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IBADAN



Mapo Hall, Ibadan

A Story Of The '60s

This same story has been told before and retold, we may say, several times over. Nigeria in the 1960s has been the theme of previous books, some very prominent in the modern Nigerian literary corpus. Among these are Chinua Achebe's very important books, *A Man of the People* and *No Longer at Ease*. They are excellent picturesque recounts of what early post-independence Nigeria looked like, with Nigerian First Republic politics and their heroes caricatured in fiction but with very strong memorable resemblances with their real-life originals.

Even Soyinka has given us slices of his impressions of that phase of life of modern Nigeria before in his prison notes, *The Man Died* and his first novel *The Interpreters*. It is so visible to the reader what struggles Soyinka goes through in not outrightly repeating himself in this latest memoir *Ibadan*:

The Penkelemites Years. Soyinka's extra-literary and political activities in the 1960s, his non-official involvement with Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi's government during the Northern Nigeria anti-Igbo pogrom (which Soyinka tells with greater liberty in the fictional version of *The Man Died* titled *Season of Anomy*) the messy conducts or misconducts of those who held power and how rather than evaporate have given countless and even more vicious incestuous births. He says it more clearly here how the wreckage now referred to as Nigerian universities began their initial slow gravitations towards extinction, thanks to the less than responsible utilisation of instruments of state power, at times from venerated and by all means unexpected quarters.

So, what then - more than any other perhaps - does this book tell us that we have not already known? And especially to warrant these special features on the book?

The most important (or most interesting) aspect of this book is its first-ever admission by the dramatist that it was he - and no one else - who broke into the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBC) studios in Ibadan gun-in-hand during the Western Premier, Chief Ladoke Akintola's tenure and switched the Premier's priorly recorded statewide broadcast tape for another (subversive) tape, which Soyinka now admits he singlehandedly recorded with an American expatriate friend's reel-to-reel, borrowed and utilised in Tedder Hall, University of Ibadan.

The prime accomplice was Jimi Solanke, an acting apprentice with Soyinka's private drama group, the Orisun Theatre. Soyinka also tries to justify his actions. But more than anything else, it is this mere admission and the telling of this thriller story that we find especially interesting about this third book in the line of Soyinka's memoirs. **GR**