

FRAGILE NATIONHOOD: ETHNIC MISTRUST AND PEACE-BUILDING IN SELECTED POST-WAR NIGERIAN MEMOIRS

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Abstract

This article investigates the construction of ethnic mistrust in Postwar Nigerian memoirist genre. It argues that there is evidence in post-war Nigerian non-fiction that the Biafran question is one factor that complicates the quest for national unity. While the Igbo locate the origin of their marginalization in colonial history and the attempt by the British to punish them for challenging the colonial project of domination, other ethnic groups in Nigeria lay claim to their own marginalization and the attempt by the Igbo to dominate them. Relying on Bhabha's theory of mimicry as menace and the concept of fragility of peace in its interrogation of these controversies, the article examines three postwar memoirs by authors from each of the three ethnic formations, Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: A Prison Memoir* (1972), Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of the Nigeria-Biafra War* (2012) and Ayuba Mshelia's *Araba Let's Separate: The Story of the Nigeria Civil War* to show how postwar Nigerian non-fiction has engaged with the question of ethnic mistrust, the fragility of peace and the prospects of inter-ethnic reconnection in Nigeria.

Keywords: Post-war Nigerian Memoir, Biafran War, Fragility of Peace, Ethnic Mistrust, Post-Colonial Mimicry

Introduction

In an article short-titled "The Fragility of Peace," Paul Jakov Smith argues that "the fragility of the Chanyuan-style peace did not stem from the aspirations of a revanchist emperor and his confidantes, but was rather the consequence of the intrinsic difficulties of maintaining peace in a world of new players, internecine political contests, and shifting geopolitical alliances that characterized the mid-eleventh century" (112). Whether in China or elsewhere, the question of fragile peace in the postwar period has often arisen from diverse causes including political contexts and geopolitical alliances. Many postwar countries in Africa are saddled with crises that threaten peace and national unity in many ways; "from socio-political crises to environmental catastrophes, from religious extremism to insurgencies and terrorism, from the deafening noise of looting machines to cyber fraud, from kidnapping to ethnic mistrust and separatist agitations, our continent now sits on a time-bomb" (Abba 2022, 1).

The fragility of peace in post-independence Nigeria was shaped by ethnic sentiments, cultural affiliations and identity contests. Cyprian Ekwensi, in his letter to Keith Sambrook on 7 September 1966, notes:

Here in Nigeria, we live in very troubled times. There is a continuous expectation of disaster which somehow seems to be postponed from minute to minute by some unseen forces. There are prayers that the disaster never comes and there is the fear that it is preordained to come somehow and that if it does not come the purification process necessary for the building of a permanent Nigeria will not be commenced.

The atmosphere which Ekwensi draws attention was charged by dangerous rivalries, especially among the three major ethnic groups in the country. Unfortunately, scholarship on post-war Nigerian non-fiction has not robustly addressed the representation of the influence of ethnic mistrust and the fragility of peace within the context of the genre. For instance, in Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of the Nigeria Civil War* (2012), he claims that the Igbo-Biafrans' rise to prominence in post-independence Nigeria led to acts of exhibitionist arrogance among some Igbo that attracted deep resentment among some non-Igbo" (2012:233). But Nigerian-born Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka's argument is different. Conceiving the war as an example of socio-political disruption, Soyinka argues that "the genocide-consolidated dictatorship of the [Nigerian] Army made both secession and war inevitable" (32). The war was indeed seen as a watershed in the postcolonial global order (Lasse Heerten, Dirk Moses 9), in which the interplay between class and ethnicity, as well as the tensions between the Igbo and non-Igbo minorities, accounts for the war and its aftermath (Jeyifo 262). Historian Lasse Heerten further indicates that "(A)t the core of the Biafran Holocaust comparisons", wrote, 'was the creed against

remaining silent in view of the suffering of others. This belief system was couched in universal terms, but is firmly entrenched in particular systems of thought and evocations of a shared civilization" (Lasse Heerten 201). If the genocide in Biafra is seen as "a crime that transcended the ambit of national sovereignty" (Farquharson 17), genocide scholars contend that it has led to the rise of the Northern Nigerian terrorist group which "raised questions about Nigerian federalism and the legacy of the Nigeria-Biafra war" (Korieh 6).

To be sure, more than five decades after the cessation of hostilities on the battlefield of the war, the emergence of, and the dangerous metamorphosis of Biafran separatist groups, from the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) to the semi-violent Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), to the fully violent Eastern Security Network (ESN) and the dreaded Unknown Gun Men (UGM), as well as other equally dangerous ethnic militias across the country are particularly troubling. All of these are in response to the crisis of ethnic self-defense, not only of the Igbo but also other groups in Nigeria. Thus, despite the Igbo claim to ethnic marginalisation in the political landscape of Nigeria by the non-Igbo groups, postwar Nigerian memoirs demonstrate that all the groups are implicated in the demonised construction of each other's identity, reinforcing the narrative of widespread inter-ethnic mistrust in the postcolony. So, if the Igbo believed that they were treated as an untrustworthy tribe, they equally argued that this identity denied them access to the mainstream socio-political structures of the country (Jeffs 282). Moreso, pro-Igbo discourses insist that colonial history constructed "the myth of the Igbo untrustworthiness" (Abba 2025, 5) in an attempt to punish them for challenging the colonial project of domination (Barnes 413). For them, this colonial perception of the Igbo has been reinforced by most non-Igbo Nigerians, especially the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba, both of whom resent the Igbo because the latter are historically destined to conquer and lead (Jeffs 299). In addition, the Igbo claim that the Hausa-Fulani have "an anarchic love for power," and that the Yoruba are irremediably "hypocritical" (82).

Some prominent Nigerian writers have at a time dropped their fictional lens and embraced the memoir to "speak to a generation that seemed hard of hearing" (Nnolim 2) in their exploration of ethnic mistrust in Nigerian literature. This is because the memoir functions as a critical infrastructure that reveals the world as it is, as it has been, and as it could be, recognizing Achebe's position that:

Art for Art's sake is just another piece deodorized dog-shit. Art is and was in the service of man. Our ancestors created their myth and legend and told their stories for a human purpose (including, no doubt the excitation of wonder and pure delight); they made their sculptures in wood and terracotta, stone and bronze to serve the needs of their times. Their artists lived and moved and had their being in society and created their works for the good of that society (*Morning Yet on Creation Day* 19.)

For Ukrainian novelist Andrey Kurkov, everybody has a role to play in nation-building, and so does the artist: "The snipers should kill the enemy. The singers should sing for the soldiers and the refugees. What I can do is write and tell things, and that is what I am doing" (in Abba, 2022, 2). James Baldwin also acknowledges the poet's responsibility "to bear witness, as long as breath is in him, to that mighty, unnameable, transfiguring force which lives in the soul of man" (8). This article examines how the selected postwar memoirs, Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died* (1972), Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country* (2012), and Ayuba Mshelia's *Araba Let's Separate: The Story of the Nigerian Civil War* (2012), each by an author from each of the three ethnic formations, bears witness to the narratives of ethnic mistrust in Nigerian literature.

Homi Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry as menace is invoked here as a theoretical anchor for understanding the influence of colonial history in the fragility of peace in postwar Nigeria discourses. Our concept of fragility connects to Judith Butler's 'precarious' which is associated with vulnerable subjectivities. Suggesting that the fragile and the precarious are vulnerable subjects, we argue that a nation "trembling in the balance" (Udumukwu 1) such as Nigeria in its current precarious state, vulnerable to sociopolitical crises, economic sabotage and ethno-terrorism, can justifiably be described as a fragile nation. Beyond the separatist gestures of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra motivated by their subaltern feeling, the agitations of other ethnic militias or insurgent groups like the Nigeri-Delta militants in the South-South, the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC) in the South-West, the herdsmen in the North-Central region, Boko-Haram in the North-East and the bandits in the North-West complicate and extend the narrative of ethnicity and the fragility of peace in post-war Nigerian nonfiction.

Mimicry and Ethnocentric Self-Righteousness

Homi K. Bhabha's theory of mimicry as menace provides a vantage anchor for analyzing ethnic mistrust in postwar Nigerian memoirs, given that it reveals how colonial power structures persist through distorted imitations. In Bhabha's seminal concept captured in the title "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", he positions colonial mimicry as an ambivalent process where the colonized are compelled to imitate the colonizer: "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. By

that I mean that it is a desire for a subjectivity of colour that is almost the same, but not white" (86). Yet, "the partial representation and recognition of the colonial object... almost the same, but not quite... turns from mimicry—a difference that is almost nothing but not quite—to menace—a difference that is almost total but not quite" (88). Mimicry, for him, is at once resemblance and menace, and the menace of mimicry is its double vision, which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority (90). The idea of this "resemblance and menace" underscores the fact that the postcolonial subject repeats consciously or subconsciously the narratives created by the colonialists about postcolonial identities. In a sense, identity constructions in African literature draw heavily on colonial history and foreground same in indigenous discourses, resulting in the menace of fragile peace. Thus the narratives of Igbo "untrustworthiness," the Hausa-Fulani "hegemony," and the Yoruba "hypocrisy" emerge as mimetic distortions that define colonial discourses, the postcolonial stereotypes they construct, and mistrust they perpetuate.

Mimicry's Postcolonial Afterlife in Postwar Nigerian Memoir

Mimicry is the result of the colonial divide-and-rule tactics replicated by ethnic groups against each other in Nigerian postwar memoir. Achebe's *There Was a Country* (2012) interrogates Nigeria's ethnic rivalry by tracing it to colonial manipulations and post-independence elite failures, portraying the Igbo as victims of systemic marginalization while critiquing Hausa-Fulani hegemony and Yoruba complicity. Through a blend of memoir, history, and polemic, Achebe inverts non-Igbo narratives of Igbo arrogance in which ethnic rivalry engineered the injustice that fuels Biafran secession and ongoing insurgencies. He locates the genesis of rivalry in the rigging of the 1960 elections by the British government to enthrone Northern dominance:

It was discovered that a courageous English junior civil servant named Harold Smith had been selected by no other than Sir James Robertson to oversee the rigging of Nigeria's first election 'so that its compliant friends in Northern Nigeria would win power, dominate the country, and serve British interests after independence' (*TWAC* 50).

He further notes that following the wrong foundation which the British laid for the takeoff of Nigeria as a sovereign nation, through its tragic colonial manipulation, Nigeria was plunged into a cycle of corruption and misrule:

Public servants helped themselves freely to the nation's wealth. Elections were blatantly rigged. The subsequent national census was outrageously stage-managed; judges and magistrates were manipulated by the politicians in power. The politicians themselves were pawns of foreign business interests" (*TWAC* 51).

Achebe had acted as Biafra's Ambassador at Large, travelling across the world, including the United States, to present the Biafran perspectives but also seek foreign support for the fledgling republic. His foreign mission during the war led to the emergence of over two-hundred pro-Biafran support committees in the United States, which had a decisive impact on shaping public opinion.¹ It raised huge public outcry that made the Biafran situation a pressing domestic issue that became difficult for both the Johnson and Nixon Administrations to ignore (Melbourne 33). The impact was legendary: "Airfields such as the one at Uli – one of the few operational airports in Biafra – became hubs of transnational activism as aid workers, missionaries, celebrities, politicians, journalists, intellectuals, mercenaries, and intrigued foreigners flocked to provide aid and assistance" (Farquharson 18). The mobilisation so popularised the secessionist Biafra that it became 'a ward of the international community' (Sargent 73).

Thus, in *There Was a Country*, Achebe traces the origin of the resentment of the Igbo by the non-Igbo Nigerians to their historical and cultural worldview. This is worth quoting at length:

The Igbo culture, being receptive to change, individualistic and highly competitive, gave the Igbo man an unquestioned advantage over his compatriots in securing credentials for advancement in Nigerian colonial society. Unlike the Hausa-Fulani, he was unhindered by the wary of religion and unlike the Yoruba, he was unhampered by traditional hierarchies. This kind of creature, fearing no god or man, was custom-made to grasp the opportunities, such as they were, of the whiteman's dispensations. And the Igbo did so with both hands. Although the Yoruba had a huge historical and geographical head start, the Igbo wiped out their handicap in one fantastic burst of energy in the twenty years between 1930 and 1950 (74).

¹ The figure of two-hundred Biafra support committees in the United States is quoted in Brian McNeil, "And Starvation is the Grim Reaper": The American Committee to Keep Biafra Alive and the Genocide Question During the Nigerian Civil War, 1968-1970", in *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria Biafra War, 1967-1970*, eds. A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (New York: Routledge, 2018), 279.

That the Igbo made great use of these dispensations has also been reaffirmed by other scholars such as Paul Anber. Again, this is captured verbatim:

With unparalleled rapidity, the Igbos advanced fastest in the shortest period of time of all Nigeria's ethnic groups. Like the Jews to whom they have frequently been likened, they progressed despite being a minority in the country, filling the ranks of the nation's educated, prosperous classes. ... It was not long before the educational and economic progress of the Igbos led to their becoming the major source of administrators, managers, technicians, and civil servants for the country, occupying senior positions out of proportion to their numbers. Particularly with respect to the Federal public service and the government statutory corporations, this led to accusations of an Igbo monopoly of essential services to the exclusion of other ethnic groups (in Achebe, *TWAC* 74-75)

Achebe states that although the Igbo had enormous cultural advantage and opportunities, lacking in other ethnic groups, which they grabbed, their success had its lethal consequences: "the dangers of hubris, overweening pride, and thoughtlessness, which invite envy and hatred, or even worse, that can obsess the mind with material success and dispose it to all kinds of crude showiness. There is no doubt at all that there is a strand in contemporary Igbo behaviour that can offend by its noisy exhibitionism and disregard for humility and quietness" (76).

For Achebe, the combination of ethnic success and hubris that went with it is what bred resentment against them and which played a critical role in the Northern pogroms in which over 50,000 Igbo were slaughtered, millions had been forced to flee their homes, and thousands, many of them children, were now facing starvation²³. He posits that "the massacres of Northerners in the East were no less savage... but the massacres [of Igbos] were carried out with such barbarism that the word massacre sounds almost inadequate" (67). Thus, *There Was a Country* constructs Igbo characters who rose to occupy the seats left behind by the British and copied their ideals during the post-independence period, only to be resented as "arrogant" (233). Their arrogance was seen as a threat that distorted the identity of the other ethnic groups.

However, Ayuba Mshelia's *Araba Let's Separate: The Story of the Nigerian Civil War* (2012) offers a counter-narrative of Northern victimhood which frames the 1966 coup as a "cold-blooded" Igbo coup (*Araba Let's Separate* 45). The memoir confronts the Igbocentric posture of Achebe's *TWAC*, offering a Northern Hausa-Fulani perspective, portraying the Igbo pogroms as a justified response to Igbo provocation rather than as an act of unprovoked aggression. Blending historical narrative with fictional elements, it describes "Araba" (separation cries) as a symbol of Northern disaffection against Igbo arrogance. In his conception of Igbo provocation and Northern victimhood, Mshelia locates the origin of the mistrust against the Igbo in the January 1966 Igbo-led coup in which the Sarduna of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello and other prominent Northern elite were murdered:

The catalyst... was the cold-blooded murder of some prominent Northern elites, including the Premier of the North, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduna of Sokoto, by predominantly Igbo officers, on January 15, 1966 (30).

He also portrays Aguiyi-Ironsi's Decree No. 34, which proposed a unitary system of government, as an "obnoxious" power grab that ignited the "Araba" riots and mutual killings. For him, the killings were mutual since the Igbo pogroms in the North, was counter-balanced by the slaughter of Northerners in the East—thus balancing ethnic blame (45).

Mshelia's memoir also celebrates the triumph of Gowon-led federal government's 12-state structure as exposing the folly of Ojukwu's Biafran secession, thus justifying the Eastern blockades as necessary to crush the "intransigence" of the Igbo. The mass flight to the East by the Igbo for Mshelia was self-inflicted rather than expulsion. Unlike Soyinka's anti-dictatorship universalism or Achebe's marginalization thesis, Mshelia endorses military decorum and postwar "no victor, no vanquished" as the federal government's attempt to heal the rivalry

³ The figure of 50,000 comes from the article from the 12 July edition; see "Biafra: a war of starvation and extinction," *Life*, July 12, 1968, 20-21. See also Farquharson, 'Black America Cares': The Response of African Americans to the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970, PhD Thesis, Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University 7 November 2019.

through restructuring. Yet, his "fictionalized history" democratizes the views of the Northerners and their treatment of the Igbo by countering the Igbo-centric narratives of the conflicts with the claims of mutual migrations as shared trauma. According to him,

In some quarters, it became resonant and synonymous with the rampant killing of Igbo in the North. These killings (similar things were happening to Northerners in the East) necessitated the mass movement (62).

While Achebe lays claim to Igbo victimhood and marginalization and depicts the "barbarism" beyond massacre of the federal government's use of blockades to deliberately starve about 2 million Igbo people to death, Mshelia justifies "Araba" as a righteous Northern backlash, thus balancing the atrocities to emphasize mutual culpability over one-sided blame. For him, it was a symmetric violence, not ethnic cleansing (55).

The Aguiyi-Ironsi's July 1966 Decree 34 abolishing Nigeria's federal structure for a unitary state was also described as an "obnoxious" Igbo power grab that ignited Northern "Araba" and provoked the pogroms that escalated to Biafran secession. Ironsi's failure to punish the coup plotters and the promulgation of the decree forced the Northerners into believing that the Igbo were set to dominate the rest of the country. In their view, the decree abrogated the regional autonomy which the Northern elite had long guarded, thereby criminalising retaliatory riots—framed as organic Northern self-defense rather than orchestrated pogroms. If Achebe portrays the pogroms as unprovoked "genocide" predating the decree, Mshelia inverts its causality to show that the violence was Northern self-defense against Igbo hegemony.

This echoes the thesis of ethnic mistrust: while the Northerners read the decree through colonial lenses of Igbo "untrustworthiness," the Igbo saw it as a necessary instrument of anti-corruption reform. The decree symbolizes for Mshelia a political and existential threat that must be crushed through Gowon's counter-secession ideology. Mshelia's narrative seems to overlook Ironsi's vision to stabilize a nation in anarchy and rationalize the atrocities against the Igbo just as Achebe rationalizes the first coup despite its human cost. Both perspectives entrench divisive rhetorics that defined Nigeria's fragile peace. Invariably, Mshelia writes back to Achebe's *TWAC*, positioning himself as the spokesperson of the Northern victims of the coup. It is striking that Mshelia's memoir was published in 2012, the same year *TWAC* was published.

Nonetheless, in Soyinka's prison memoir *The Man Died* (1972), he conceives ethnic mistrust in Nigeria as a symptom of authoritarian failure and colonial legacies rather than innate tribal hatred. Through some prison notes which he structured as a mythic three-act ordeal like Ogun's descent, he critiques the tensions leading to the 1966 pogroms targetted specifically at the Igbo, the coup and the counter-coup, and the Biafran secession as consequences of elite manipulation of ethnic sentiments. Particularly, the memoir x-rays Soyinka's secret meeting with the Biafran leader Odumegwu Ojukwu in 1967 intended to broker peace, which attracted treason charges against him by Gowon's regime. For Soyinka, the meeting was a Pan-Nigerian effort to blur ethnic divisions among the Hausa, the Igbo and the Yoruba. Soyinka rejects the sense of what Abba calls "ethnic self-canonization" (2025: 5) by not only challenging the Northern military dominance and the Eastern secessionist struggle but also demonstrating how coups ignited mutual suspicions.

Thus, Soyinka's work stands midway between Achebe's *TWAC* and Mshelia's *ALS* with his philosophy of universal humanism. His solitary confinement offers him an opportunity to interrogate the crossfire of ethnic violence involving the Igbo and the Hausa-Fulani. Although he documents the underground aid to the Igbo who were fleeing pogroms and indicts the federal government's complicity in the atrocities, he also decries Biafran "secessionist intransigence" (*TMD* 120). He rejects ethnic essentialism, attributing the war to post-independence state failure in which corruption and power grabbing merged tribal interests with national implosion (25). The eponymous clause from which the memoir derived its title, "the man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny," came to be used to universalize rivalry as moral cowardice across groups (176). Drawing on Yoruba cosmology, Soyinka mythicizes resistance against the yoking up of rival ethnicities by colonial powers. Yet, he critiques all the factions and their peculiar sensibilities - the Yoruba intellectuals' acquiescence, the Hausa-Fulani "anarchy," and the Igbo "arrogance" as collaborative forces that consolidated rivalry as constructed trauma. This collective indictment, however, seems to diminish the claim of Igbo genocide, while potentially reinforcing some non-Igbo narratives of Biafran provocation (20). Like Soyinka's *The Man Died*, his civil war poetry collection, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* also published in 1972, which emerged from his 22-month imprisonment during the war, enabled him to interrogate ethnic mistrust as a tool of authoritarianism rather than primordial hatred. If *The Man Died*'s prose chronicles pre-war mediation and tyranny, *A Shuttle*'s poetry symbolically closes ethnic dichotomies through a mythic shuttling between life and death.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* offers a balanced and multi-perspectival view of the war in a way that bridges ethnic divides rather than entrench Biafran victimhood (Abba 2019; 2025). Adichie's polyphonic

approach, which features characters like Ugwu (Igbo houseboy), Olanna (Igbo elite), Richard (British observer), and Kainene (Igbo cynic), "resists the temptation to reconstruct the war story from a single perspective," enabling mutual recognition of shared trauma across ethnic lines.

Fragility of Peace and Precarious Nationhood

The concept of fragile peace in postwar Nigerian discourse can be linked to Judith Butler's notion of 'precarity,' which appeared in her important book, *Precarious Life* (2004). It speaks to Nigeria's ethnic tension as a trembling equilibrium that is vulnerable to mimetic rupture. The war came and ended in the federal government's thesis of "no victor, no vanquished" status, which was intended for the reintegration of the Igbo. But as Achebe's memoir reveals, that project was complicated by the deliberate emasculation of the Igbo through a punitive economic policy that placed embargo on the victims' bank accounts, restricting every Igbo to a one-time withdrawal of 20 pounds only, irrespective of how much they had in their accounts (*TWAC* 300). The resultant depression from this experience formed part of the unaddressed war traumas that were to lead to the emergence of such ethnic militias as the Uwazuruike-led Mobilization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MOSSOB), the Nnamdi Kanu-led Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) and the Eastern Security Network (ESN), etc. All of these seek to re-enact the war violence but also subvert all forms of colonial suppression in the form of subaltern resistance.

For Mshelia, the 20-pound policy was not an undue punishment against the Igbo; it was a justifiable form of "pragmatic healing" (150), a sort of recompense awarded to the Igbo for their arrogance. Thus, each group adopts a self-defense that destabilizes the nation, turning peace into what Mbembe refers to as "a mutation of war":

The old-fashioned army has now mutated into 'urban militias; private armies; armies of regional lords; private security firms and state armies, all claim the right to exercise violence or to kill' (32).

In his postcolonial imagination, Mbembe shows how wars mutate into death-worlds, and how they transform under necropower. This way, war becomes "both remedy and poison—our pharmakon" that mutates sovereignty into biopolitical control (3). Thus, if Achebe and Mshelia are conceived as counter subjects, and *There Was a Country* and *Araba Let's Separate* as counter-discourses, the Eastern Security Network and the Boko-Haram are to be perceived as respective counter-forces of the Igbo and the Hausa-Fulani.

Achebe links rivalry to Igbo exclusion from power: "The Igbo take enormous pride in the present, not in some misty past... but part of the way to respond to confusion in Nigeria is to blame those from the other ethnic group" (20). While he universalizes trauma, demonstrating that "a nation without justice cannot survive", his partiality reinforces ethnic binaries. In *There Was a Country*, he extols Soyinka's views on ethnic tensions as well as his pan-Nigerian activism as a rare counterpoint to widespread Yoruba complicity. Yet he argues that structural Igbo marginalization, rooted in colonial privileging of Northern hegemony doomed such efforts. He notes that although Soyinka's 1967 secret ceasefire mission to Ojukwu, documented in *The Man Died* was symbolic of his heroic solidarity, the ethnic logic of pogroms and Gowon's dictatorship rendered futile Soyinka's universal anti-tyranny stance and emphasis on justice for Biafra (*TWAC* 48). For Achebe, Soyinka's imprisonment for his courageous opposition to the war was evidence of federal government's fear of cross-ethnic unity (*TWAC* 35). However, while Achebe insists that the tensions created by Igbo "arrogance" contributed to the ethnic resentment against the Igbo.

Unlike *There Was a Country* which exposes Achebe's Igbo-centrism and *Araba: Let's Separate*, which reveals Mshelia's Northern symmetry, Adichie's novel avoids "ethnic self-canonization" while remediating Biafra not as eternal grievance but as a precarious postcolony that is forever in the making. This is evident in the experience of characters like Richard, whose incomplete Biafran book symbolizes failed outsider mediation and colonial complicity in ethnic myths, showing that the nation would heal by itself and not by any external intervention.

Conclusion

Postwar Nigerian memoirs function as sites of double articulation because they mimic historical narratives in ways that both complicates the quest for national unity (for instance, Soyinka's *The Man Died* 48-52) as well as fuels separatism (as in Achebe's *There Was a Country* and Mshelia's *Araba Let's Separate*). Yet, the tripartite consciousness of postwar Nigerian memoir is in its capacity to function as "critical infrastructure" for deconstructing inter-ethnic mistrust: Achebe uses it to humanize Igbo precarity, Mshelia to democratize Northern views, and Soyinka to mythicize transcendence. Soyinka's Pan-Nigerian mediation and Adichie's inter-ethnic reconciliatory approaches show how memoir and fiction may be mobilised to add urgency to the search for peace in a fragile postcolony.

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