

The American Embassy

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Story Summary

- An unnamed woman sits in line at the American Embassy.
- She is continuously spacing out thinking about things from her past.
- She was finding it hard to follow her doctor's advice to keep her mind blank. Constantly thinking her 4 year old son Ogunna with the fresh red “palm oil”.
- The doctor refused to give her, her usual tranquilizer because she had the visa interview coming up.
- Man behind the woman made her jump which she tweaked her shoulder which she hurt after jumping out of the building the night she saw her son die before her eyes.
- Believes that the government sent the men to go find her husband, who had been writing controversial political literature and when they realised he was gone (fled the country) they killed her son.
- Couldn't provide any real evidence during interview so decided to just leave.

Characters

- Unnamed woman
- Her son Ugonna
- The interviewer
- Her husband
- Unnamed man behind her
- The doctor

Questions

What is going through the woman's mind as she walks away from the interviewer?

She feels as if no one understands her problems and that what they had said to her was emotionless. She is also trying to think of all the positives on her life.

Discuss the tone of the story.

Annoyed/ frustrated tone due to how the main character has been treated.

Although the narrator is impartial again the main character's outlook resonates through the narrator's tone and is one of the detachments, despair and desolation. Rather than one of desperation which would be expected of someone seeking asylum.

Questions

Why do you think Adichie wrote this story?

To show the injustice of the Nigerian government and army and how little remorse they have for their actions on their own people.

How do you perceive the end of the story - as positive or negative? Why?

Mixture of both, she has given up on her goal of getting asylum in America but also leaves the embassy thinking back to better times when she was with her family in the village (Umunnachi) planting flowers.

Questions

Is there anything in the book to explain the brutality of the military officers?

Her husband was openly rebelling to the government through his novels which gave the leader a reason to use force, especially since it gave people a means to stand up against it and fight.

Quotes

“She did not fan herself with her magazine or swipe at the tiny fly hovering near her ear.” - 128

“Our people have become too used to pleasing with soldiers” - 129

“You know the story your husband wrote in the newspaper? You know he is a liar? You know people like him should be in jail because they cause trouble, becausee they dont want Nigeria to move forward?” - 132

“She had not expected much trouble, or much attention, but a day after the paper came out, BBC radio carried the story on the news and interviewed an exiled Nigerian professor of politics who said her husband deserved a Human Rights Award. He fights repression with the pen, he gives a voice to the voiceless, he makes the world know.” - 137

Themes

- Violence
- Immigrant experience'
- Empowerment
- Corruption
- Government and army brutality
- Identity
- The Nigerian way of life
- Alienation and loss
- Suicidal thoughts (only briefly after her son is killed)