

**Memoirs Towards a Cohesive Community:  
Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* and Achebe's *There Was A Country***

**Olugbenga Akin Akinwale and Samuel Olabode Ajibiye**

Department of Languages  
Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos State

**Abstract**

Social and literary critics of African literature have often debated the impact of the political arrangement of African states on African literary productions. This paper rethinks the impact of inter-ethnic hostility on literary production in Africa and the complicity of the state in Africa, with specific focus on two non-fiction works: Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country* (2012) and Wole Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006). Engagements with this problem bifurcate into two strands: the first advocating the complete overhaul of the present socio-political arrangement in Africa, and the second proposing the need for reasonable tact and integrity in the conduct of government business. In this paper, we argue that both Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka demonstrate in their non-fictional writings that inter-ethnic tension characterizes the environment in which they write and that Tejumola Olaniyan's (2017) stimulating theorization of the concept of stranger initiates new possibilities of reconsidering the configuration of the African state. Engaging Georg Simmel's (1950) and Zygmunt Bauman's (1990) conceptualization of the stranger, this paper stretches Olaniyan's argument even further to demonstrate the need to extend the stranger's liminality not just to the state but also to the citizenry.

**Keywords:** Achebe, ethnicity, memoir, political legitimacy, Soyinka, stranger

**Introduction**

Existing engagements of the socio-political situations in Africa, Tejumola Olaniyan (2017) observes, can be categorized into two: the foundationalist and the pragmatist. The foundationalist critique advocates a complete overhaul of the present social arrangement in Africa, beginning at the point of contact between Africa and Europe, which they deem the foundation of Africa's social crisis. This category of critics insists that as long as Africa's socio-political order derives from the colonial structure, little can be done to redeem the continent from its many lingering problems. The pragmatist critique acknowledges the depredation of Africa by Europe but proposes that Africa

can surmount its problems by learning from past failings and by conducting the business of government with reasonable tact and integrity. To the latter category belong Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka; and who but the irrepressible Soyinka could one call upon to put this as forthrightly as he does in his social critique of the Nigerian situation, *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*, which he published in 1996, in the heyday of Nigeria's most brutal military regime.

Both Achebe and Soyinka have consistently been grouped together as belonging to the first generation of anglophone African literary writers, hailed as the defining literary voices of the continent, and deemed as sharing an

ideological ground. Soyinka himself tells us that both of them are widely considered as the elder statesmen of Nigerian literature, J.P. Clark, the unassuming poet and playwright, being the third (*You Must Set Forth*, 244). Omotoso, in *Achebe or Soyinka: A Study in Contrasts*, cites Gilbert Phelps's opinion on both writers thus: "...between them they illustrate the whole course of the new literature of English-speaking Africa – and, indeed, in many respects, those of the other parts of the world which have emerged from the colonial experience" (xi). Clearly, the works of both writers are elitist: they write for the elite, representing the plight and failures of the elite in a troubled state.

Indeed, both writers have a lot in common, and to mention the obvious few: both attended the same Nigerian university but at different times, are professors, internationally acclaimed writers, and had been on exile. However, there also exists an apparent but profound dissimilarity between them: Achebe is Igbo, while Soyinka is Yoruba. This difference influences their writing, and this is evident in their memoirs, the subject of this paper. Achebe's memoir, *There Was a Country* (2012), published in the twilight of his life, is confessedly "Nigeria's story, Biafra's story, our story, my story" (3). On the other hand, Soyinka takes a more total view of his distress in Nigeria in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006). In this paper, we probe how the ethnic affiliations and sentiments of these writers influence their constructions of their identities and the identities of others. The objective of such an enterprise is to answer the following questions: How can disparate and diversely populated ethnic groups enable the creation of a cohesive community of peoples? On what terms and in what manner can these ethnic groups be beneficial? Although our analysis closely

examines the Nigerian situation, it bears insight into several other postcolonial African countries as well. Our interrogation in this paper – divided into three sections that briefly trace the history of ethnic rivalry in Nigeria, summarize Achebe's and Soyinka's memoirs, and ultimately argue for a middle ground for the interaction of the state and the citizenry – is stimulated by Michael Schatzberg's treatment of political legitimacy in Middle Africa and Tejumola Olaniyan's engagement of Georg Simmel's theory of the stranger.

### **Political Legitimacy and the Bane of Ethnicity**

Barely a few years after Nigeria's independence from Britain in 1960, the political situation became bleak. It quickly became clear that Frantz Fanon was right. Perhaps the most perspicacious analyst of the African situation at the time. Fanon had, in the late 1950s, excoriated the elites of African countries who were agitating for independence for their unproductivity. He points out that what these elites stood to inherit from the colonial masters were colonial structures that would not make them any more than business agents (149, 152-153). The political crisis that swept through Africa after independence was not unconnected with this.

Something more compounded the problem that dogged Africa's "formal independence", as Abiola Irele puts it (301): the amalgamation of disparate cultural groups as one country. The majority of the African countries that gained independence were made up of communities who saw one another as strangers. To consider the Nigerian situation more closely, when the British arrived in Nigeria, they made Lagos, a Yoruba metropolis in south-west Nigeria, a crown colony. They oversaw the rest of

what is now known as Nigeria from there. This is because Lagos was a coastal city, so they could easily ferry cocoa, groundnuts, rubber, and other raw materials overseas. Britain's indirect rule in Nigeria was a success in the north of Nigeria, and this owed to the caliphal structure in place there. Islam had preceded Britain in northern Nigeria, courtesy of Usman Dan Fodio's Jihad of 1804. It was not just a religion but also a political system. The colonizers latched on to this structure to rule northern Nigeria indirectly through emirs. As Moses Ochonu notes, the Hausa-Fulani Emirate, whom he referred to as the sub-colonial, was instrumental to the colonization of the non-Muslim ethnic group in the Middle Belt of Nigeria:

In many districts of the Middle Belt, Hausa-Fulani sub-colonials were in charge of the various spheres of colonial rule in their areas of administrative jurisdiction. They hired their own staff and paid them from the revenue generated. More crucially, they shaped the contours of the colonial enterprise, setting the parameters of economic, political, and social policies and changes (212).

The huge success of this system could not be replicated in south-east Nigeria, but it succeeded somewhat in south-west Nigeria. While the Yoruba in south-west Nigeria had kings through whom Britain could rule indirectly, the Igbos in south-east Nigeria had no such structure of governance, and this was the most significant cause of the failure of indirect rule in south-east Nigeria. Britain rewarded northern Nigeria by protecting it from the non-Islamic influence, fencing it off from the rest of the country. Gary Diamond, cited in Morrison (6-7), puts it thus:

...British officials administered the North through the Hausa language and, seeking to preserve that region's social structures and institutions, effectively sealed off the North, especially the Muslim emirates, from Western influences, even in the person of Southern Nigerians. Those Southerners who migrated to the North were forced to live in segregated housing and to educate their children in separate schools, and were prevented from acquiring freehold title to lands. ... This separate administration of North and South [of Nigeria] not only profoundly hindered the development of a common national identity but also generated an immense development gap.

Colonialism not only brought over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups together in Nigeria but also devised their separation. When the colonizers eventually left in 1960, they had brought the northern elite to rule over the country they were leaving behind by rigging the election that brought Abubakar Tafawa Balewa to power (Achebe, 50-51; Soyinka 54). Thus, the stage was set for the inter-ethnic tussle that trailed independence.

Schatzberg's (2001) otherwise stimulating examination of political legitimacy in Middle Africa, in which he observes that political legitimacy in Middle Africa revolves around the metaphor of fatherhood, consumption, inclusion and exclusion, and alternation of power, does not account for the impact of inter-ethnic rivalry on governance in Africa. The carefree manner in which colonizers threw together diverse ethnic groups and designated them a country incessantly besets many African countries. According to Irele,

In an important sense, the Europeans simplified matters by integrating large populations of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds into their colonial possessions. But they failed to resolve the problem of political legitimacy, which had been fundamental to antecedent history in Africa. (298)

The political structure in Northern Nigeria, after Usman Dan Fodio's Jihad, was an Islamic oligarchy; in Western Nigeria there was a sophisticated monarchical system of government with its own methods of checks and balances; and Eastern Nigeria was an egalitarian community where every title-holding man has a say in every communal decision. In each of these regions, "political order originate[d] from and is sustained by religion (especially creation of myths and kinships)" (Halloway, 29). With this situation in which the British government system came to supersede indigenous systems, "the new structures", Irele notes, "were in direct competition for legitimacy with traditional precolonial systems" (300). Another horrible result that arose from this dismissal of existing colonial system was that the manner in which the British designed and carried out their indirect rule, even when "by proxy" as it was in the Middle Belt (Ochonu, 2014), was a precursor to the authoritarian rule that came to plague Nigeria soon after independence. Olaniyan posits that:

With the colonial dissolution of precolonial African political communities also followed the dissolution of established indigenous African political accountability. This is especially important given the epidemic of tyrannical rules that have bedeviled the African continent since the end of colonial rule. (272)

This colonial insensitivity adds to the reasons Schatzberg proffers for the failure of the Western concept and praxis of democracy in Middle Africa: imposition of a foreign constitution; leadership failures, and widespread corruption of leaders (216). Presumably, it is the most important reason for the failure of democracy. Recent "democratic" elections in Middle Africa, and are much too often trailed by violence, arising from dissatisfaction of ethnic groups. Even when the ruling elite came up with a dubious solution, dubbed "the Federal Character", to ensure that each ethnic group is represented in the central government, the ethnic tensions persist.

Reading Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* and Achebe's *There Was a Country* against this background revealed that both writers were conscious of the inter-ethnic tensions that pervaded the political atmosphere in Nigeria and still remain the bane of Nigeria's existence, and that neither of them denies his affiliation with his ethnic group. The argument in this paper is that such a stance is not necessarily inimical to nation-building efforts of both writers, who are, indubitably, concerned with the state of the country they call theirs.

### **For Freedom's Sake**

Soyinka's memoir, as suggested by its title, is a voyage through Nigeria's tortuous socio-political landscape. He traces his investment in African politics to his days as a student at Leeds University in England. He recounts how his interaction with other African students under the aegis of the Overseas Students Club, or the University of London Student Union, or the West African Students Union. This socialization was an avenue to ponder the African situation in the late 1950s.

It became obvious in the pre-independence days the emerging nationalists who hoped to succeed the colonizers cared little for the progress of the nation. They were allured by the privileges of the offices they aspired to; and, at the self-indulgent pretext of familiarization tours of Britain in order to study "British-style democracy, its institutions and bureaucracy" (43), they flocked to Europe to enjoy themselves. They sought out young Nigerian students wherever they went and urged them to "[c]ome back quickly and stake your claims. The earlier you position yourselves, the bigger your slice of the national cake!" (43). This invitation recalls Michael Schatzberg's analysis of political legitimacy. These profligate national leaders whom Soyinka describes courted scandal so unabashedly that "we asked ourselves, were these men, who routinely conducted themselves with such gracelessness, the true representatives of a national mandate?" (42). These perturbed students resolved to confront what they saw as an adumbration of the leadership failure that trailed Nigeria's Independence. He returns to Nigeria in time for the Independence celebration, four years after which a power tussle ensued between Obafemi Awolowo, the Premier of the Western Region of Nigeria (henceforth "Western Nigeria"), and his deputy, Ladoke Akintola. The political crisis that engulfed Western Nigeria ignited the concatenation of events that culminated in the military coup de tat of January 1966 and the avoidable civil war of 1967. The coup, he suggests, concretized the wall of division among the major ethnic divisions in Nigeria. Because many Nigerians in the south read the coup as respite from the chaos they had had to endure, they celebrated the change. However, Nigerians in the north did not share this sentiment:

Mostly, there was jubilation to the south – in the East, West, and Midwest – while the North was plunged into mourning and into a deep, visceral distrust and resentment of the South. The Eastern Region earned the greatest loathing from the stricken North, since it soon became noticeable that the leadership of the coup was mostly Igbo, the dominant population of the East. In addition, the Eastern political leadership had been left untouched (100).

He probes the motives of the secession of the Eastern Region and reveals the role he played in calling for the end of the needless pogrom: "When a people have been subjected to a degree of inhuman violation, for which there is no other word but genocide," he observes, "they have the right to seek an identity apart from their aggressors" (101). He, together with other activists, demanded that General Yakubu Gowon, the Head of State at the time, ended the war. They "urged our people in the West to distance themselves from any act that might suggest approval of slaughter. In addition, however, the suspicion developed of a Northern-dominated agenda, this time through the agency of the military" (102). By "suspicion", Soyinka implies a lingering distrust among the many ethnic groups in Nigeria. The reprisal coup de tat of July 1966 confirmed the fear of foresighted observers, even with the military establishment, that the military had come under the control of Northern feudalists. His intervention in the civil war by visiting Biafra to commune with Odumegwu Ojukwu, the leader of Biafra, got him incarcerated for twenty-two months. On his release, Soyinka encountered a different society than the one he left behind.

When Soyinka finally resettled into society, he got involved with the military leadership, often offering advice and challenging despotism. Military rule continued in Nigeria from the end of the war until 1999, except for a short span of civilian rule between 1979 and 1983. He recounts his evasion of Sani Abacha's tyranny and eventual exile during which he mobilized support for campaigns against Abacha. After the tyrant's death, Soyinka eventually returned to Nigeria, having spurned the invitation extended to him to vie for the presidency of Nigeria. He offers his honest response:

My immediate response was that I would not make a unifying president. An influential caucus in the North – a feudal elite whom I had never spared, and who in turn had indoctrinated their constituency with the convenient notion that I hated the North in its entirety – viewed me with great suspicion. To make the ideal president, I would first have to dismantle that lie, and that, I knew, would require making underserved concessions (485).

Striking issues arise from this memoir, but the most important to the purpose of this paper are Soyinka's projection of himself as Yoruba, and his silence on Obafemi Awolowo's role in the Biafran War. In many instances, Soyinka reveals his affiliation with the Yoruba people. The most powerful of these demonstrations are his adulatory references to Ogun, the Yoruba god of creativity and war, his patron-deity (191, 237). That he adapts Yoruba mythology in his work is general knowledge among critics of his works. We will cite two other instances in the book where he identifies himself with the Yoruba group. He tells us that at the outset of the war, as a sort of leader in the Yoruba community, he and others "urged *our*

*people*" (102, our italics) to desist from aggravating the violence being perpetrated. However, the most evocative of these is his account of his discovery of a small town known as 'Bekuta' (derived from the name of his hometown, Abeokuta) in Jamaica (24-31).

Intriguingly, Soyinka is silent on Awolowo's role in the Biafran War. It is known that he was the Federal Commissioner of Finance in Nigeria at the end of the civil war and spearheaded the economic program that shortchanged wealthy Igbo people after the war. Given Soyinka's outspoken stance against injustice, his silence on this begs some questions: Why does Soyinka leave this act of injustice out in his narrative of the history of Nigeria? Why does he not mention it in his other personal narratives – namely, *The Man Died*, *Ibadan*, and *The Open Sore of a Continent*? Perhaps, he might have decided not to repeat an issue that was already in public knowledge. Additionally, he might have decided not to fan the embers of inter-ethnic animosity by recalling past wrongs as mere speculations. It is clear, however, that he, like many other young intellectuals of the Western Region, venerated the politician, whom many, even in the military, saw as savior of Nigeria at the time.

### **Despair of a Son of the Soil**

Chinua Achebe offers his account of the Biafran War (1967-1970) and his analysis of the Nigerian situation in his remarkable memoir, *There Was a Country*. For one who achieved a legendary status for the timing of his fourth novel, *A Man of the People*, which heralded the first military coup and almost cost him his life, the keenness with which he analyzes the events that precipitated the needless war was not unexpected; it is borne of a calm reflection that has taken on the benefit of hindsight.

Chimamanda Adichie rightly characterizes the narrative as a mourning for Biafra and an outpour of anger at the failures of Nigeria.

Achebe, consistent with his style, begins with a proverb: "a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body" (1), a loud intimation that the work is reflective. The first few pages were a description of his formative years. His father, a catechist and school teacher, one of the earliest beneficiaries of Western education, took his children's education seriously. He excelled at school and was one of the very first set of undergraduates at the University College, Ibadan. However, there was another part to his education which was supplied by his uncle, a staunch Igbo traditionalist, who had opened his door to the first missionaries to arrive Ogidi:

Those two – my father and his uncle – formed the dialectic that I had inherited. Udoh stood fast in what he knew, but he also left room for my father to seek other answers. The answer my father found in the Christian faith solved many problems, but by no means all (13).

Achebe had, by 1967, become a towering figure on the African literary scene. His publication of *Things Fall Apart*, which he wrote to contest the misrepresentation of Africa in European novels, notably Joyce Cary's *Mr. Johnson* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, had launched him to the top of the list of African writers, and he followed it up with three more novels: *No Longer at Ease*, *Arrow of God*, and *A Man of the People*. These novels betrayed Achebe's thematic preoccupations at the time. First, he deployed his stories to responding to the misrepresentation of Africa; and second,

he challenged the decadence that he perceived in Nigeria, especially among the leaders. *A Man of the People* clearly depicts his investment in Nigeria, and his insightful analysis of the political situation of Nigeria. He had foreseen the military intervention that eventually happened in 1966 and coincided with the publication of *A Man of the People*. He writes:

When the artist's imagination clashes with life's very reality it creates a heavy conundrum. ... Despite my fictional warning I never expected or wanted the form of violent intervention that became the military coup of January 15, 1966. ... That night of January 15, 1966, is something Nigeria has never really recovered from (64-65).

The coup foregrounded the reality of the differences that rested in the subconscious of the country. Implacable Northerners took to slaughtering the Igbo people who lived among them in Northern Nigeria, in retaliation for the murder of the Sardauna of Sokoto and leader of the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello. The pogrom spread to Western Nigeria, and he found himself no longer at ease in Lagos, where he had his home. This violence would not have been, Achebe offers, but for the maladroitness of the ruling class:

As we reached the brink of a full-blown war it became clear to me that the chaos enveloping all of us in Nigeria was due to the incompetence of the Nigerian ruling class. They clearly had a poor grasp of history and found it difficult to appreciate and grapple with Nigeria's ethnic and political complexity. This clique, stunted by ineptitude, distracted by power games and the pursuit of material comforts, was unwilling [to save], if not incapable of saving... our fledgling new nation.

The violence indeed attained vertiginous dimensions and culminated in a protracted war between Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo people who had announced their secession from the country, and the rest of Nigeria. While the disgruntled Igbo nation cited the nonchalance of the Federal Government to the mass murder of their people in the North of Nigeria and elsewhere as the justification for the war, the Federal Government commissioned its army to fight the secessionists to keep the country together as one: "To keep Nigeria one/ Is a task that must be done" (Soyinka, 142). The outcome of this morbid obsession with war was the murder of thousands of Nigerians.

The war ended after three years, and the elaborate rebuilding campaign that followed, peppered with the slogan: "No Victor, No Vanquished", did little to assuage the frayed nerves of the Easterners. It is noteworthy that at the end of the war, the Federal Government confiscated the money of Easterners in Nigerian banks, and, regardless of how much they had in banks before the war, they were given only 20 pounds (then Nigeria's currency). The Federal Commissioner for Finance at this time was Obafemi Awolowo, who was considered the leader of the Yoruba people. And, indeed, he was: he led the dominant political party in Western Nigeria and until Independence was Premier of the Western Region of Nigeria.

There are many international observers who believe that Gowon's actions after the war were magnanimous and laudable. There are tons of treatises that talk about how the Igbo were wonderfully integrated into Nigeria. Well, I have news for them: the Igbo were not and continue not to be reintegrated into Nigeria, one of the main reasons for the country's

continued backwardness, in my estimation (235).

This undoubtedly is why Achebe was convinced that "Nigerians of all other ethnic groups will probably achieve consensus on no other matter than their common resentment of the Igbo" (74)

Achebe's memoir has been criticized by Soyinka as "unduly divisive". However, Olu Obafemi in his short but perceptive engagement of the work, calls attention to the trauma of the war that the celebrated novelist must have gone through, the despair and anguish the war must have caused him, and the need for him to relieve himself of the trauma by recounting his experience. One cannot discountenance, too, the deep sense of frustration he must have felt at the defeat of Biafra, a short-lived country he had been called to build and in which he had had high hopes. If Achebe's account is "tinged with odd nostalgia for the ephemeral moment when Biafra seemed to birth a national culture", as Adam Nossiter opines, that nostalgia is entrenched in the disappointment of a man who fervently believed in humanity.

We would argue, however, that the treatise Achebe offers at the end of his memoir – a treatise that was largely a rehash of his pamphlet *The Trouble with Nigeria* – ignores the root of Nigeria's problem: the multifarious ethnic interests that clog the wheel of the country's progress. The first of the remedies he suggests a restructuring of election processes at all levels, an abolition of the system of godfatherism, which he describes as "an archaic, corrupt practice in which individuals with lots of money and time to spare...sponsor their chosen and push them right to the desired political position", and redesigning the governmental system such that the opportunity to rule is open to everyone

(248-250). This, he avers, will effectively combat corruption, indiscipline, terrorism, and economic regression. In an optimistic flourish, he prophesies that "the Nigerian solution will come in stages, once democratic institutions are strengthened. However, in light of Achebe's foregoing account and analysis of the Nigerian situation, this treatise becomes simplistic, not considering the ethnic differences he had referred to bitterly in the memoir.

### **A Necessary Antinomy**

As noted earlier, Achebe and Soyinka acknowledge the complexity of the Nigerian political situation and face the uncomfortable choice of calling for a disintegration of the country in order to resolve its flaws. The choice they have to make between advocating a continuation of the existing arrangement of the country and calling for its radical reorganization results in their taking an ambivalent stance. Soyinka expresses this directly when he refers to his commitment to Nigeria as a duty:

I accept Nigeria as a responsibility, without sentiment. I accept that entity, Nigeria, as a space into which I happen to have been born, and therefore a space within which I am bound to collaborate with fellow occupants in the pursuit of justice and ethical life... (*The Open Sore*, 133)

The Nigerian Civil War coupled with what he perceived as injustice against the Igbo, no doubt, shook Achebe's belief in Nigeria as a nation. The equivocation of the title of his memoir suggests an intellectual battle raging within him, vacillating between placing his allegiance between Nigeria and casting his lot with Biafra (Omotoso, 143). "There was a country" provokes an insistent question: what country – Biafra or Nigeria? The argument can be made, as has

been by Adichie, that Achebe mourns Biafra, the fashioning of which he had contributed to. The country he refers to may also well be the Nigeria he and others in his generation had dreamed of after Independence in 1960.

This confronts one, again, with the issue of ethnicity in Nigeria. How can an inhabitant of a territory like Nigeria, made up of diverse cultural communities of varying proportions, relate to the country they call theirs? Can our answer provoke a resolution of ethnic tension to the inauguration of lasting institutions? Olaniyan (2017), in an engagement of Zygmunt Bauman's (1990) theorization of friendship and enmity, an offshoot of Georg Simmel's theorization of the phenomenon of the stranger, proposes that the African postcolonial state – the governance structure that is a legacy of colonization – be "conceived and related to as a stranger." He argues that the state, being not an indigenous invention but a foreign but ineluctable force, is poised as a stranger and not as a friend or an enemy. This sort of relationship brings the state beyond any attempt to tame it, for such attempts are inherently problematic. Olaniyan contends that construing that state as stranger is:

To foreground and make possible open and equal possibilities for everyone in dealing with the state, on the basis of citizenship as level ground. It is also to expect and make possible equal and appropriate sanction under the law, on the basis of citizenship as level ground. The state ought not to be anybody's enemy or friend, but a stranger, and a stranger is structurally and substantively composed, in a chastening way of the possibilities of both.

However, he does not confront the problem that arises in the eventual reality of one of both possibilities. He concedes, nevertheless, that this does not dissuade diverse interest groups from jostling for its control, and therein is the antinomy of the kind of state that he proposes: its aloof disinterestedness and prospects of being amenable to domestication. It is the kind of state that at once is accessible to everybody but is owned by nobody.

Simmel notes that the stranger is different from the wanderer who typifies liberation from every form of fixation, in that the stranger can be both remote and accessible. However, the stranger is only able to retain this ambivalence as long as he is somewhat moored to his root. The stranger can remain aloof only if he sees himself, as he is seen, as being an outsider-insider. That sense of detachment that engenders the knowledge that the stranger cannot be tamed arises from the realization that the stranger is primarily exclusive. But when the stranger severs his connection to his root, he becomes subjective to the normative demands of his host. It seems palpable then, from Simmel's treatise, that this relationship of estrangement that Olaniyan advocates necessitates the stranger's – in this case the state's – effort at maintaining its strangeness. Appiah, who evokes the concept of strangeness, in his inquiry into cosmopolitanism upholds this complex construction of the stranger when he asserts that "[a] creed that disdains the partialities of kinfolk and community may have a past, but it has no future" (xviii).

There is another angle to this, and it comes in the form of a question: what makes a stranger attractive? A stranger may be economically attractive or politically attractive, and thus provoke desires to control him or turn around to control his host. Even if the stranger

maintains his aloofness but is attractive, in that it is more powerful – politically and economically – than his host, then there is bound to be a jostling to either curry favor with the stranger or to intimidate the stranger. In extreme cases, as in the case of colonization, if the stranger perceives himself as more powerful than his host, he takes his host captive.

Therefore, for a stranger to remain as such, there must be an intervening force, a middle ground of sorts, where the state can interact with all citizens and maintain its distance. Friendship and enmity, it should be noted, is nurtured in conditions of sustained contact. Sustained contact is attended by the unavoidable situation of attraction or offences; relationships are furthered by instances unmediated communion between two parties, for each party must arrive at a point of vulnerability to benefit from the relationship. For the meaningfully productive and beneficiary relationship that Olaniyan proposes between the state and the citizenry, each of these parties must maintain its exclusivity. What we propose is the construction of an intervening space between the stranger-state and the citizenry can meet, neither claiming belonging to the space. This is possible, again with Nigeria as a reference point, with the reconfiguration of the ethnic community as intervening space. The reality is that the intricate bond of kinship, the basic level of ethnic affiliation, is inextricable. Rather than ignoring it to focus on relationship with the state, as Olaniyan suggests, the alien state should be stripped of its excessive power, notably the power to control all economic resources. A devolution of this power to constituting cultural groups is, in this wise, desirable, so that each collective group may become the middle ground through which the individual negotiates with the state which is neither more or less

powerful than the collective middle ground.

### Conclusion

Ethnic affiliations, then, are not abhorrent, neither are they necessarily inimical to progress. In fact, they hold out the promise of development that does not put the state in jeopardy of disintegration. Achebe and Soyinka are Nigeria's greatest examples of how cultural symbols may be deployed to collective benefit, of the prospects of the positive reconfiguration of ethnic groupings. At the national level, Achebe reveals his role as spokesperson for the Igbo during the Nigerian Civil War. Soyinka shows his close connection to his roots, the most colorful of which is his installation as the *Akinlatun* of Egbaland and as *Akogun* of Isara – chieftaincy titles among the Yoruba; and the most revealing of which is his bereavement at the erosion of Bekuta, the Jamaican replica of his hometown. In a sense, both writers belong to the collective, Nigerian state – they are *Nigerian* writers. However one perceives and defines the qualifier, and it is their awareness of the individual-collective breadth of their existence that breeds the ambivalence one often encounters in their works.

The quest for a cohesive community, a binding nation-state, starts then with first reorganizing ethnic groups for the management of intellectual and material resources they muster, and the alienation of the state. What should follow is a restructuring of the ethnic groups as middle grounds for the interaction between the state and the individual citizen of the state. With this arrangement, each group can remain interestedly aloof from the stranger-state, and the stranger-state can retain its paradoxical close-remote relationship with each without provoking an inordinate desire for control.

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- **Olugbenga Akin Akinwale** holds a Ph.D and is of the Department of Languages, Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos State and he can be reached @[akinwolegbenga01@gmail.com](mailto:akinwolegbenga01@gmail.com).
  - **Samuel Olabode Ajibiye** holds a Ph.D and is of the Department of Languages, Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos State. He can be reached @[samuel.ajibiye@gmail.com](mailto:samuel.ajibiye@gmail.com).