

Civil Peace



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHINUA ACHEBE

Chinua Achebe was born in Ogidi, Nigeria in 1930, which was at that time a colony of the British Empire. Achebe and his family were members of the Igbo, a minority ethnic group in Nigeria who lived primarily in the southeast of the country. As a child, Achebe learned Igbo stories and read European literature. While studying at University College in Ibadan, Nigeria, Achebe became disillusioned with European depictions of Africa and Africans and decided to become a writer himself. In 1958, he published his first and most well-known novel, [Things Fall Apart](#), depicting European colonization of Nigeria from an African perspective. [Things Fall Apart](#) went on to become the most famous work of African literature in the world, renowned for its detailed and revolutionary depiction of Igbo life. After its success, Achebe worked to promote postcolonial African literature as the editor of the African Writers Series. During the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), in which the predominantly Igbo state of Biafra attempted to secede from Nigeria, Achebe supported the Biafran government and opposed the Nigerian state, which he felt was a remnant of British colonialism. He and his family suffered from the devastation of the war, and many of his friends and colleagues were harmed or killed in the violence. Throughout his life, he wrote several more novels and numerous short stories, all featuring African settings and protagonists, while dealing with uniquely African issues. In 1990, Achebe was a victim of a car crash which paralyzed him from the waist down. He spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. He continued to live in America but remained active in Nigerian politics until his death in 2013, at the age of 82.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Achebe wrote "Civil Peace" shortly after the end of the Nigerian Civil War, a conflict that lasted from 1967 to 1970 in which the state of Biafra, predominantly populated by the minority Igbo ethnic group, attempted to secede from the rest of Nigeria. Achebe himself was a member of the Igbo people and was a supporter of the Biafran cause throughout the war. The civil war was a legacy of the colonial policies of the British government in Nigeria. Early in the 20th century, the British colonial government had consolidated several of their colonies in western Africa into a single political unit: Nigeria. Despite the deep cultural and religious divisions that existed in this new region, when Nigeria gained independence, it was as a single state. Most of the Igbos in the southeast had adopted Christianity, while most Nigerians elsewhere in the new

country were Muslims. Amid claims of election fraud, the first Prime Minister of Nigeria, the northern Nigerian Muslim Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was overthrown by a group of Igbo military officers. Shortly afterwards, many Nigerians in the north began to engage in mass ethnic violence against Igbos living there, resulting in thousands of deaths. Eventually, the Igbos in the southeast seceded, naming themselves the independent Republic of Biafra, and beginning the civil war. Three years of brutal fighting and economic destruction followed. The Nigerian government pursued policies of starvation against the Biafrans, as well as numerous other atrocities and war crimes. The war ended with a victory for the Nigerian government, and Biafra was re-absorbed into Nigeria. With the end of the war, many Igbos began to return to homes and jobs they had fled, only to find that they had been destroyed or stolen. Additionally, the Nigerian bank refused to issue more than a pittance amount of new currency to former Biafrans, regardless of how much money they had before the war.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Achebe's most famous work is his novel, [Things Fall Apart](#) (1958), which covers the conflicts that came with earlier colonial intrusion into the land that became modern-day Nigeria, from the perspective of the indigenous Igbo people. Achebe's last book, his memoir, *There Was a Country* (2012) gives a sense of his personal experience and views on the war, and the Biafran state. There are numerous other books and short stories written about the Nigerian Civil War and its aftermath. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's [Half of a Yellow Sun](#) (2006) is one of the most notable, and Adichie's work is heavily influenced by Achebe. Other significant narratives of the war include Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982), Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975), and Anthonia Kalu's *Broken Lives and Other Stories* (2003). Cyprian Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace* (1976) presents a similar setting to "Civil Peace," looking at the effect the civil war had on the peace that followed it.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Civil Peace
- **When Written:** 1971
- **Where Written:** Most likely Nsukka, Enugu, Nigeria
- **When Published:** 1971
- **Literary Period:** Postcolonial
- **Genre:** Postcolonialism, Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Primarily Enugu, a large city in southern Nigeria that was part of the Biafran secessionist state, around

1970-1971 after the end of the Nigerian Civil War.

- **Climax:** A group of thieves surround Jonathan's home and demand money.
- **Antagonist:** The thieves who attempt to rob Jonathan, as well as the chaos and scarcity of post-war Nigerian society
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Oral Tradition. Chinua Achebe was raised in the Igbo culture in Nigeria, which emphasizes oral storytelling and memorized proverbs. These elements appear frequently in his work; for example, in the proverb that Jonathan repeats throughout "Civil Peace."

Political Leader. Achebe worked for the Biafran government during their brief period of independence. He served as a foreign ambassador for the new government and travelled the world telling foreign leaders about the Biafran struggle. Throughout this time, he continued to write and promote African writing.



PLOT SUMMARY

"Civil Peace" takes place in southern Nigeria, shortly after the end of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), in which the state of Biafra failed in its attempt to secede and which has devastated the country. A man named Jonathan Iwegbu has survived the war along with his wife, Maria and three of his four children. He counts himself extremely lucky for this, as well as the fact that he was able to save his **bicycle**. Jonathan recalls a soldier attempting to requisition the bicycle during the war, but Jonathan was able to bribe the man instead and then hide the bicycle for the duration of the war. He now uses the bicycle to ferry passengers and earn some money in the refugee camp in which he and his family are living.

Eventually, Jonathan returns to the city of Enugu, where he and his family had lived before the war and is surprised and delighted to find that their small house is still intact, despite the destruction throughout the city. They move back in, and Jonathan soon opens a bar for soldiers using palm wine that he gets by biking to neighboring villages. Meanwhile, he tries to return to his job as a miner, but the mining company offers neither work nor any information about when there might be work, and he focuses instead on his own entrepreneurial efforts.

Later, Jonathan receives twenty Nigerian pounds in *ex-gratia* (or as he and others pronounce it "**egg-rasher**"), for turning in any Biafran money they hold to the Nigerian Treasury. The atmosphere is dangerous around the Treasury, and Jonathan must be very careful in order to keep his money safe from thieves. He goes home as quickly as possible, careful to interact

with no one.

That night, a group of thieves surround Jonathan's house. Jonathan and his family cry out and attempt to get the attention of their neighbors or the police, but nobody comes. The thieves mock Jonathan's family, imitating their calls for help to make clear that none is coming. The leader of the thieves tells Jonathan that no one needs to get hurt, as the war is over and this is now the "civil peace." Jonathan says that he doesn't have much money, but the leader responds that he and the other thieves don't have any money at all. Jonathan offers to give the thieves his egg-rasher, and the leader accepts.

The next morning, Jonathan's neighbors come to offer their condolences about the robbery, but Jonathan and his family seem unaffected. They are all back to work, and Jonathan tells his neighbors that he wasn't reliant on the money the thieves stole. He repeats his favorite proverb: "Nothing puzzles God."



CHARACTERS

Jonathan Iwegbu – The protagonist of the story, Jonathan is a man living in southern Nigeria just after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). He is the husband of Maria and father to four children, the youngest of whom died in the war. Before the war, Jonathan was a miner. Jonathan is a relentless optimist and believes deeply in the will of God, as indicated by his favorite proverb: "Nothing puzzles God." Although he lost a son in the war and was forced to flee his home, he is always grateful for the blessings that he still has—such as his wife, his three remaining children, and his bicycle. He is also a hard worker, entrepreneurial, and savvy. Throughout the story, he is constantly searching for new ways to earn money, whether by using his bike to operate a taxi, opening a bar, waiting at the mining office for work, or receiving his **egg-rasher**. Even as he seeks to earn money, though, he always does so with the understanding that money is a means to supporting his family, and not an end in itself. Through this hard work and optimism, Jonathan is able to support his family and survive the destruction of the war and its aftermath. When a group of thieves robs him and his family one night, he is terrified, but once he is able to get through it without any harm coming to himself or his family, he is unbothered. His faith and optimism remain intact despite the traumatic events of the story.

Maria Iwegbu – Maria is the wife of Jonathan, and the mother of their children. Little is revealed about her personality, but she is shown to be hardworking like her husband, and she builds a business making and selling breakfast to their neighbors. She and her children are provided for and protected by Jonathan over the course of the story. Like Jonathan, she gets back to work and seems unperturbed by the attack from the group of thieves.

The Thieves – The thieves are the main human antagonists of

the story, as they harass and rob Jonathan and his family. They are shown to be less educated than Jonathan, as they speak in a pidgin rather than standard English. This could also be meant to indicate that they are northerners rather than Igbo, as Igbo were generally more educated than other Nigerians. They also claim to be very poor, which is why they have resorted to stealing. The thieves are cruel to Jonathan and his family, mocking them for attempting to call for help, although they claim that they are “good” thieves because they don’t want to hurt anybody (though of course they will if they don’t get the money they want). The presence of the thieves makes clear the general lack of authority in post-war Nigeria, as well as the awful economic conditions that make thievery attractive to some people. But the thieves also demonstrate an opposed—and morally inferior—perspective on money to Jonathan’s. While Jonathan demonstrates that his ethics and faith are more important to him than money, the thieves are willing to give up their moral boundaries in order to steal from innocent people.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



WAR AND PEACE

Chinua Achebe’s “Civil Peace” begins with the main character, Jonathan, expressing his joy about the end of the Nigerian civil war, which raged from 1967 to 1970 between Nigeria and a failed secessionist state called Biafra. The cost of the war was terrible, illustrated by the fact that Jonathan feels lucky to have lost only his youngest son out of his six-person family, and by his astonishment when he discovers that his little house survived the destruction of the war. After the war, Jonathan is optimistic and excited to rebuild, but over the course of the story, it becomes clear that peacetime has its own dangers. One night, Jonathan and his family are robbed by thieves, who declare during the robbery that now that the civil war is over, they are in a “civil peace.” The phrase “civil peace”—which is also the title of the story—is a kind of oxymoron that captures the new dynamic of Nigeria after the war, in which the official war is over but there is still a battle between citizens for survival.

Throughout the story, Achebe makes clear the horror and danger of war and its lasting devastation on the country. The clearest example is that Jonathan considers himself lucky to have only lost one child to its violence, which clearly implies that many other families lost more. The danger of the war is also shown in a flashback in which Jonathan nearly loses his

bicycle when it is requisitioned by a possibly corrupt soldier. This is the only scene of the actual war that appears in the story, and it is tinged with the threat of violence, as Jonathan is almost forced to give up one of the few resources he has left. It is never made clear which side the soldier is on, and by leaving that detail out, the story suggests that this environment of threat and plunder is simply the nature of the war. Even after the war, war’s devastation defines the land. When Jonathan returns to his native city of Enugu, a massive concrete building nearby has been destroyed, and Jonathan counts himself lucky that his own small house has merely been badly damaged. The remnants of death from the war are also repeatedly present in the story. Jonathan buries his bicycle just next to the cemetery where his dead son is buried, and later his children pick mangoes from nearby a military cemetery. The fruit is then sold to soldiers’ wives, some or all of whom are presumably widows. The dangers of war linger everywhere in the setting of the story.

However, the end of the war does not mean the end of difficulty for Jonathan and his family and neighbors, as it soon becomes clear that peace presents its own struggles. When Jonathan attempts to return to his pre-war job as a miner, there is no work to be had. Other former miners are less lucky than Jonathan and don’t even have a home to return to. The peace that Jonathan and others find themselves in is not one of easy rebuilding, but rather of lack of money and other resources. This lack of money leads to conflict that is smaller than the destruction wrought by the war, but nevertheless is ever-present and life-threatening. For instance, after Jonathan gets his \$20 **egg-rasher** for turning in his Biafran money, he understands that he must quickly put the money out of sight and avoid interacting with any other people to make sure he doesn’t get robbed. Another man, who is less careful, does get robbed before he can even get out of the crowd around the egg-rasher line. The climax of the story, in which a group of thieves surround Jonathan’s home and attempt to rob him, shows that danger and violence are not unique to the war. Much like the soldier during the war, the thieves threaten violence (in this case, by firing guns into the air) to get what they want from Jonathan. The thieves themselves make clear that the current “peace” shares attributes with the war when they call it a “civil peace”—the “civil” suggests that just as the war was a battle between the people of Nigeria, the peace also may end up being a battle of citizen against citizen.



OPTIMISM AND FAITH

Jonathan, the main character of “Civil Peace,” repeats the same phrase numerous times throughout the story: “Nothing puzzles God.” As the phrase implies, God acts as a guiding force for Jonathan. Jonathan’s mantra and his faith provide him with the emotional strength to accept both the good and the bad in his life without

being weighed down by the violence and devastation which surrounds him in post civil-war Nigeria. Indeed, Jonathan's most remarkable trait may be his optimism in the face of general destruction and bad experiences. The story suggests that his optimism is founded in his faith, and that his optimism and faith are what give him the ability to rebuild after each setback.

Jonathan's optimism throughout the story is striking, and the story consistently makes clear that his optimism arises from his faith. In the story, Jonathan faces the devastation of the war not with despair but astonishment about his luck. Though one of his children died, he can't believe the rest of his immediate family survived. Though his house was damaged, he's amazed it's still standing at all. He's even delighted that his bike still works after he had to bury it to make sure it wouldn't get stolen. This optimism drives his work ethic. It gives him hope that he can provide for his family, rebuild his home, and build a better life, and so he works to do just those things. For instance, when Jonathan is unable to find a job working as a miner as he had before the civil war, he simply shifts gears to a different entrepreneurial effort to make a living. In nearly every instance in which Jonathan displays optimism rather than despair, he utters his favorite proverb: "Nothing puzzles God." In this way, the story makes clear that Jonathan's optimism is founded in his faith in a supportive God whose help and blessings will help him find a way through every difficulty.

Jonathan's faith and optimism combine to make him morally upright, in contrast to many around him. His faith keeps him humble. For instance, when he finds that the **bicycle** that he had buried during the war is still working, he praises God for it. Although keeping the bicycle safe and then repairing it after the war was clearly a smart thing to do, his faith causes him not to praise himself but to praise God. Meanwhile, his optimism makes him a productive member of society. Jonathan's efforts to make money are all entrepreneurial. His optimism makes him believe he can rebuild through effort, and so he does: he works as a taxi driver with his bike; he starts a bar; his wife cooks and sells food. In contrast, others respond to their poverty with either violence, like the thieves, or despair, like the man who collapses after his egg-rasher gets stolen.

As a whole, "Civil Peace" presents a vision of faith as a powerful force for stability, morality, and guidance in difficult times. It's also interesting to note that religious difference was at the core of the conflict between Biafra and Nigeria, as Biafrans were mostly Christian in contrast to the majority-Muslim northern Nigerians. Yet the story is notable in never explicitly stating what Jonathan's religion is. In this way, the story suggests that a positive, optimistic relationship with faith, regardless of religious affiliation, could foster a more successful, peaceful society.



AUTHORITY, CORRUPTION, AND SELF-RELIANCE

In "Civil Peace," Nigerian authority figures both during and after the war are repeatedly shown to be unreliable and corrupt. From the soldier who tries to steal Jonathan's **bicycle**, to the coal company that once employed him but seems to no longer be operational, to the night watchmen and police who fail to come to Jonathan's aid during the robbery of his home, every authority figure in the story fails him. As a result of this absence of reliable authority, Jonathan must rely on himself to support his family and keep them safe. In depicting a self-reliant character like Jonathan in the midst of the horrors of government corruption and incompetence, the story makes clear that when traditional institutions and structures fail, individuals are still able to—and must—survive and thrive through their own action.

Throughout the story, authority figures repeatedly either fail at their job or actively harm Jonathan. During the war, Jonathan nearly has his bike stolen by a soldier who claims, shadily, that it's needed for military purposes. That Jonathan manages to keep the bicycle by bribing the soldier is a stroke of luck, but it also further suggests that the soldier was corrupt and only sought the bike in the first place for personal profit. After the war, Jonathan must consistently contend with the failures of both the government and private industry. The coal company where Jonathan used to work as a miner not only isn't operating or offering work, it also doesn't even communicate with any of its former employees. Meanwhile, the government bureaucracy which gives out the **egg-rasher** to Jonathan and other former Biafrans is also incompetent, leading to massive crowds waiting to get their 20 pounds for turning in Biafran money. These crowds lead to fear and violence, which the authorities do nothing to prevent. Finally, when thieves surround Jonathan's home, Jonathan and his family call out for the help of the police but receive neither answer nor assistance. The thieves go so far as to mock the family by themselves calling out for the police to help. The clear implication is that the thieves are either working with these figures of authority, or that they have enough power of their own that they know that the authorities won't stop them. In either case, it is clear that citizens can't rely on the authorities to provide safety, order, or support.

Since authority fails to fulfill any of its obligations, the story makes clear that the only way forward is through self-reliance and individual work. When the soldier attempts to steal his bicycle, Jonathan uses his intuition about the soldier's demeanor to determine that he can offer a bribe instead. Doing so ensures his survival when a simple submittal to authority could have doomed him. When Jonathan is unable to return to work as a miner, he instead comes up with new ways to earn money, first through using his bicycle as a taxi service, and then by biking around to nearby towns to buy palm wine to sell at a

bar for soldiers. While other former miners sleep in poverty in the coal company building, Jonathan's entrepreneurial drive allows him to support himself and his family. When the police fail to come to Jonathan's aid when he is being robbed, he negotiates with the thieves on his own and protects his family by giving the thieves the egg-rasher money. Afterward, Jonathan's neighbors are concerned for him because of the lost money, but Jonathan assures them that he was never reliant on it. His self-reliance means that he knows he will be able to survive and support his family on his own without the money that was given to him by the government. Time and time again, the story portrays Jonathan confronted by a world in which traditional authority is either absent or corrupted, and in each case, it is Jonathan's own drive and self-reliance that offers him a path to both survive and thrive. Through this pattern, the story suggests that such self-reliance is the only thing that an individual can, in the end, truly bank on.



MONEY AND SURVIVAL

Discussion of money is constant throughout "Civil Peace." In particular, much of the story describes the various entrepreneurial ventures through which Jonathan, who is almost destitute at the end of the Nigerian civil war, supports himself and his family during the newfound peace. Through its constant focus on Jonathan's efforts to make money, along with scenes that show other characters' desperation to get money, the story suggests that money is not just nice to have—it is essential, a key to both survival and future hope. Yet the story is also careful to show that Jonathan has a proper perspective on the importance of money relative to other things. He's often grateful for his material possessions, but he's even more grateful for the safety of his wife and children. Additionally, money isn't only a positive thing in the story; having it makes Jonathan a target for dangerous thieves. In the story, then, money plays a complex role. It acts as both a tool for survival and a threat to it. And efforts to get money can inspire virtuous behavior that helps build community, or destructive behavior that tears it down. Jonathan experiences both of these sides of money, but his own behavior charts the virtuous mindset, using money for both the personal and societal good.

The story depicts money as a constant need in post-civil war Nigeria, and Jonathan works tirelessly to earn it. As soon as the war comes to an end, Jonathan digs his **bicycle** up from where he had hidden it and gets to work earning money by working as a bike-taxi driver. The bicycle is his most valuable possession, and this is because of its ability to earn him the money he needs to survive. Later, Jonathan's bicycle again becomes useful when Jonathan rides it to get palm wine from neighboring villages and then waters the wine down and sells it to soldiers. Even Jonathan's wife and children work: his children pick and sell mangoes, and his wife cooks breakfast for their neighbors. The

entire family devotes their time to generating the money they need to survive and rebuild. While Jonathan and his family's efforts show the importance of money, so too do the failures of those who lack such entrepreneurial instincts. Other former miners who can't find work end up sleeping on the floor of the seemingly abandoned mining company office. One man who has his **egg-rasher** stolen simply collapses in grief. And the thieves respond to their lack of money by turning to crime. Money—whether the effort to gain it or the lack of it—defines the actions of all of the characters in the story.

While the story makes clear that money is the means to survival, it also indicates that, precisely because of its importance, money can also lead to conflict and danger. Jonathan notices that, upon returning to his home city, his humble family home has been left mostly intact while a huge concrete home owned by a wealthier neighbor has been reduced to rubble, presumably because the neighbor's wealth and status made his property a bigger target for opposition forces. After Jonathan receives his egg-rasher—a payment for turning in his Biafran dollars to the Nigerian Treasury—he is extraordinarily careful in how he handles it because he knows having such an amount of money out in the open makes him a target for thieves. That night, thieves with guns do surround Jonathan's home and threaten him and his family unless they get paid. Simply by having a house to live in, he and his family become a target for the thieves. The meagre wealth that Jonathan has almost gets him and his family killed.

Yet while the vital importance of money makes other characters put it first, such that they sacrifice their morals to get it, Jonathan never does the same. At the beginning of "Civil Peace," Jonathan repeatedly emphasizes that the blessing of finding his bicycle in working order is nothing compared to the importance of the survival of his family during the war. Similarly, when the group of thieves demand Jonathan's money, he doesn't hesitate to give up the egg-rasher in order to ensure his and his family's safety. While Jonathan understands the value of money and its importance in ensuring his and his family's survival, he never treats money as the *most* important thing. Rather, Jonathan treats money as a vital means to an end: that his family survive and thrive. His commitment to those ends allows him to avoid the moral pitfalls of money—he devotes himself to earning it, but he won't sacrifice himself or his family in that effort. Ultimately, the story portrays Jonathan's attitude toward money as the correct and healthy one and implies that Jonathan's behavior toward money should be a model for others.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE EGG-RASHER

The ex-gratia, which Jonathan and others in the story pronounce as “egg-rasher,” is a payment that the Nigerian government provides to citizens who turn in any of the Biafran money that they still hold from during the Civil War. The symbolic meaning of the egg-rasher shifts throughout the story, and this shifting is itself symbolic as it represents the constantly changing methods of survival that Jonathan as well as other Nigerians and Biafrans must undertake to endure during and after the civil war.

On a surface level, the egg-rasher could be seen as a betrayal of the Biafran cause, because in order to get it Jonathan and others must give up their Biafran money, which might be seen as being akin to giving up on his Biafran identity in exchange for Nigerian money. Yet Jonathan is never shown to have any particular loyalty to the Biafrans; in fact, a Biafran soldier attempts to rob Jonathan early in the story. Rather than being politically motivated, Jonathan seems rather to be someone buffeted by the events of history who is just trying to survive, and he shows no emotional connection to the Biafran money he holds or the political hopes of independence that money once represented.

As a result, the egg-rasher acts as a representation of Jonathan’s navigation of his varying identities, demonstrating the ease with which he shifts from Biafran to Nigerian. Furthermore, that ease suggests that, to an ordinary person like Jonathan, the difference seems essentially meaningless—it is the money and its promise that is important.

And, yet, when the thieves surround his house, Jonathan quickly gives them the egg-rasher in order to save himself and his family. That Jonathan so readily gives up the egg-rasher—as opposed to, say, his bicycle makes clear that to him the money itself is not as valuable as either the people he loves or the means that would allow him to build a livelihood. In this sense, the egg-rasher might be looked at as being akin to the fish in the old proverb “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day; teach him to fish and he will eat for a lifetime.” The egg-rasher is a helpful handout, but Jonathan, and the story, see more value in building a self-sufficient life.



THE BICYCLE

Jonathan’s bicycle is representative of his intelligence and work ethic, as well as the faith which continues to help him through his struggles in the aftermath of the war. During the war, Jonathan almost loses the bicycle when a possibly corrupt Biafran army officer tries to requisition it. But Jonathan holds onto the bike by bribing the officer and then realizes that the only way he can ensure he can keep the bike is to hide it until the war ends. He buries the bike, in the same graveyard where his youngest child who died in the

war is buried.

When he digs up the bike after the war and finds it is still usable, the moment is a kind of resurrection that attests to the power of God as well as to Jonathan’s own ingenuity, and which also offers hope for Jonathan’s prospects in the post-war world. In that post-war world, the bicycle repeatedly enables Jonathan to grasp opportunities for work and survival. He first uses it as a taxi in his refugee camp, and later as his means of transportation to purchase palm wine for his bar. The bicycle functions as a tool that amplifies Jonathan’s own drive and ingenuity, and in doing so it both highlights the necessity of that drive and ingenuity for success in post-Civil-War Nigeria while also emphasizing how luck and God’s blessings—in the form of the bicycle’s survival through the war, also play a key role in success.



QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Anchor Books edition of *Girls at War and Other Stories* published in 1991.

Civil Peace Quotes

●● He had come out of the war with five inestimable blessings— his head, his wife Maria’s head and the heads of three out of their four children. As a bonus he also had his old bicycle— a miracle too but naturally not to be compared to the safety of five human heads.

Related Characters: Jonathan Iwegbu, Maria Iwegbu

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

This passage at the beginning of the story presents the state of Jonathan’s family just after the end of the war: Jonathan, his wife Maria, and three of their children have survived the war, while one child died. That Jonathan counts each survival as a miracle while brushing past the death of one of his children is an indication of the generally optimistic and positive outlook that he has on the world.


Additionally, the way that Jonathan phrases this information shows his humility. Rather than taking credit for mostly keeping his family safe, he implies that each family member’s survival was a blessing bestowed on him from

God. Understanding their survival in this way perhaps helps Jonathan to move past the death of his son, as he's focusing more on what blessings he has been given than on what he has lost, which he implies was not in his control. But the mention of the bicycle brings attention to Jonathan's own role in their survival; as is soon discussed, it was Jonathan's ingenuity that allowed him to keep the bicycle, and it is his own shrewdness that allows him to make money from it. Yet it's clear that Jonathan does not credit his own intelligence and ability for his family's relative good fortune; he credits God.

It wasn't his disreputable rags, nor the toes peeping out of one blue and one brown canvas shoes, nor yet the two stars of his rank done obviously in a hurry in biro, that troubled Jonathan; many good and heroic soldiers looked the same or worse. It was rather a certain lack of grip and firmness in his manner.

Related Characters: Jonathan Iwegbu

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 82-83

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jonathan explains how he was able to save his bicycle from a soldier who claimed to want it for military purposes but actually seemed corrupt. This is one of the few scenes of the war presented in the short story, so it gives readers a small sense of what wartime was like.


One significant element of the passage is its emphasis on the poverty of the war; the soldier is wearing dilapidated clothing, and Jonathan claims that this is fairly common for soldiers at this time. That Jonathan doesn't see this dress as an indication of moral failing tells readers about his relationship to wealth. While money is clearly important for survival, money itself does not indicate moral standing and is less important than a person's character.

In fact, it's Jonathan's focus on character that allows him to take charge of this situation; he sees the soldier as lacking "grip or firmness in his manner," which alerts him to the possibility that the man is corrupt. This shows Jonathan's ability to easily size up a situation and determine the best course of action for dealing with it—even in a situation where he's ostensibly dealing with an authority figure.

That night he buried it in the little clearing in the bush where the dead of the camp, including his own youngest son, were buried. When he dug it up again a year later after the surrender all it needed was a little palm-oil greasing. "Nothing puzzles God," he said in wonder.

Related Characters: Jonathan Iwegbu (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

This passage reveals how Jonathan's bicycle survived from the war into the present: Jonathan buried it to hide it from theft, and then he dug it up and oiled it and it was good as new. As usual, though, Jonathan gives the credit for this blessing not to his own ingenuity, but to God, whom "nothing puzzles."

The phrase "Nothing puzzles God" is crucial, as Jonathan repeats it whenever he's confronted with something that seems miraculous to him (even if it might seem ordinary to the reader). Jonathan never explains what he means by this phrase, but it seems to be his favorite way to express and affirm his unshakeable faith. It's possible to interpret it as an expression of awe at God's power, since there's no problem too great for God to solve. It can also be interpreted as an expression of God's wisdom, since he always provides for Jonathan the very thing that he most needs. Finally, this statement also reveals Jonathan's humility, since it seems to imply that while Jonathan himself might find various problems and circumstances in his life puzzling, he's confident that nothing puzzles God.

This passage is also significant because it is the last time that Jonathan's dead son is explicitly mentioned, which is once again in an aside. The succinctness with which this death is addressed is an indication of Jonathan's desire to focus on the positives of his life rather than the negatives. This optimism is so overwhelming that it leads him to focus more on the bicycle buried in the ground than on his son's body which is buried nearby. Still, the passage indicates the extent to which the war haunts the present, as Jonathan must return to the site of his son's grave to retrieve the bicycle, which he needs in order to make money and continue on with his life.

☛ This newest miracle was his little house in Ogui Oversight. Indeed nothing puzzles God! Only two houses away a huge concrete edifice some wealthy contractor had put up just before the war was a mountain of rubble. And here was Jonathan's little zinc house of no regrets built with mud blocks quite intact!

Related Characters: Jonathan Iwegbu

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis



When Jonathan returns to his hometown of Enugu, he sees the destruction that has taken place over the course of the war. But rather than being devastated by the damage, his immediate reaction is excitement and awe at the survival of his family's home. Jonathan's faith keeps him focused on the positive, and in his intact house he sees hope for the future.


The description of Jonathan's house as "a little zinc house of no regrets" is interesting, as it identifies Jonathan's home as being a lot like Jonathan himself. Jonathan is a perpetual optimist who is never shown to have regrets or negative thoughts about the past, and his house—which is a humble survivor, just like Jonathan—is also described as having "no regrets."

The destruction of the large nearby building reminds readers of the danger of amassing wealth. Jonathan's house survived because of its relative humility, but the ostentatious appearance of the other house made it a target, which ensured its destruction. The survival of Jonathan's house, then, suggests that Jonathan's values are the right ones—focusing on being industrious and humble is what will keep his family alive, not amassing wealth.

☛ His children picked mangoes near the military cemetery and sold them to soldiers' wives for a few pennies— real pennies this time— and his wife started making breakfast akara balls for neighbours in a hurry to start life again. With his family earnings he took his bicycle to the villages around and bought fresh palmwine which he mixed generously in his rooms with the water which had recently started running again in the public tap down the road, and opened up a bar for soldiers and other lucky people with good money.

Related Characters: Jonathan Iwegbu, Maria Iwegbu

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis


Shortly after Jonathan's family moves back to Enugu, they begin figuring out new ways to make money and thereby rebuild their lives and prepare for the future. In addition to Jonathan's family's eagerness to get back to normal life, this passage notes that his neighbors are also "in a hurry to start life again." This gives a general sense that the country is beginning to move past the horrors of the war—a process that, for the Iwegbu family, is primarily economic.

Interestingly, though, these movements toward life in peacetime are shown to be haunted by remnants of the war. The children pick mangoes near the military cemetery, for instance. These mangoes are representative of a new life and a new future for the family, yet they are inescapably tied to the casualties of the war. At the same time, Jonathan's new money-making venture is a bar for soldiers; his income is linked to the very people who were involved in the violence of the war.

☛ But nothing puzzles God. Came the day of the windfall when after five days of endless scuffles in queues and counter-queues in the sun outside the Treasury he had twenty pounds counted into his palms as ex-gratia award for the rebel money he had turned in. It was like Christmas for him and for many others like him when the payments began. They called it (since few could manage its proper official name) *egg-rasher*.

Related Characters: Jonathan Iwegbu

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 84-85

Explanation and Analysis

Just after giving up on returning to his old job at the mine, Jonathan spends five days arduously trying to exchange Biafran currency at the Treasury, in exchange for which he is given an ex-gratia award (a substantial cash payment), which everyone calls an "egg-rasher." The repetition of Jonathan's favorite proverb suggests that the egg-rasher's sudden appearance is a gift from God, perhaps to make up for the shutdown of the mine. It's notable that Jonathan

seems so convinced of God's authority and power, even as all the traditional authorities in Nigerian society have broken down, as shown by the five days of chaos that Jonathan had to endure to get a simple payment from the Treasury. This is another example of Jonathan's relentless optimism and faith; the chaos of the world around him cannot shake his sense that God is in charge and will always provide for him when it's needed.

The egg-rasher is yet another remnant of the war that continues to influence the peace, as it's an incentive for people to turn in Biafran currency (Biafra being the failed successionist state that was defeated in the war).


Encouraging people to hand over the rebel currency both consolidates the Nigerian government's power by deeming the Biafran government illegitimate, and it rewards citizens monetarily for demonstrating their loyalty (agreeing to use official Nigerian money rather than their Biafran cash). Jonathan himself seems to have no qualms about turning in the Biafran money (just as he had no qualms about earning Biafran money earlier in the story), which shows that his loyalty is not to governments or causes, but instead to his family, whom this money will help. The story gives the overwhelming sense that this is wise, as governments seem corrupt and ineffective, so Jonathan can only count on his own hard work and ingenuity to survive.

One final thing to note is the story's replacement of the Latin word "ex-gratia" with the colloquial "egg-rasher." During the civil war, Chinua Achebe accused the Nigerian government of simply being an extension of the British colonial power. Therefore, replacing the official English term of "ex-gratia" with "egg-rasher" could demonstrate a subtle, casual rejection of British cultural influence. It is one way in which Jonathan and the other former Biafrans can make the Nigerian government's payment their own, as opposed to uncritically relying on the handout of the egg-rasher.

☞ He had to be extra careful because he had seen a man a couple of days earlier collapse into near-madness in an instant before that oceanic crowd because no sooner had he got his twenty pounds than some heartless ruffian picked it off him.

Related Characters: Jonathan Iwegbu

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

When Jonathan receives his egg-rasher, he's very careful as he walks home because of something he saw a few days prior: a man collapsed into insanity because a thief stole his egg-rasher just after he received it. This passage again reminds readers of the potential danger that comes with money—despite the war being over, Nigerian society is still resource-starved and violent, which means that anyone with money is a target.

The danger that Jonathan now faces while carrying money recalls an event during the war in which a soldier attempted to rob him when he was walking with his bicycle, so this passage subtly suggests that peacetime isn't actually all that different from wartime, as many of the horrors of war still persist.

☞ "My frien," said he at long last, "we don try our best for call dem but I tink say dem all done sleep-o . . . So we tin we go do now? Sometaim you wan call soja? Or you wan make we call dem for you? Soja better pass police. No be so?"

Related Characters: The Thieves (speaker), The Thieves, Jonathan Iwegbu, Maria Iwegbu

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place during the thieves' robbery of Jonathan's home, just after Maria and Jonathan have attempted to call out for help. The thieves also called out to demonstrate to the Iwegbu family that there was nobody coming to help them. The leader of the thieves speaks confidently about this, which suggests that he knows for certain that there is nobody coming to help them, either because of an arrangement they have made with the authorities, or because the thieves have enough power that they can even threaten the police. In asking about the soldiers, the dialogue references the corruption of the soldier who attempted to rob Jonathan during the war. Despite running a bar for soldiers, Jonathan doesn't want to call them; distrust still lingers.

The thief speaks in a pidgin dialect, which contrasts with Jonathan's relatively formal way of speaking English. This could suggest that the thief is of a lower social class than

Jonathan's family, but it could also indicate that the thieves are not Igbo like Jonathan and his family, as Igbos in Nigeria were generally more educated in the English language than other ethnic groups in the area. Therefore, the thieves can be seen as evidence of lingering ethnic tension in the country, another danger that the end of the war has failed to resolve.

“Awrighto. Now make we talk business. We no be bad tief. We no like for make trouble. Trouble done finish. War done finish and all the katakata wey de for inside. No Civil War again. This time na Civil Peace. No be so?”

“Na so!” answered the horrible chorus.

Related Characters: The Thieves (speaker), The Thieves, Jonathan Iwegbu

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

During the robbery of Jonathan's home, as the thieves begin to make their demands, they characterize themselves as not being “bad,” because they don't want to “make trouble” now that the war has ended. This is, of course, ironic, considering that they're currently threatening Jonathan and robbing his house.

The use of the phrase “Civil Peace” references the title of the short story, and it is obviously significant. In referencing the end of the war and declaring it a time of peace, they ironically suggest that the dangers of the war are over, even as they threaten and harass Jonathan's family. The word “civil” changes meaning in this phrase: as opposed to denoting a conflict within a country (as it does in the term “civil war”), the “civil” in “civil peace” suggests that civility, or manners, will now prevail in the country. Their characterization of themselves as good thieves goes along with this definition: their new form of coercion and crime possesses an air of civility, as they suggest that they can be reasoned with.


But the phrase “civil peace” also shows how little has changed with the end of the war. The thieves have merely swapped out the word “war” for “peace,” which gives the phrase an implicit connotation: they're living through a time that isn't pure peace but isn't civil war—it's something of a hybrid of the two, a “civil peace.” In this way, the phrase accounts for the violence and dysfunction that still pervade

the country: Jonathan is still being robbed, the authorities are still corrupt, and he must still rely on his own bravery and intellect to survive a society in which citizens are fighting one another.

“I count it as nothing,” he told his sympathizers, his eyes on the rope he was tying. “What is *egg-rasher*? Did I depend on it last week? Or is it greater than other things that went with the war? I say, let *egg-rasher* perish in the flames! Let it go where everything else has gone. Nothing puzzles God.”

Related Characters: Jonathan Iwegbu (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

This is the very last passage of the story, as Jonathan responds to his neighbors who are surprised to see that he is not mourning the loss of the egg-rasher. Instead, Jonathan presents his trademark outlook on life, refusing to dwell on the past, and instead figuring out a way to move forward. He tells the crowd that he counts the egg-rasher “as nothing,” presumably because he sees it as a handout that he had no actual need for. He also tends to view money in this way, as something transient. While he works hard to make what amount he needs to survive, he never relies on it being around forever, particularly if giving it up means his survival. This is something he's learned from his experience in the war, which he once again finds that he can never get much distance from.

Notably, his reaction is totally unlike that of the man who had his egg-rasher stolen out of his pocket; while that man was completely devastated by the loss, Jonathan's immediate reaction is one of optimism and hope, supported by his faith in God's will.

The repetition of the idiom “Nothing puzzles God” concludes the story. It has been used in a variety of ways throughout the story, but here it offers a simple and reassuring conclusion. Jonathan has no way to make sense of the repeated horrors that have been inflicted on him and his family, but he has no need for one: it is in God's hands, and Jonathan must simply continue to choose to move forward. God provides a way to make sense of the unexplainable events that Jonathan and the rest of Nigeria have survived.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CIVIL PEACE

Jonathan Iwegbu believes that he was unbelievably lucky to have survived the recent Nigerian Civil war, along with his wife and three of his four children. He's also happy that he still has his **bicycle**, although that's not as important, of course, as his own or his family's lives.

During the war, a soldier had tried to take Jonathan's **bicycle** from him, claiming it was needed for military use. Jonathan would have been willing to give up the bike, despite its value to him, but he was suspicious of the soldier who was trying to take it. He wasn't suspicious because of the soldier's shabby dress—lots of honorable soldiers were dressed like that—but rather because of his manner. To keep his bicycle, Jonathan bribed the soldier with some money that he had been planning on buying supplies with. That night, he buried the bicycle to hide it, right next to the graveyard where his youngest son and other dead had been buried.

After the war ends, Jonathan digs up the **bike** and is surprised and delighted to find that, with a bit of oil, it is still in working condition. He states that "Nothing puzzles God," and he begins using his bicycle as a taxi in the camp where he and his family live. People in the camp with money are eager to spend it on his service. He is able to earn some Biafran money this way: one hundred and fifteen pounds.

Immediately, the story alerts readers to the setting: Nigeria after the civil war, which took place during the late 1960s. Jonathan's enthusiasm almost masks the implicit horror of this passage, but when he expresses his gratitude that he, his wife, and three out of four of his children survived, he's implying a horrific loss: one of his children died in the war. This begins to show how devastating the war was for Nigerians. This passage also makes clear Jonathan's priorities: survival and family will always come before material possessions like the bicycle.



This section reiterates Jonathan's priorities: material belongings don't mean much to him, as shown by his willingness to give up his bicycle had the soldier wanted it for honorable purposes. This moment also demonstrates the value of money in this society: because Jonathan has some to spare, while the soldier does not, he is able to keep his bike. Jonathan's observant nature is also demonstrated in this section, as he can evaluate the soldier's corruption and find a way to resolve the situation favorably.



In this passage, Jonathan uses a phrase that is deeply important to him: Nothing puzzles God. This is both an affirmation of God's power and wisdom, and an expression of gratitude to God for keeping the bicycle safe during the war. Although it was Jonathan's idea to keep the bicycle safe by burying it, he believes that God is responsible for its survival, which shows Jonathan's humility—he's reluctant to take credit for his own actions. Jonathan's ingenuity and talent for making money is also demonstrated through his immediate use of the bicycle, but the fact that simply having a bicycle is so lucrative for him also shows the extreme lack of resources in the now peaceful country.



Jonathan travels to the town of Enugu, where his home was before the war, and he is amazed to find that his house is still intact. He decides this is a miracle, and he can barely believe it, although it is not as significant as the miracle of his family's survival. He again states that "Nothing puzzles God." Nearby, a wealthy neighbor's giant concrete house had been demolished during the war. There is some damage to Jonathan's small zinc house, but Jonathan isn't concerned about it. He hires a carpenter and uses some materials he scavenges from around the neighborhood to repair the door and windows. He's able to pay the carpenter with his Biafran money (though the Biafran pounds are worth just a few Nigerian shillings).

Jonathan and his family move into the house happily. His children begin picking fruit from a nearby military cemetery for money, and his wife starts making breakfast that she sells to their neighbors. Jonathan **bikes** to nearby villages and buys palm wine using the money his family earns. He then waters down the wine and uses it to start a bar for soldiers and other people who can afford it.

Jonathan used to work as a coal miner and he goes every day to the Coal Corporation offices to find out if he can start working as a miner again. As the company continues to provide no information, he starts going less often and finds out that many other ex-miners have become homeless and sleep outside the offices at night while waiting for news. Eventually, Jonathan gives up on trying to get a job there again and instead focuses on running his bar.

One day, Jonathan is paid twenty Nigerian pounds in *ex-gratia*—or "**egg-rasher**," as most people call it—for turning in Biafran money to the Nigerian Treasury. He must wait in line for five days full of scuffles and confusion to receive his new money. But receiving the money is like Christmas for him and others.

While some people might return to their hometown, see the widespread damage, and feel despair, Jonathan reacts with optimism—he's grateful that his home, while damaged, still stands, and he's grateful to be able to scavenge materials to fix it and to be able to pay the carpenter. Jonathan seems unfazed by the tragedy of war, focusing instead on the miracle of everything he still has. Enugu was the capital of the short-lived Biafran state, which has just been defeated, so the damage is not surprising in the aftermath of the war. The destruction of the large house nearby makes clear the connection between wealth and risk; it seems that Jonathan's house was spared because of its relative humility, whereas the more ostentatious house was a target because of its obvious wealth.



Jonathan's talent for finding ways to make money is once again on display, and it seems to be shared by the rest of his family. The entire family's dedication to earning money shows its importance for their collective survival. The war is also a continued presence even in the current state of peace, as the children spend time near the military cemetery, and Jonathan runs a bar for soldiers.



Jonathan attempts to return to a pre-war institution, only to find that is no longer able to help him, showing the damage the war has inflicted on society. He must rely on his own ability to survive. The other ex-miners present a contrast to Jonathan. They lost their homes, while Jonathan miraculously kept his, and they find themselves unable to find other means of income the way that he has managed to. This shows how Jonathan's ingenuity, resilience, and optimism are helping him survive.



The Nigerian government is encouraging people to turn in Biafran currency, since it's the currency of the failed successionist state that ceased to exist once the war ended, so it's no longer a relevant currency. Notably, Jonathan faces no internal conflict over whether to turn in his Biafran money, suggesting that he has little political allegiance to the Biafran cause. For him, his family's survival must come first, and receiving the egg-rasher is a means to that survival. This passage also demonstrates the continued breakdown of structures of authority through the confusion and delay in receiving the money.



As soon as he gets the **money**, Jonathan is extremely cautious about protecting it, burying it inside his pants pocket while still holding it in his fist. Jonathan does this because, not long before, a different man had gotten his egg-rasher, immediately had it stolen, and then had an emotional breakdown in the crowd outside the Treasury. Few people were sympathetic to this man, though, as they felt that he had been careless—one of his pockets had a gaping hole in it, though he claimed he had kept the money in his other pocket. Regardless, Jonathan is extra careful, and he moves the money into his left hand and pocket so that he can shake hands if necessary with anyone that he meets on his way home without exposing the bills. At the same time, he avoids making eye contact with anyone so that he doesn't risk needing to interact with them.

That night, Jonathan listens to the sounds of his neighborhood go quiet as he struggles to fall asleep. He notices that the night watchman has gone silent. After he falls asleep, he is suddenly awakened by someone knocking on the front door. His wife and children also wake up and are terrified. Jonathan asks who is knocking, and a person responds that he is one of a group of thieves and he demands that Jonathan open the door.

Jonathan's wife begins to call out for help, and Jonathan and the children join her. They shout for the police and their neighbors, saying that there are thieves and they are in trouble. They say, "We are lost! We are dead!" Eventually, the family stops crying for help, and they wonder if the thieves have been scared away, since it's silent outside. But moments later the thief and his gang begin to mock Jonathan and his family by imitating their calls for help—and it becomes clear that no help is coming. There are at least five people besides the leader in the group. Jonathan and his family are terrified, and his wife and children start crying. When the thieves stop mockingly calling for help, there is again complete silence.

The danger that surrounds money comes to the forefront in this section. In the peace following the civil war, twenty pounds is extremely valuable, and although Jonathan has worked hard for the Biafran money that he exchanged for the egg-rasher, it puts him at risk to carry it. The story of the man who was robbed provides a lesson for Jonathan on this risk. It's especially telling that this man is blamed for his misfortune: other Nigerians believe that one must always be prepared for a crime, and failing to head off a theft signals irresponsibility or naivety. This sense of individualism is further expressed by Jonathan's social avoidance; he must isolate himself from others in order to get home safely.



Jonathan's anxiety over receiving the money is still apparent as he struggles to fall asleep that night; it seems that Jonathan understands the extent to which having money makes him and his family a target, so while the egg-rasher was a blessing, it is also something of a curse. When he is awakened by the thieves, his fears take physical form: someone has come to hurt his family. This is also the first instance of physical violence in the story, and it's significant that it comes not during the war, but some time after its end. The peace, readers can see, is not necessarily safer than the war.



The family's cries for help are unanswered, which shows the breakdown of authority and community after the war. Not only do the police not help them, but the neighbors don't either—it seems like peacetime means every man for himself. In fact, the thieves are so confident that this is the order of things that they mockingly call for help as well, driving home the extent to which the authorities have abandoned them. The fear in this section is at odds with what one might expect from a time of peace, which helps illuminate the oxymoron of the story's title: while technically this is peacetime, it seems more like a time in between peace and civil war where the danger and violence have not yet ended.



Jonathan begs the leader of the thieves to tell him what they want. The thief says that they tried to call the neighbors and the police to help, but everyone must still be asleep. He mockingly suggests that Jonathan could also call the soldiers for help. Jonathan feels increasingly anxious about the situation and can't bring himself to speak until the leader of the thieves asks again if he wants to call the soldiers. Jonathan says he doesn't want to.

The thieves have total control over the situation, suggesting that they have some kind of arrangement with the police and the military—either they're working with the corrupt authorities or those authorities are deliberately turning a blind eye. Jonathan saying that he doesn't want to call the soldiers demonstrates his distrust for the authorities in this situation; he has no belief that they can save him. Jonathan's terror is also a new development; for once, he seems unable to figure out what to do, as his faith and optimism seem to be failing.



The leader of the thieves says it is time to talk business, and that they aren't bad thieves who want to cause trouble. He claims that the trouble is actually over now that the Civil War has ended, and that now they are in a "Civil Peace." Jonathan explains that he doesn't have much money after the war and adds that there are other people with more money. The thief says he understands, but that they have no money at all. He demands that Jonathan give him one hundred pounds, and someone fires shots into the air as a threat.

*The use of the story's title here indicates the significance of the thief's statement. Labelling this period of time a "Civil Peace" presents an uncomfortable irony to Jonathan and readers, as the thief implies that the end of the war has been an end to danger, all while he personally threatens Jonathan and his family. This section also shows that Jonathan is now in the position of his wealthy neighbor, or the man who was robbed of his **egg-rasher**: his relative wealth has made him a target.*



Jonathan again tells the thieves that he doesn't have that much money—they can come inside and check if they want. He says his only money is the **egg-rasher**, which the main thief accepts, although some in the gang believe Jonathan is lying. The leader quiets them, and Jonathan goes to get the money from where he had kept it and gives it to them.

Jonathan bounces back from his paralysis earlier, thinking on his feet once again as he has throughout the story. His decision to give up the egg-rasher reminds readers of the priorities he laid out at the beginning of the story: despite having waited in a dangerous line for five days to get this money, his material possessions are inconsequential in comparison to the continued safety of himself and his family.



The next day, Jonathan's neighbors prepare to mourn the loss of the **money** with him, but he is already back to work. He prepares to use his **bicycle** to get more palm wine, his wife is making akara balls, and his son is working as well. Jonathan tells his neighbors that he doesn't care about losing the egg-rasher, because he never depended on it, and it was no more than what he had lost in the war. He concludes by saying that "Nothing puzzles God."

Once again, Jonathan's faith and optimism allow him to bounce back from what his neighbors expected to be a devastating loss. This is a sharp contrast from the earlier story of the man who had his egg-rasher stolen and had a breakdown as a result. Jonathan sees the egg-rasher as a gift from authority, one that he does not need to rely on. His familiarity with loss due to the war also stabilizes him after this event, since it allows him to put this minor loss in perspective. He knows that he can rely on his faith and his own work ethic and intellect to survive.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Heyrman, Alex. "Civil Peace." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 16 Aug 2021. Web. 16 Aug 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Heyrman, Alex. "Civil Peace." LitCharts LLC, August 16, 2021. Retrieved August 16, 2021. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/civil-peace>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Civil Peace* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Achebe, Chinua. *Civil Peace*. Anchor Books. 1991.

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Achebe, Chinua. *Civil Peace*. New York: Anchor Books. 1991.