KEN SARO-WIWA is beloved within Nigeria for his popular television series *Basi and Company*, and admired worldwide for the environmental activism that eventually cost him his life. He was born in 1941 in Bori, Rivers State. After graduating from the University of Ibadan, he worked as a teacher, education commissioner, entrepreneur, television producer, playwright, and novelist. In 1990 Sara-Wiwa founded the Movement for the Survival of the Ogani People (MOSOP) to protest the environmental degradation visited upon his region by Shell and other large oil companies. He was executed, along with eight other MOSOP leaders, in 1996. Sara-Wiwa’s novel *Sozaboy* is both a massively successful linguistic experiment (and source of this collection’s title) and also an important account of the 1967-70 Nigerian Civil War. This chapter comes at a point when Saro-Wiwa’s narrator Mene has been mulling over the advice of his new girlfriend Agnes, his neighbor Zaza, and “the tall man... at the Upwine Bar”, all of whom had pressured him to enlist in the war. For Mene, their advice prompts an intensely symbolic dream that connects bureaucratic Standard English (or “big big grammar”) with the violence he will soon experience firsthand.

So one afternoon as we were playing football one policeman came and told us that we must go to the church now now. Church from football? With sweat in our bodies? This policeman must be stupid. What is his trouble, anyway? Can policeman confuse himself like this? If it is *kotuma*, somebody will understand. Because after all, *kotuma* is just man with small education, no plenty job, just chopping small small bribe from woman and man in Dukana. But police is big man going on transfer from Lagos to Kana and so an. And he can be promoted too to sarzent, then inspector and so an. So it is not good that he should confuse himself. So, nevertheless, since he say we must go to church, we all begin to go there. Everybody. Are we going to pray in the church, and today is not Sunday? Will this policeman force us to begin to pray? Ha!

As we entered the church now, not only those who were playing football were inside that church. Everybody in Dukana. Plus Chief Birabee, smiling that idiot foolish smile which he will be smiling whenever he sees soza or police or power. Trouble don come again, ah. Even people who do not go to church are entering this church today. I beg, God, make you no vex far these people, and this nonsense police who is causing all this trouble. So we waited inside the church. People were talking, talking. Because in this Dukana people will always talk. After some time, Chief Birabee with idiot smile looking at policeman begin to shout "Keep quiet all of you, oh! Keep quiet all of you, oh!" Then after some time he will shout again, "Keep quiet all of you, oh. Hei! Why can’t you people close your mouth?" The people will keep quiet for small time then after some time they will begin to hala again.

As you see these Dukana people, they are not talking anything good oh. I can see they are all fearing, because once they see police or soza or even *kotuma*, they must begin to fear. Useless people. And when they are fearing like that, they cannot say what is inside their mind. Just smiling idiot foolish smile like
that Chief Birabee smile. Myself too, I was not happy as they have called us to church and leaving us there just like that. So after some time one motor begin to come. At first I think that it is my master's motor. But not so. It is small car. And the person who is inside it come down quickly. He is wearing better cloth, so you can see at once that he is a very important person. As he walked into the church, the police shouted "All stand". Everybody stood up. The man in fine shirt walked to where Chief Birabee was sitting and shook hand with him. Chief Birabee was smiling that his foolish idiot smile, super. Prouding. Because the man with fine shirt is shaking hand with him in front of the Dukana people.

The man with fine shirt sat down and we all sat down too. Plenty of talking.

"Silence!" shouted the police. "Silence, I say!"

The people cannot understand him. They were laughing because of how he was shouting. Myself too, I was laughing. Then the police came to where I was sitting and used his stick on my head. Everybody kept quiet. I stopped laughing by force. That is how my own things are. Every time trouble. Always. So I kept quiet with several people shouting little shouts inside my head from the policeman's stick's blow. I said to myself, 'trouble don begin'.


My heart begin to cut. Plenty. Join army? For what? So I am now a soza. No. No. I cannot be soza. Soza for what? Ehn? I begin to shout. No. No. The man with fine shirt was looking at me. The policeman was coming to me: Is he coming to take me to be soza? The policeman was coming. My heart was cutting, beating like drum. Tam tum. Tam tum tum. Then I see that it is not just one policeman but many sozas. Plenty of them with gun pointing at me. My heart was beating. Tam tum, tam tum tum. I don't want to be soza. So as I see them coming with their gun, I jumped out of that church and started to run. Then I heard Chief Birabee and the others shouting "Hold am! hold am!" They were shouting from every side. Then the sozas started running after me. Pursuing me. I ran and ran like a dog. Still the sozas pursued me, pointing their gun.

Oh my father wey don die, help me today. Put power inside my body. Make I no tire. I can hear the
sozas saying "You are now a soza. You will fight the enemy". Na lie. Na lie. I ran towards the river. The sozas and the police were still following me. Then when I got to the river, I just jumped inside it and begin to swim. All those sozas cannot catch me. They cannot swim like myself. They are afraid of the river.

Then when I reached the other side of the river, I stopped. I went out of the water. My khaki was wet. I sat down on the white sand. No sooner than one thousand sozas appeared behind me, all their guns pointing at my back. God in Heaven. What kain trouble be dis? Immediately I jumped into the river again and begin to swim to the other side. My heart begin to beat drum more than before. *Tam tum tum. Tam tum tum. Tam tum tum.* I was swimming. I am afraid of the sozas. I do not want to join the sozas. Now the sozas do not follow me, they begin to shoot their guns: *Tako, tako. Tako-tako-tako.* Oh, Jesus. You know, I am young boy. I have never do anybody any bad thing since they born me. You know I love my neighbour as myself. Even I am good Samaritan several times. I have not called another man's wife. I have not tief another person money. I do not go juju house. Forgive me my tresspasses. *Tako, tako, tako.* My heart was beating, *tam tum tum. Tam tum tum.* I have not tief another person money. *Toko, tako, tako.* Oh my mother, pray for me, make these sozas no kill me. Let them kill snake, leopard and tiger. All those bad animals who live inside bush. But make them no kill me.

I was swimming all this time, oh. Then I reach the other bank again and I could not get into the bush. The bush catch my leg and wound me for body. My body all full of wound. Blood. The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh God, help me, I beg you in the name of Jesus. I will do everything you want. I will be good boy from now till kingdom come. The sozas were still following me. Shooting. And I was running like dog.

I run until I get back to the church in Dukana. Now nobody in the church at all. Ali those people who were there are not there again. Now I look through the window of the church and I see all the sozas, very many of them moving like forest towards the church. They were not shooting again. They were singing very loud:

*My father don't you worry*
*My mother don't you worry*
*If I happen to die in the battle field*
*Never mind we shall meet again.*

Fear catch me well well as the sozas are moving towards the church. So I ran. From the church. I ran to my mama's house where I used to stay. But when I got there, my mama's house is notstanding again. Ah-ah. Where is my mama house? Where have it disappeared to? What have happened to it? And where is my mama?
Then the sozamen began to sing another song:

*Why do you delay*
*Come and save the nation*
*Why do you delay*
*Come and save the nation*
*Oh why do you delay*
*Come and save the nation*
*There is danger*
*Why do you delay?*

So now when I hear there is danger my mind come go to Agnes. I am thinking what has happened to her. So I come run to her house. And when I get there I see that her house is not there too. And she is not here either. So what have happened to Agnes and her mama? Oh Cod, what is happening?

Then the sozas began to sing another song:

*We are sozas marching for our nation*
*In the name of Jesus we shall conquer*

The sozas were moving nearer now. And then they begin to shoot. *Tako, tako, tako*. And still I cannot see Agnes. And I do not see my mama too. And my mama house and Agnes mama house are not there. And all the Dukana people have disappeared. Not even one person in the town. Fear cut my heart. The sozas were moving nearer and their bullet begin to fall near me. Plenty bullets. I begin to shout "Mama, mama, mama!" I was shouting like that when I opened my eyes.

Ah, so it is all dream. Very bad dream. Already, day don begin to break. My mama come to ask me why I am calling her. I told her that I was dreaming. I told my mama how I dream of many many sozas singing song and shooting gun and pursuing me. And I ran away from them and fell into the river and how they continued to pursue me. And how I return to Dukana and I cannot find her or her house. And all the people of Dukana are no longer there.

My mama told me that she too have been dreaming how aeroplane came to Dukana and dropped big big mortars on top of the church and how everybody was afraid and running about and hiding and calling God to help them. And she ran with them but I was not near her and she started looking for me but she could not find me.
Well, well, well, this dream and my own are almost identical. What can it mean? I tell you, I was very confused that morning. And that day I was turning the dreams for my mind. And I remembered too what the tall man said at the Upwine Bar. What Agnes said. What Zaza said. What the thick man said about salt and no salt inside the salt of our body. I fear.

And now everyday they were talking more and more about the war. The radio was shouting about it all the time. And they were saying that everybody must be ready for it. Trouble!