

Taking control of fate in chinua achebe's civil peace



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Chinua Achebe's "Civil Peace" takes place in post-war Nigeria. The story's protagonist, Jonathan Iwegbu, considers himself to be a very lucky man as most of his family is alive and he still has the few material possessions he had possessed before the war. He is able to make some money putting his bicycle to use as a taxi and then opens up a bar for soldiers and "other lucky people with good money." Jonathan's good fortune seems to continue until one night a band of thieves knocks on his door. As a result of living through the war, Jonathan realizes the steps he must take to survive. He discovers that he can not trust anyone, that there is no one to protect the innocent, and that he must take his fate into his own hands. During times of war, in any country, a person must be very careful with who they place their trust in. Jonathan learns this lesson many times, but one experience in particular illustrates it very well. One day during the war, an officer came to Jonathan and told him his bicycle was being commandeered for military action. Iwegbu, being a patriot, would certainly have let his bike go even though its loss would be greatly felt. However, the officer's "lack of grip and firmness in his manner" gives Jonathan doubts about his authenticity. So Jonathan, thinking the officer to be a thief, is able to pay him off and keep his bicycle. If it weren't for Jonathan realizing the man's lie, he would have been unable to make the money he did after the war and his loss of twenty pounds to the thieves would have been much more serious. The post-war situation in Nigeria, which the thieves refer to as "Civil Peace" is really a time of civil corruption. The government has no real structure and all of the services people expect from their government (protection by police, soldiers, etc.) are essentially non-existent. Jonathan witnesses the chaos that is caused by a lack of security force firsthand. While waiting in line for five days outside the <https://assignbuster.com/taking-control-of-fate-in-chinua-achebes-civil-peace/>

Treasury for his ex-gratia award, he witnesses a man who just received his twenty pounds collapse in front of the huge crowd of people because a ruffian picks the award of twenty pounds he had just received off of him . It was not enough that neither the police nor anyone else did anything to help the man, but “ many in the queues that day were able to remark quietly on the victim’s carelessness.” These people blamed the man for what happened, implying that what the thief did was expected and that the man deserved what happened to him. As Jonathan bears witness to all of this, he realizes he lives in a land of lawlessness and there is no one out there to protect his family but himself. Through it all, Jonathan learns that his fate and the fate of his family are in his hands. Although it appears through Jonathan’s unending optimism that his family’s good fortune comes about solely because of luck, much of it was really due to their hard work. With no outside help, Jonathan is able to provide for his family and survive while most, including the majority of his coworkers at the Coal Corporation, are unable to provide for themselves. When the thieves arrive at his house, Jonathan knows no one is going to come help him, though he does call for help just in case. Knowing there is no one to help him, and also that if he wants to be able to provide for his family he can not give all of his money away, emboldens him to lie to the thieves by saying “ if you come inside and find one hundred pounds, take it and shoot me and shoot my wife and children. I swear to God. The only money I have in this life is this twenty-pounds egg-rasher they gave me today.” He is also hoping that the thieves, likely as desperate for any money as everyone else is, will take whatever they can easily get. In this land of unrest where it is every man for himself, Jonathan uses his understanding of the post-war situation to not only survive

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the thieves, but keep enough money to continue providing for himself and his family. Experiencing war can have profound effects on a person, and this statement certainly rests true with Jonathan. Not only does it cause him to be very thankful for everything he is seemingly blessed with, but it also changes him fundamentally as a person. His outlook on life is summarized by his favorite phrase “ nothing puzzles God” . Essentially, he understands that he must take the good with the bad, and that it is all part of a greater plan which he cannot comprehend. This idea of fate is recurrent throughout Achebe's works. In his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the idea is present through the concept of chi—an individual's personal god that is responsible for that person's good fortune. The protagonist of the novel credits his chi when times are good and when misfortune finds him, he asks why he is so ill-fated. This is very similar to the way that Jonathan believes that fate is responsible for everything, whether it was a result of his actions or not. In both instances, Achebe is able to depict the prevalence of the belief in fate throughout Africa and how much influence that belief has on people's