



# Wole Soyinka, Nigeria, and the Contradictions of the Nigerian Civil War

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## ABSTRACT

Wole Soyinka's role as an activist, an anti-war advocate, and an opposition diplomat earned him a reputation beyond the theoretical and creative enterprise of most of his contemporaries. His most dynamic initiative was, perhaps, his daredevil intervention and visit to Biafra to hold talks for a détente during the Nigerian Civil War. Soyinka became a national figure because of his consequent incarceration by the Nigerian government that could not condone his political orientation and his anti-war advocacy. Soyinka's foresight on the 1960 independence, his advocacy against the recurring conflicts that led to the Nigerian Civil War and terrifying consequences, run through his critical, nonfictional, fictional and biographical writing. This paper examines Soyinka's agency and resistance to war, and his efforts towards conflict resolution during the Nigerian Civil War. It engages the Soyinka biography, particularly his prison notes, as a source of reading Soyinka's participation and his portrayal of the politics of the Nigerian Civil War as well as the contradictions of war locally and globally. In *The Man Died*, Soyinka is the incarcerated victim of war. In *Madmen and Specialists*, Soyinka is the absurd dramatist who shocks his audience with the realities and consequences of war on stage. Soyinka as an anti-war advocate, an opposition diplomat and social critic, constructs his world through his creative writings and his critical interventions.

**Keywords:** Nigerian Civil War; Contradictions of War; Wole Soyinka; Drama; Biographical narratives.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Several of the essays on the Nigerian Civil War have focused on the causes, the duration, and the consequences of the war as well as the potential recurrence of such a war in Nigeria. There are diverse perspectives on the consequences of the melding of different nations into the Nigerian Nation State in 1914, which are regarded as the underlying cause of conflicts in Nigeria (Aguoru, 2013). Theories and ideologies in international relations recognise the importance and the continued implication of conflict in bringing diverse ethnicities together as an entity. This blending of ethnicities into a nation state has distinct characteristics of either an ethnic group or a nation (Ziring, 1995). On the one hand, an ethnic group is made up of people who share a common language, folk art, myths, religious experiences, history, and territory. All of this points to differences in how people live

among themselves, perceive territorial issues, develop cohesive coping mechanisms in the face of external threats, demonstrate solidarity, and internally come to terms with their identity (Ziring, 1995).

On the other hand, and depending on ideological views, ethnicity places emphasis on "imagined communities," psychological factors, and temporal dimensions of ethnic concerns. Ethnicity is usually sustained by an existing nation-state, creating a more expansive idea of culture, national identity, and economic life (p. 40). These basic elements are politicised to manage solidarity and promote loyalty to the national state. The general notion of a nation-state is that which is a "melting pot or mosaic of peoples", and the more narrowly conceived ethno-nations can each call upon their citizenry to blindly kill in defence of a common heritage (or be killed as an act of self-preservation). These are reoccurring indices in Nigeria,

captured in Soyinka's work. Nigeria, having about two hundred and fifty crystallised ethnicities, is a nation of nations (Aguoru 2013). The very concept of nations existing within larger nations presents the challenge of resistance and counter-resistance. In the first scenario, one group may insist on secession, the claim to self-determination as a matter of right or the right to fuse territory with another, while another may conform to efforts made to "sustain the territorial integrity of the nation state irrespective of the human diversity within it, indeed, regardless of the means required—violence, if necessary to reinforce the nation-state" (Ziring, 1995, p. 40). This is typified by the non-recognition and denial of Biafra's independence from Nigeria.

Regardless, the use of force to unite otherwise disparate peoples into a unified community is a common theme in current and contemporary international relations (Ziring, 1995). The Nigerian Civil War, which lasted for thirty months, ended with the pacification of the Igbos that had seceded (Smith, 2005). The dominant issues considered to be the seeds of the crises include ethnicity and population-related pressures; territorial disputes; the supremacy of ethnic groups; and other social issues such as greed and deep-seated historical grievances. These complexities, strengthened by non-existent social security, expected yet denied rights and privileges, and identity crises, have been and remain conflicts in the Nigerian nation-state and remain the preoccupation of most Nigerian writers, particularly Wole Soyinka, who belongs to the functionalist school of thought. War, a current issue, has served as both thematic preoccupation and setting for several of Wole Soyinka's works. Soyinka's global and universal perspective on the topicality of war runs as a recurrent motif in Soyinka's biographical and other writings. In many of these works, Soyinka condemns war and its effects in a clear way, using different types of writing.

## 2. ANTI-WAR ADVOCACY IN SOYINKA'S BIOGRAPHICAL COLLECTION

Taking bearing from Soyinka's *Ake the Years of Childhood* (1981), his earliest biographical writing, Soyinka portrays the Second World War through a child's eyes. The hilarious episode about the visit of his Uncle Dipo, who had fought in Burma and how his mom eventually insisted on changing his brother's name because of the tumult that accompanied the visit of his uncle, with whom he shares a name, was a deliberate inclusion in the narrative. From the queerness of their guest, we are able to deduce that

something was not quite right about war or promoting war. The realities, significance, and implications of the Second World War were consistently reflected as a concern in Ake's work and later reinforced at the conclusion of the narrative. Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti had taken exception to the racist agenda evident in the manner in which Super Powers aborted or resolved the war. Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, a renowned female activist of her time, established the fact that America had ended World War II by detonating the atomic bombs on the yellow peoples of Japan rather than Hitler's Germany, which had been more radically on the offensive along with Italy. In her opinion, these two nations were more deserving of the atomic bombs but were exempted because they were white (Soyinka 1981).

In *Isara* (1989), subtitled : *a Voyage around Essay* (his father), Soyinka goes to town on the echoes of war and the implication of the Second World War on the indigenes and inhabitants of Isara, who were indeed psychologically and emotionally involved in the war. There were several implications for Nigeria and these cities and hamlets portrayed by Soyinka, particularly investment opportunities for his friends (the Ex-Illes), who were in their middle age and seeking such investment opportunities. The news broadcast through the local rediffusion box regularly provided sufficient information that brought the people up to date on the war. Some Nigeria nationals have been recruited as soldiers. It was regarded as a national assignment that bore some elements of national pride. The war and every detail of the war became a source of national interest, national pride, and loyalty to the Queen of England, the head of the Nigerian colony. Winning styles became the dominant slangy expressions for everyone. Narratives on the trade in salt as well as the implications of the war for the Lagos and Isara communities are included in the episodic plot. Tentativeness and missed opportunities are thematic strands, and trade and industry are engaged as dominant economic and psychological settings.

Soyinka's memoir *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* (1994), emphasises war and its implications in the contexts of civil unrests such as Operation Wet i e, whereas *The Man Died* captures the full-fledged and extensive Civil War. In *Ibadan*, Soyinka narrates the fracas between Obafemi Awolowo and his lieutenant, Samuel Ladoke Akintola, and the resistance of the public to Akintola's betrayal and perceived bad politics. Akintola was resisted more because he was seen as taking steps that jeopardised the sanctity of the

electoral system, particularly the rigging of the elections. Soyinka's contribution to the Akintola saga was his playing the Mystery Gunman at the radio station where he had gone to swap the premier's speech with a harshly critical speech instructing Akintola to "Get out." He had to undergo extensive trials for this, being Ladoke Akintola's greatest suspect.

Soyinka's eyewitness account of the war is found in *The Man Died* (1972), a prison note and a war narrative. This paper interrogates the account of the numerous arguments on the contradictions of the Nigerian Civil War the author was privileged to have participated in or initiated, as well as the general and other postures to war but not his sufferings as an incarcerated war prisoner. Aguoru's *A Voyage Around W.S* (2015) portrays the cumulative effect of the experience as well as the consequences of Soyinka's intervention on his career. The impact of his absence was really significant. He was the first Nigerian appointed as the Director of the School of Drama at the University of Ibadan. Aguoru captures this from the official records on Soyinka from the University of Ibadan archives.

Soyinka's intention was to broker peace by persuading the generals and advocates of war, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, Aguiyi-Ironsi, and Yakubu Gowon, to hold peace talks. Soyinka's attempt to see Gowon proved abortive, and he decided to take the next best step, which was to see Ojukwu first. His conviction was strengthened by the knowledge that at least two of his close friends had enlisted in a war he considered to be absolutely unnecessary. He eventually lost one, Christopher Okigbo, to the war. Soyinka visited Western, Eastern and Northern Nigeria as the momentum for the war was being built and during the war. He narrates his conversations with a number of people who were anti-war advocates and with several of the war lords who took him into confidence and believed he could influence the restoration of peace within the Federation. Most of these dialogues were called up during the "visits" or as reflections on the war while incarcerated in *The Man Died*. His prison experience and his relationship with his cruel captors make up the rest of his preoccupation with *The Man Who Died*. The postures of the war and the portraits of the political leaders were painted from his interventionist point of view.

It is clear that Soyinka wrote the play *Madmen and Specialists* as a necessity. *The Man Who Died* tells a lot, explains so much, and attempts many arguments,

justifications, and reconciliations, all of which the narrator still could not logically resolve. However, in *Madmen and Specialists*, Soyinka's absurdist interpretation of the meaninglessness and hopelessness of war, he says nothing, rationalises nothing, but deliberately shocks his reader and audience with the realities and consequences of the Civil War. The plot, setting, staccato dialogue, and constant blabbing of the characters are all employed on purpose to achieve this goal. Soyinka portrays perverted people who were involved in the war and who can be perceived as war survivors but who remain casualties in many ways, suffering from mental and psychological imbalance and physically debilitating injuries.

### 3. THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR IN CONTEXT

Carl von Clausewitz's position on war has been made popular in most canonical texts on war fare. Clausewitz juxtaposes war with other means of furthering politics (George, 2020). While this has been found as a strategic position in war studies, war is also understood as hostilities within a space or territory engaged by means of armed force (Ziring, 1995). Nigeria has remained a warring nation, engaging in most forms of war: ethnic wars, ethnic cleansing, guerrilla wars, religious wars, *coups d'état*, and the legendary Civil War, among other uprisings and unrests. Ethnic wars in Nigeria have taken the form of conflicts occurring between or among "culturally distinctive groups" that occupy the same region or within other regions in the federation. It is vital to note that ethnic conflicts, most of which trigger premeditated ethnic cleansing, are not peculiar to the ethnicities in Nigeria or Africa. What Soyinka found perplexing during the Civil War was the cry for ethnic extinction chanted in the North. This vengeful cry was triggered by the ill-executed coup d'état that spared the lives of some of the Eastern politicians earmarked for assassination. Prior to this ill-executed revolution, there had been some level of trust among the ethnicities.

Two of the several accounts narrating the causes and contexts, as well as the contradictions and consequences of the Nigerian Civil War, are crucial to this study. Justice Kayode Eso's biographical account is unmistakably so because of his involvement in the judiciary in that historic period. Wole Soyinka's Mystery Gunman Case was the judge that presided over Wole Soyinka's. Though Soyinka would, 30 years

later, agree to be responsible for the deed in *Ibadan: The Penkelemites Years*, Justice Kayode Eso acquitted him on all counts because there was insufficient evidence to find him guilty or put him behind bars. The case was a defining one in the history of Justice Eso's years of being at bar and, in spite of pressure from the government of the day to jail him without evidence, he had engaged the available evidence along with his good conscience. This made him fall into disfavour with the government of the day. He dedicates *The Mystery Gunman*: "To all whose unyielding faith is in the Rule of Law (and his) wife who supported him throughout the crises" (Eso, 1996, p. v) Kole Omotosho's perspective is also important because it centres on the marginalisation of the minority groups and their predicament during the war. Soyinka mentions this in narrating one interrogative session with his gaolers. Omotosho brings to the fore the often unrecognised, critical roles these minority groups played during the Civil War and continue to play in sustaining Nigeria as a nation-state. Omotosho and Esho's narratives speak critically and factually to the dominant national conflicts that degenerated into the Nigerian Civil War. The fabric of the conflicts which is germane to this study consists of greed, grievance, and opportunity by the main actors (Hoeffler, 2020).

Establishing the groundwork for the events that led to the Civil War, he claimed that in the aftermath of "violent protests against the Western Nigerian Government of Akintola..." (Eso 1996, p. 261), he got an unexpected phone call informing him that the Prime Minister had been murdered. This began the series of *coups d'état* in Nigeria. On the 15th of January 1966, Eso witnessed Nigeria's first *coup d'état*, which he described as a "... sorrowful event... that signalled the curtain on democracy" (p. 261), despite the fact that there had been violent protests against the Western government. The popular opinion and general impression were that the common man was aggrieved because the government at all levels had taken sides against the polity. That definitely could not have prepared the nation-state for the overnight reports on the shootings in the Premier's lodge followed by the news of the murder of the Premier:

Kayode... I understand some people have killed the Premier. This is authentic. This is serious Kayode... I think it's a *coup d'état*. I understand the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and the Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okotie Eboh have been

abducted and Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, the Premier of the North, has been assassinated. (1996, p. 262)

Soyinka in *The Man Died* also wrote of how unthinkable the idea was even after it had taken place. Eso corroborates this in his narrative stating that the six coup plotters had ... struck at the fabric of the nation ... (261) and had brought on to the federation what had '...been regarded as an impossibility in Nigeria... (261). This *coup d'état* spearheaded the *coups* that were to become the regular feature in Nigerian politics and some of the actors have managed to remain in power for over five decades.

The first attempt was led and executed by Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu, who eventually lost to the Army Command. Therefore, Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi became the first military Head of State of Nigeria. For ease of administration, Colonel Fajuyi was appointed the first Military Governor of the West by Lt. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the first Military Governor of the East by Major Hassan Usman Katsina, and the first Military Governor of the North by Lt. Colonel David Ejor, the Military Governor of the Mid-West. Invariably, a new nation state emerged under the military under the Constitution (suspension and modification) decree. The first to be enforced was decree No. 1 of 1966, which suspended the constitution from January 17, 1966. The same decree firmly established military rule and "... empowered the Head of the Federal Military Government and the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces to rule by decrees and Governor's by edicts" (p. 263).

By the end of the first year, eighty-eight decrees were promulgated, including the State Security (Detention of Persons) decree, with which several politicians, all of whom were of Western origin, were detained. The second *coup d'état* was carried out on July 29, 1966. Soyinka confirms from the war front that the warring parties as well as their ethnic groups interpreted this move as 'retaliative' and to balance the grievances felt by the Northern section of the country that believed the North had suffered unjustly from the first coup led by an Easterner because more of their kinsmen had been casualties.

Eso's narrative painted a clear picture of this second phase of the coup: Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi had made a trip to the West and was hosted by the Military Governor, Lt. Col. Adekunle Fajuyi. The counter-coup plotters seized the moment, arrested the Head of State and his host, the Governor, and, after

some tentativeness, they were both assassinated. Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon became the head of the Federal Military Government and, for administrative ease, Lt. Col. Hassan Usman Katsina, the Northern Military Governor, was appointed the Military Governor of the West; Lt. Col. Odumegu Ojukwu continued as the Military Governor of the East; and Lt. Col. David Ejoor, the Military Governor of the Mid-West. The government, through the media, succeeded in sustaining the nation as a single nation-state for ten months. On May 30th 1967, the East seceded, naming its enclave "Biafra", with Odumegu Ojukwu, the former head of the Western Region, remaining as the Head of State. A civil war ensued, which lasted until the complete pacification of the Igbos in 1970. There were other coups, like the one on July 29th, 1975, which ushered in Generals Muritala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo. An attempt to overthrow this government failed but took Muritala Mohammed's life. General Olusegun Obasanjo headed the government until September 1979 and took the surrender of Biafra on behalf of the Federal Government.

#### 4. ADVOCACY FOR THE MINORITY GROUPS AND ETHNICITIES IN NIGERIA

About two hundred and fifty ethnic groups and nations (Aguoru 2011) have distinctive, real as well as imagined communities in their own right makes up the Nigerian nation-state. The fact that three of these groups, the Hausa/Fulani, the Yoruba, and the Igbo, are the most powerful does not change the nation's makeup. According to Kole Omotosho, the Pan-African contexts of economic and political strength in Africa preclude the majority of the seemingly less influential ethnic nationalities. In his words, "this relationship is often volatile, antagonistic, and hardly ever friendly and mutually beneficial to them." Omotosho observes that the real situation in Nigeria is that these minority ethnic groups sustain the continued unification of the nation state. These ethnic groups, having no vested interests or 'ethnic agenda', have continued to work for the nation state that guarantees their own space: the 'institution is the Federation of Nigeria' (Omotosho, 2009, p. 100).

Until very recent times and at specific periods in the existence of Nigeria, the major ethnicities have been determined to secede or "end the federation" if they were unable to influence things or control the nation. At each of those crucial moments, Omotosho avers that it is the unrecognised efforts of this group

that make the federation survive. The rationale behind Biafra *viz-a-vis* the contradictions of the Civil War ought to begin with the questioning of the Igbos' plan to secede with the other minority groups that had no interest in seceding with them and upon whose resources Biafra had planned to build its own economic strength. It is thought that the Igbos must have imagined that they had the military might to subdue the minorities who also had to flee from the North after the January 15<sup>th</sup> and subsequent pogrom. Though the issue of resources in the case of oil is totally not true of the situation, since the present day Igbo nations are also part of the Niger-Delta Basin (E.E. Epuh: 2022, Wikipedia 2022), that formed the Biafran Nation. Prior to independence, the British colonial government, at the insistence of the likes of Obafemi Awolowo, who had the understanding of sustaining ethnic identity, made efforts to normalise the status of the minorities within the federation. In 1957, the Willink Commission of inquiry was set up. The major ethnic nationalities ensured that this commission did not resolve the matter; rather, they made empty promises that issues concerning the minorities would be resolved after independence was granted.

The British government was then obliged to grant independence to the federation of Nigeria on the promise that the issue of the alleviation of the fears of the minority ethnic nations would be attended to as soon as possible (Omotosho, 2009, p. 101). Contrary to those promises the politics and dynamics of resource control, ethnic minority politics, power sharing ensured that the minority groups remained subdued until the early 1990s when Ken Saro-Wiwa and his movement MOSOP turned national and international lights on the groups (Dibua, 2005). At independence four regions were created and sustained up until the first *coup d'état* currently is made up of 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory vistas are being thrown up on the contexts of state creation being a means of scrambling for "...more and more of already over-exploited national cake, especially after the concentrated exploitation of petroleum products" (2009, p. 102). Of the three major ethnic nationalities the Igbo is taken to have apparent limitations: It is believed that Igboland is a small landlocked mass which does not have the petroleum wealth of the South southern states. This however is not true since there are oil producing areas in Imo State though with over 163 oil wells at over 12 different locations in the State. The main petroleum companies operating in the state are:

Addax Petroleum, Chevron Corporation, Royal Dutch Shell and Agip (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>).

According to Omotosho, 'The first mass creation of states just before the Civil War delimited the area of the former Eastern Region, confining the Igbo in their own area, far from the oil producing areas of the region.' This critical mass within the Nigerian construct, fought for the unity of Nigeria but invariably suffered the most during the Civil War. Despite Omotosho's view, it is quintessential to note that the Oguta, Ohaji and Egbema areas have sufficient oil that made the Eastern state of Imo to belong to the oil producing states of present day Nigeria.

## 5. SOYINKA: ANTI-WAR ADVOCATE AND PEACENIK

*The Man Died* is a book of sorts concerned with the issues that landed its author in prison without trial for about two years. His reflections while in goal is a combination of narratives : grief stricken episodes , anger driven tropes, records of visits to him in the prison by ghosts, majorly his relations and his allies, hallucinations, philosophical reflections all of which reflect his emotional entanglement with his nation-state. The Nigerian problem became hydra-headed shortly after the country's independence. This had become even more complex by the posture and intrusion of the imperialists as they prepared to leave. Soyinka with great passion in *The Man Died* portrays the bloody carnage and reports the inhuman treatment meted out to Nigerians and the state failure which he believed was: 'a failure that led to secession and war' (Soyinka 1972:19). Soyinka in a letter that further incriminates General Yakubu Gowon, accuses him of being permissive and tolerant of the atrocities committed during his administration. Citing the Emmanuel Ogbona case, the man who was wrongfully and wickedly murdered in cold blood was his takeoff point. Soyinka's consternation was intensified having overheard several of the conversations of Ogbona's unrepentant murders who were detained in a cell next to his:

What has happened in the case of Emmanuel Ogbona is only one example of the thousand blatant horrors of genocide, acceded to by the judiciary of the West backed by other forces and authorities which must be forced to stand trial someday (Soyinka, 1972, p. 22).

Further enraged by the special attention given the

murderers of Ogbona he asks of what use is the code of conduct when the army is infested with self-confessed murders who – because their victim was Ibo – are treated even in their brief confinement as very important prisoners... (Soyinka, 1972, p. 22).

The other example he cites is of Ojibo Uche an Igala who was mistaken for an Ibo. He was fast asleep when Malayi struck his head and Maikawa, a warder, cut his throat with a knife (Soyinka, 1972).

When asked by the Grand Overseer of his Kaduna prison, how he got involved in the affair his response was 'I have not just become involved. I have always been involved' (p. 147). Soyinka's after he gave himself up for arrest had written a statement that he had formed 'a committee to campaign internationally against the importation of arms to Nigeria' He also informed them that he had called up a few of his friends at the U.N who joined him on his trip to discuss the challenges in Nigeria. In his words, 'We set up a pressure group to lobby against all supply of arms to either side.' His interrogators told him that it was disloyal of him to have done so.

Soyinka also made it clear that he had not gone on any form of espionage but had made frantic efforts to meet with Gowon and discuss strategies for peace with, without luck before going to the East. "If I did not have concrete and practical proposals I would not ask to see Gowon. Nor would I have gone over to talk to Ojukwu" (p. 49). He unmistakably made his mission clear 'I represent an independent group. My message was for Gowon and Ojukwu. I have no commission to speak to the Police on the subject' (p. 49).

He was told he had no right to take international diplomacy of such magnitude upon himself, no right to arrogate himself to such an intervent, generating a campaign to deprive the legitimate government of its means of putting an end to the secession. Soyinka reported that Commissioner Tony Enahoro issued a framed press report. The report accused Soyinka of visiting Mr. Ojukwu on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August to 'assist in the purchase of jet aircraft to be used by the rebel air force.' And on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, he visited Colonel Victor Banjo and agreed to help in the overthrow of the Federal Military Government. Soyinka's diverse interventions had preceded the full-blown war; according to him, he had 'a year full of activities':

A hyper-charged involvement of the entire year seared with losses of friends and comrades , smeared in

the naked humiliation of an entire populace by an arrogant, raping, murdering and terrorizing soldiery ... weeks of running a sensitive link in the 'underground rail road' rescuing Eastern soldiers –Ibo Efik, Ogoja Rivers – and even some Westerners of who not even the lowest was too mean for a remorseless hunt-down by their colleagues, ( half my wife's wardrobe went on their disguise ) impotent to answer and alleviate the thousand pleas for help that came to me from helpless civilians (Westerners, Mid Westerners, as well as Easterners) whose relations or friends lay in whimsical grip of soldiers, witnessing daily emasculation of a whole people by a band of vicious , opportunist outgrowths of the mystique of power (p. 149).

To Soyinka, the January 15<sup>th</sup> coup was 'a mismanaged affair' (p. 147). There were good intentions targeted at revolutionizing the country but this was quickly hijacked by those who had other sinister motives. The Northerners could not be convinced that the killings were not selective believed that the killings were 'so wicked and one sided' Soyinka in conversation with a northern gaoler, Grand Overseer, realised how bitter they were about the January 15<sup>th</sup> killings. He tried to provide some explanation and the subsequent action he had taken to minimize the consequences of the 'one sided killings'. Soyinka is able to confirm that the September Massacres were in retaliation to the January Coup. What he found really strange were the self-vindications and justification which he tagged 'spontaneous theory of that genocide' To his great shock his overseer had said as a matter of fact: "...they were warned, I personally warned several of them ... my Ibo friends. Most of them were to blame for their own suffering. They couldn't say they had no warning" (p. 148). On another occasion Soyinka at a luncheon was mistaken for 'a government man', and a supporter of the Gowon régime'. An Embassy official *confidently told him*:

The Ibos have not yet learnt their lesson. The full extraction has not yet been made for January 15<sup>th</sup> but don't worry. One of our people came over recently, our diplomatic courier, and

even before that a former minister spent a day here and we had a long chat. It's only a matter of days and then believe me, the Ibos won't trouble us anymore.

Soyinka softly inquiring what he meant made him confidently state:

'Just wait and see. Haven't you noticed how they continue to create difficulties at the constitutional conference? That Ojukwu! They think they have something to complain about because of May and June. They haven't learnt their lesson. This time they are going to get something real to complain about.

Soyinka had heard cries of *Araba!* (Secession) And saw printed texts calling for Jihad against the yaminrin (Igbos) would connect this conversation strongly with extraction of the Ibos that began three days after. Soyinka before his arrest publicly denounced the genocide and the selective expulsion –and insists in his prison notes that they were not representative of the masses will, he therefore openly considered it appropriate to accuse Gowon and his government of treason and falsification of the Nigerian popular will (Soyinka, 1972). Convinced of General Yakubu Gowon's support and permissiveness Soyinka portrays the strategic environment of the nation under Gowon. As the war raged the preferred words in national discourse became "TOTAL WAR, TOTAL MOBILISATION, CRUSHING BLOW..." (Soyinka, 1972, p. 117). The government of the Mid-West had earlier set up a commission known as the 'ATROCITIES' Commission the concept signified a phenomenon in the making more than anything else. Gowon however re-launched his own version of the Commission, September/October 1966. By this time the 'atrocities had overtaken the whole country manifesting in 'grand style' in the North and quite publicly in the South. The Southern occurrence was by far humiliating. It included the manhandling of certain delegates that came to the South to attend the constitutional conference launched by the government.

Manhunts, publicized by machine-gun stutters, took place around Ikoyi where Gowon lived, and execution and torture games... went on in his official residence (Soyinka, 1972). General Gowon's subtle appeal to the Northerners concerning the ethnic cleansing made it clear that the perpetrators of the gruesome killings had his blessing. It also revealed the

extent to which Nigeria had become 'a state of anomy' (Soyinka, 1972). The obvious concern of the appeal was to appease the Northerners and not their victims. In further confirmation of the state of affairs Gowon further states.

Since January this year, when some soldiers put our country into confusion by killing our leaders... the country has not fully recovered from that confusion. I receive complaints daily that up to now, Easterners living in the North are being killed and molested, their property looted. I am very unhappy about this. We should put a stop to these it appears that it is going beyond reason to a point of recklessness and irresponsibility (Soyinka 1972, p. 120).

Soyinka's visit to the North on Fajuyi's request took him there just in time to witness the start of the Kaduna riots and the Northern desire for separation and annihilation of 'Southern infidels'. Soyinka's last discussion with Fajuyi was quite revealing as it shed more light on the national strategic environment, the great distrust within the army, and the unwillingness of the army to return to the barracks and the lack of discretion on Ironsi's part.

Soyinka's approach to the political issues of his time reveals a great deal of his analytic mind and his impression of the role as well as the functions of a writer in an era when much political upheaval occurs. Soyinka's interactions with doves Victor Banjo's gives deep insight into the core of Banjo's third force. He perceived this as a 'truly national and revolutionary alternative' the Victor Banjo's idea of the third force was to hijack Biafra power at the point of its final victory and hand over to the Federal forces. Soyinka would later reflect that Victor Banjo and his third force, was '... a revolution lost to history' (p. 94). In spite of Banjo's good intention he had forgot that his nation was a nation of fence-sitters a people whose established powers began to take swift advantage of it's a nationals in every crisis, the effect of which is a psychological paralysis of most with exception to an uncompromising few. A naïve Banjo had assumed that by publicly declaring his invading forces against would suffice for 'the dilemma of the waverers' (p. 174) unfortunately it was not 'The revolutionary base, supposed to be 'consolidated by his continued presence in the Mid-West began to crumble away, and he paid with his life. Along with other doves: Alale,

Ifeajuna, Agbam. Soyinka's consistent grief is palpable through the entire narrative. He writes:

Even when it is conceded that a nation is not merely what it is at a given moment but in its entire potential, a danger remains for all those who sometimes wonder, as I often do, if the nation they know is not simply one of their imagining. For this consoling potential of the future is also double-edged being either a potential for good or evil for retrogression or progress, for reactionary consolidation or radical reactivity (p. 174).

Soyinka's fears have been historically proven right, himself declaring that 'History proves continually that there is no certainty which will emerge as the ultimate direction, even from identical sets of circumstances' (p. 174). Soyinka had been enmeshed with the vision of the doves (the anti-war advocates) Victor Banjo's third force,, (Fajuyi, Alale and a host of others) along with his international allies. He had been summoned by Fajuyi who he served as a conscience and unofficial advisor to make a tour of the nation before it went up in flames. Soyinka recalls, that the corpse of his friend, Christopher Okigbo's corpse was brought in to one of the apartments where they had sat at a strategy session in Enugu... Okigbo it was that went to war before ever firing a gun.

At several of these strategy sessions Alale, Banjo and others who were non-Igbos figured that the opportunists had hijacked and made nothing of the intended revolution. The cries of for justice and accountability had been muffled and the genocide had been chosen as the 'cure' of the Asset Probes. Everything was being swept under the carpet: former Federal Ministers, Corporation chairmen and all those who were concerned acted like the probes never commenced. The millions hoarded by the northern politicians '...remained intact, untouched by the government in spite of the vociferous cries of the of the Southern Newspapers and the new generation of the north' (176).The hot heads continued to brainstorm: Banjo wanted to know the message from the West, Agitated about the Igbo people he would make a case for them: they to him could not '... have been equally positive on the pogrom! The Ibos were not a danger to anyone. In his opinion the, May and June Murders weakened their military they lost the capability of being a serious threat.



Soyinka can only provide information on thoughts about the secession. Alale finds it preposterous that the core of the confrontation was either 'the rejection or entrenchment of the profit motif of genocide. Or of tribal chauvinism' (p. 176). Alale also insists that the army that had grown used to power must be returned to its original status 'The politician-mentality is already destroyed but it has begun a new life by its anonymous infiltration of a naive and purely instinctive Army'. On Biafra: Negotiations were definitely on with hawkish Igbo generals. Soyinka was not calling for a surrender but for the calling off of the secession. 'Ojukwu will never agree.' Banjo who understands better says it was beyond him because he was acting upon the will of the Igbos who would have toppled him if he had refused to cooperate with them. However, being one of them, Ojukwu himself was born a reactionary. Alale marvels that the 'hawks': '...Gowon types think they can build a nation on a successful genocide? Or Ojukwu on the emotional reaction to genocide?'

The unending sessions came to a painful realization that an alliance of the capitalist adventurers and a bourgeois military that had tasted power and were unwilling to let go of it, had rallied into prominence. Sadly they reconciled the miserable, humiliating reality that the Civil War was initiated and was being fought without a simultaneous programme of reform and redefinition of social purpose. The profiteers had a colloquium and a grand plan, it excluded the sacrificing Igbos, the displaced minorities or the rest of the nation. It was therefore:

A war of solidity; for solidity is a far more accurate word than unity to employ in describing a war which can only consolidate the very values that gave rise to the war in the first place, for nowhere and at no time have those values been examined. Nowhere has there appeared a programme designed to ensure the eradication of the fundamental iniquities which gave rise to the initial conflicts (p. 181).

The war was conceived to place such burden on the entire federation that there will be no will or wherewithal to challenge the profiteers.

## 6. SOYINKA'S DRAMATIC AGENCY: *MAD MEN AND SPECIALISTS*

Suffice to say that Soyinka in a myriad of ways did justice to the portraits of the war and his involvement in the Civil War in *The Man Died*. In *Mad Men and Specialists* an underlying tone of pessimism is created, that of doom is painted, while the nihilistic character-types created all have encountered destruction and radiate strong destructive impulses known with nihilism (Fabio, 2020). His advocacy on stage was therefore straight to the point. To Oyin Ogunba the Old Man's philosophy of *as* is one of despair which interprets history in terms of 'cyclic movement in which true progress is impossible' (Ogunba, 1975, p. 203). Therefore 'man is doomed because probity has no place in the order of things and also because the implacable universe appears to destroy human initiative.' Ogunba corroborates the fact that the topicality of war as a global occurrence makes Soyinka's position in this work applicable to any other war. Biodun Jeyifo (2004), opines that Soyinka's "ferocious wit and bitter social commentary in *Madmen and Specialists* among other elements makes the play different" (p. 89). Describing it as brilliant and power filled Jeyifo insists that it being Soyinka's post incarceration period play employed language and style and dramatic action seem to be 'Soyinka's own "flower of evil" in its frenetic literalization of the explosive and strategic anti-aesthetic' which Soyinka has recommended upon his release from the prison.

This absurd drama meets Soyinka's post incarceration recommendations. At that point in his life, piece of writing should be: "a hammer" or a "hand grenade". To be detonated to rattle people out of their stagnant ways of observing the world. To him words should be used to punch holes in side people to get rid of complacency: we must make sure we explode something inside them which is a parallel of the sordidness which they ignore outside (Jeyifo, 2004). Soyinka creates a queer cast: Aafaa, Blindman, Goyi, Cripple Si Bero, Iya Agba, Iya Mate, Dr Bero, Preist the Old Man Bero's father. The setting is in and around the home surgery of Dr Bero who has just returned from the wars. The staccatos that make up the dialogue and the actions typically absurd are repetitive allusions and symbolic imagery of war. The Metaphysical as well as physical setting also creates the mood of despair that ensures that the reader or the audience experiences the war.

The Old Man saddled with the task of helping the maimed and disillusioned mendicants adjust to the post-war life began to indoctrinate them into the Philosophy of *As* along with his well thought and

determined tutorials on cannibalism which 'senselessly makes sense', why waste the meat? If you did no care about the inhabitants of the flesh in the first place:

we've got to legalize cannibalism  
 ... I'm going to try and persuade  
 those fools not waste all that meat.  
 But why, Pastor It's quite delicious,  
 you know This ... is delicious  
 ... Your friend will confirm it when  
 he comes ...  
 ... But we found it delicious just the  
 same  
 I give you the personal word of a  
 scientist. Human flesh is delicious  
 ...Of course not all parts of the body I  
 prefer the balls myself  
 Sinister is the only way to describe  
 Soyinka's detonation of the hand  
 grenade he meant *Madmen and  
 Specialists* to be (pp. 250-251).

## 7. NIGERIA'S PERPETUAL STATE OF WAR

Going by the diverse types of wars fought within the Nigerian federation, it is clear that the current crisis situation among the ethnic groups is merely a repetitive pattern. Unresolved grievances, territorial disputes, opportunities, the Civil War(s), the June 12 Crises, the Ife-Modakake wars, the Itsekiri-Ijaw uprising, Jihadist and religious movements, carnages in the Northern and Middle Belt, and the Boko Haram insurgency in the North The most recent examples are Nnamdi Kanu's Indigenous People of Biafra, pressure group protests, the Farmer's Herders Crisis, and various kidnapping cases, without doubt, has been in perpetual war. The Federal Government has continued to employ violence and force as a means of strategic pacification in a bid to attain relative peace. Soyinka responding to BBC on the recent herder-farmers crisis had this to say:

**WS.** So, what do they expect of us now?  
 Now that this war is on our doorstep  
 of course there has got to be civil  
 mobilization and if we keep waiting  
 for this to be centrally handled, we are  
 all going to become, if we are not  
 already, slaves in our own land. That  
 to me is personally intolerable...

**Q.**What is your biggest fear about  
 where we are now?

**WS.** We may enter a phase of serial  
 skirmishing which gets more and  
 more violent...becomes less and less  
 focused and swell into (I hate to use  
 the word), may develop into a Civil  
 War and a very untidy messy one at  
 that. That is my biggest fear. And  
 unless action is taken ...but Sunday  
 Igboho has responded to the situation  
 in the way he knew how. Now you  
 will see that he's trying to work with  
 others. This is the way these things  
 really happen, somebody one day he  
 reaches explosion point and says I  
 cannot take it any longer and he takes  
 unilateral action. The action may be  
 excessive, may be wrong, what  
 matters is that somebody has  
 responded to an unacceptable  
 situation.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This interrogation of Soyinka's agency and advocacy in the Nigerian Civil War and in the subsequent wars being fought in the nation has to a large extent thrown up fresh vistas on the contradiction of wars and the illogicality of the same. From canonical texts, peace is the absence of violence. There will be recurrent wars and diverse pacifications will continually take place because of the diversity of ethnicities in the Nigerian Nation State. The quality of the leadership at the centre of the federation will always be the determinant of peace. Soyinka's anti-war advocacy and what advocates insist on is that if a war must be fought, it should be on national ideology and not self-or ethnic aggrandisement.

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