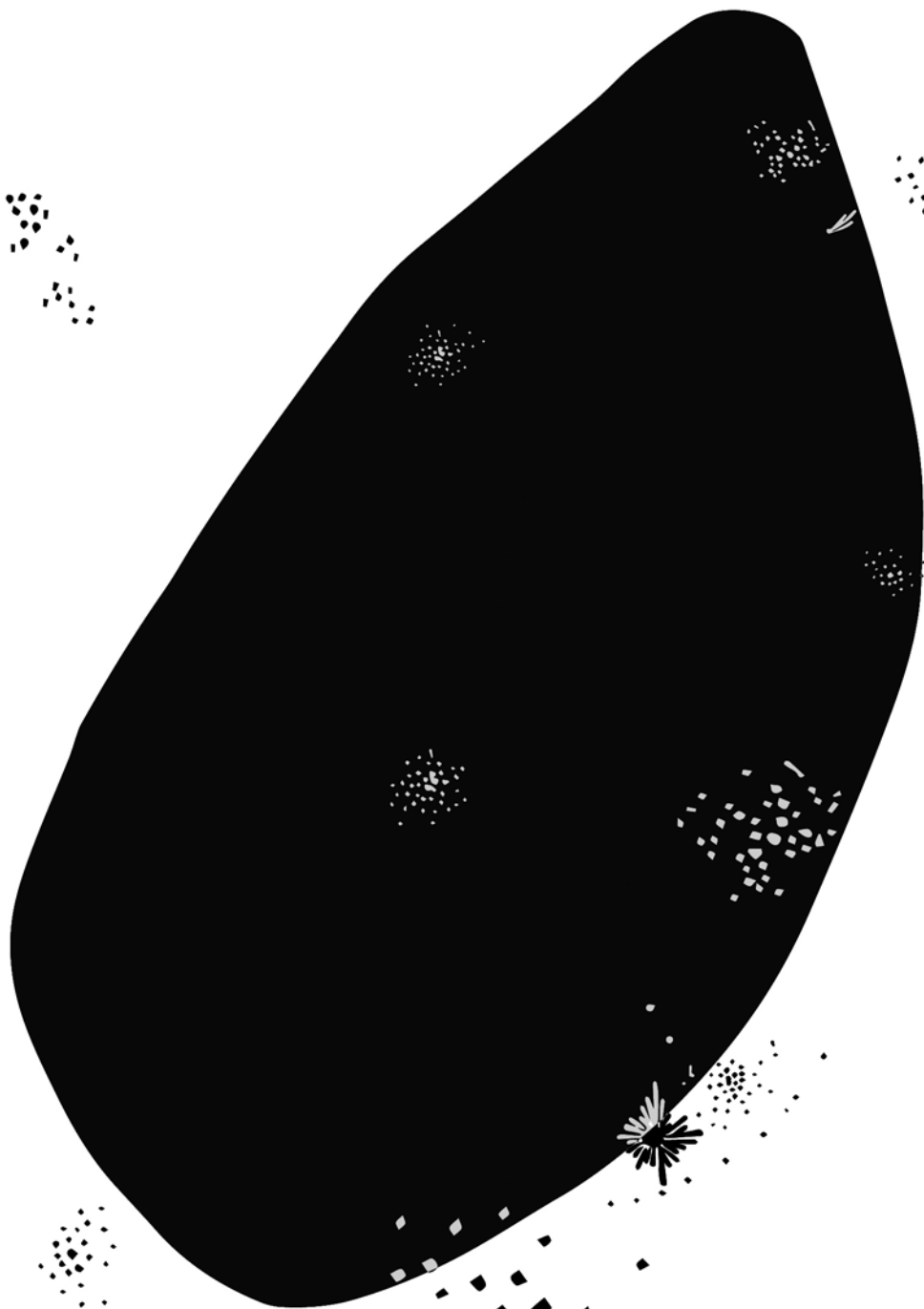


From

Left



Night







It was a staggering sight. The trial of Christopher Okigbo was opening at the Grand Stadium. They came in their millions. The multitude in white were strikingly reminiscent of the great processions of Muslim pilgrims pouring forth from Mount Arafat to return to the Kaaba in Mecca. The Grand Stadium of After-Africa was assuming today the sacred stature of the Kaaba, multiplied a hundred times in size and a thousand times in visual impact. They were marching towards the Grand Stadium, drawn from every geographical corner, every historical time associated with Africa's place in eternity. The men came, the women came, and the children followed by the side of their parents.

The varying features of Africa's humanity through the ages were fully represented. The short, the tall and the stout edged their way towards Okigbo's trial. Thick lips and thin, flat noses and straight, the full richness of Africa's heritage of hair, the full diversity of Africa's legacy of colours.

Individuals once famous in the Herebefore could be spotted among the crowds. Yes, there again was Chaka, the Zulu, fat, still sensuously exuberant, the scar against his forehead noticeable from a distance, the cruel turn of his upper lip lending mysterious dignity to what would otherwise have been a rather foolish and rounded face. Chaka was engaged in an animated discussion as he walked towards the Grand Stadium. The companion by his side was Mirambo, the hero of Nyamwezi around Lake Nyasa and Lake Tanganyika. This Ngoni hero had a lot in common with the Zulu warrior. The weapons which had been used in the Nigerian Civil War were so vastly different from what they had had to employ in their own wars in Africa. Chaka and Mirambo both believed that much of the heroism of war had in any case been diluted by the massive impersonality of advanced technology. Mirambo in a famous debate had even once put forward a political philosophy of what he called "military liberalism." By this he meant a kind of warfare which called forth from the individual warrior his own internal resources, testing his courage in hand-to-hand combat, allowed him autonomy of initiative and individual skill, and subjected him only to minimal organization within a broad military strategy. The kind of warfare which Mirambo and Chaka had led permitted within a dictatorial structure a high degree of military individualism. But modern technology had destroyed the ethics of individualism, not only in politics but also in war. Mankind had become increasingly incidental. The masses were the new yardstick for great decisions—how to mobilize the masses, how to serve the masses, how to destroy the masses. A spectator from a distance looking at Chaka and Mirambo in lively conversation could safely bet that they were discussing disparagingly the kind of

war which Nigerians and Biafrans had been waging—all those fighter planes flown by Egyptians or Portuguese; all those hand grenades, rockets, and machine-guns. Where were the spear and the shield of honour? Where were the symbols of African humanness? Africa was learning faster how to destroy the masses militarily than she was learning how to mobilize them politically. Chaka nodded vigorously, intended agreement with the well-known views of Mirambo as they approached the gates of the Grand Stadium.

The bearded man coming down the hill, wasn't that Barghash, the old Sultan of Zanzibar? A century separated him from Patrice Lumumba, and yet they too were engaged in vigorous discussion, presumably connected with the trial that they were about to attend.

A figure who attracted particular notice was Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the first Prime Minister of independent Nigeria. People pointed him out to each other as they found their way to the Grand Stadium. Would the trial be a trial of Balewa and his regime? Was Balewa a victim of Nigeria's instability? Or was he one of its many causes? It all depended upon the turn which the trial would take. The issues were big, and a figure of Tafawa's stature in the first few years of Nigeria's independence could hardly fail to be touched by the scorching issues which burst forth out of the bubbling nationhood of Nigeria.

Within the stadium Salisha had obtained a strategic seat as she watched that vast receptacle absorb

all those human millions. The stadium had looked full for the football match, and yet that was a misleading indication of its capacity. Today's millions were a test of the stadium's infinite elasticity.

The grass of the football field was still there, but in the middle of it all a huge stage had been erected, designed to be the great arena for a mighty battle of judicial wit. On one side of the shining wooden stage in the middle of the soccer ground was an enclosure of nine seats. These were the seats of the nine Elders who would be listening to the arguments advanced by the two Counsels in the case. The nine seats were themselves like thrones carved out of ebony, the back-rests being rounded with red-covered cushioning in the middle, with a thin ivory frame. The arm-rests were cushioned too, but curiously enough with antelope skin on top. The cumulative visual effect of nine red cushions and eighteen antelope arm-rests on the spectators in the stadium was bizarre but impressive. In some strange way, it was like looking at the hides of nine bulls freshly killed in the stadium at Madrid, neatly arranged across the arena in patterns of relationship with nine red flags of the matador next to the bleeding hides.

*When the draper of May
has sold out fine green
garments; and the hillsides
have made up their faces ...*



*now breaks
salt-white surf on the stones and me,
and lobsters and shells in
iodine smell—
maid of the salt-emptiness.
sophisticreamy, native...*



The nine Elders were not yet in attendance. Neither were the Counsels. The crowds were still coming in, but the hour of commencement was at hand.

As the last of the multitudes were finding their way to their seats a sign as old as creation in the universe burst upon the multitude. It was the signal of thunder—clear, penetrating, a thousand times more gripping than the loudest explosions of the sky on the shores of Victoria Nyanza.

It was one thunderous shake. But everyone seemed to know its meaning. There, in numbers beyond the imagination of census collectors, one suddenly saw a whole universe of humanity rise in unison to attention. As far as the eye could see in that stadium, white-robed figures stood in attentive response as the skies of After-Africa announced the entry of the nine Elders of Judgement. They too were partly in white, but their white garments were agbadas rather than kanzus, bound round the edges with thick red and gold borders. The simple addition of these borders to those white garments sharply differentiated the judges from the multitude. They moved towards their thrones in strides pregnant with purpose, yet unhurried in their deliberation. The rest of the stadium stood in silent attention watching aged wisdom on parade.

On reaching their thrones the nine Elders sat down. The rest of the stadium continued to stand. There was a moment of expectancy. And then all eyes turned towards the South Gate to witness the entry of Counsel for Damnation, Kwame Apolo-Gyamfi, in a flowing white Ghanaian toga, edged with green. The crowd held its breath. Young Apolo-Gyamfi was one of the most brilliant Africans produced by the twentieth century.

He was himself nearly committed for trial when he entered After-Africa in the 1940s after an act of tragic impatience at Oxford. But instead of a trial he was conceded more than two decades of uncertainty before being given a test. Many had wondered since the 1940s what kind of test would be given to young Kwame Apolo-Gyamfi when the moment came. But it now seemed clear that his test too was to relate to the trial of Christopher Okigbo. Counsel for Damnation, he was, in the language of the Herebefore, the voice of the State against Christopher Okigbo. He halted at the South Gate, standing to attention, short in stature and yet with an intellectual reputation which gave him an immense presence in that immense context.

A second later his judicial antagonist, Hamisi Salim, appeared opposite him at the North Gate. The two gates were at the edges of the football field, the trial stage was in the middle, the Judges were already presiding. Hamisi was much taller than Apolo-Gyamfi. In sheer physical impact Hamisi should have commanded more immediate attention, standing six foot one inch, clothed in a shimmering juba in lasi, with an elaborately patterned grey shawl of the kind imported into Mombasa for centuries from the craftsmen of the Persian Gulf.

The two young people looked at each other for the first time. Of the two, Hamisi was easily the more nervous, and this was observable even from the furthest seat of that infinite colosseum. It may have been because he was newer to After-Africa than his opponent, or it may have been because he had greater humility.

A touch of intellectual arrogance had been a major trait of Apolo-Gyamfi in the Herebefore,

though life beyond the grave had blunted some of the edges of that arrogance. On balance, at least according to the prejudices of the Herebefore, Apolo-Gyamfi was a less likeable person than Hamisi Salim, and yet that was too easy a judgement. The kind of pride which animated Apolo-Gyamfi included within itself moral resources, although it had also been pride which had led him to a hasty miscalculation at Oxford, leading to his arrival in the Hereafter. The two men stood and waited, the multitudes stood and waited, and the nine Elders of Judgement presided in silence. And then the skies parted once again to announce in ringing terms the next phase of the proceedings.

The two Counsels stepped forth from the gates, approached each other, stood facing each other, and then turned together shoulder to shoulder to face in the direction of the Elders. They then marched in eloquent purposefulness towards the grand stage. There were a few steps from the grass upwards on to the platform. They climbed those steps, almost in unison. The crowd watched. Silence continued to reign.

The two men, acquiring a strange complementarity despite the contrast of their physical heights, stood shoulder to shoulder a second longer and then knelt simultaneously. Another thunderous signal shattered the silence. The trial had begun.

Apolo-Gyamfi was on his feet, presenting the case for Damnation. The Elders of Judgement sat on their thrones, in a mood of relaxed concentration. Hamisi Salim sat in a chair on the north corner of the raised platform, at once nervous and intensely attentive.

The Grand Stadium was listening. Where was Christopher Okigbo, the accused? Hamisi had learnt by this time that in After-Africa it was considered barbaric to have the accused standing in the dock, conspicuously displayed in isolation, silent while others talked about him in his presence, subject to glares of spectators, denied the right of private anguish while his fate was being decided.

But did not the accused also have the right to know what went on in the great dialogue preceding a decision on his fate? The rules of judicial practice in After-Africa gave the accused the right to see everything that went on at the trial. He could choose between attending the proceedings as a spectator among the millions who filled this stadium, or he could remain in his own room, looking at one specified blank wall which, with concentration, he could convert into something comparable to a large television screen of the Herebefore. Hamisi was not sure whether Christopher Okigbo was in the audience among those millions in white, or was watching and listening to his own trial in private anguish at home.

Apolo-Gyamfi was describing what he called "the fall of Okigbo." Counsel made a distinction between individualism, universalism, and social collectivism. A great artist was first an individualist, secondly a universalist, and only thirdly a social collectivist. Individualism was the deeper loyalty to one's inner being, a capacity to retain a private area of distinctiveness in one's personality. The right to be eccentric was one great unit of measurement. The black sheep of the family was the greatest individualist member, precisely by being the most conspicuously distinctive.

Bright
with armpit-dazzle of a lioness,
she answers,
wearing the light about her;
and the waves escort her,
my lioness,
crowned with moonlight.
So brief her presence –
so brief with mirrors around me.





*The Prophet only,
the poet.
And he said:
Logistics.
Which is what poetry is.*

Apolo-Gyamfi continued: “Universalism, on the other hand, is a commitment to the eternal. The frontiers of space and the boundaries of time relinquish their legitimacy. A fusion of the near and the distant, of the now and the ever, is what universalism is all about.”

As for social collectivism, Apolo-Gyamfi defined it as that complex of loyalties which tied the individual to his or her own specific society, which commanded his or her affections for his or her kith and kin, which aroused his or her protectiveness for the soil of his or her ancestors, which enabled him or her to serve and, very occasionally, to love his or her people. Socialism, tribalism, and nationalism, were all different forms of these bonds of collectivity.

“We in After-Africa have gone beyond the naïve egalitarianism which ignored the great differentials in nature’s endowment. It is simply untrue to regard the death of Christopher Okigbo as being no more significant than that of an upright but ungifted fellow tribesman. All life is sacred, but some lives are more sacred than others.”

Counsel then went on to claim that the duty of a very gifted person is fundamentally different from the duty of an ungifted being. It may well be true that the commoner’s first duty is a duty to his or her own society, to the precise collectivity which produced him or her, and nourished him or her into communal consciousness. The ordinary man and woman is permitted to be first and foremost a social collectivist. He or she needs never experience the depths of individualism, nor needs he or she be called upon to bow to the dictates of the universal.

“But it is different with the gifted. We all have duties only to our societies; and the gifted ones have duties to humankind.”

Apolo-Gyamfi proceeded to categorize different types of intellectual greatness, and the ethical duties which were born out of them. He discussed C. P. Snow’s analysis of the two cultures—of science and the arts, but drew attention to the ethical poverty of Snow’s conclusions.

“If we are now to regrade the obligations of the artist as against the scientist, we must surely observe one important difference. The duty of the scientist is, firstly, to the universal; secondly, to the social; and only thirdly to himself. But the duty of the artist is firstly to himself, secondly to the universal, and only thirdly to the social. The inner creativity of the artist requires a doctrine of the primacy of the self. The aesthetic meaning of the artist requires a supporting doctrine of aesthetic universalism. But it is by serving the universal that the artist should be expected to serve his own society.”

Apolo-Gyamfi asserted that the life of Christopher Okigbo became a distortion of these values. From childhood to artistic adulthood, Christopher Okigbo was the supreme individual. He seemed to dislike great crowds, and certainly disliked the idea of addressing great crowds, even in poetic terms. His individualism sometimes had a ring of intellectual arrogance, or was it simply aristocratic distance? It was Okigbo who once remarked to delegates at a conference, “I don’t read my poems to non-poets!”

The very occasion on which he said this was rare in its collectiveness. It was at a conference held at Makerere University College in Kampala in 1962. At that

conference, Okigbo gave one of his rare public talks, condescending to collectivize literary explanation.

In some ways, it was just as well that he did not permit himself too much exposure to public “culturalization.” He was not a platform performer. His high-pitched voice was somewhat distracting when raised to be heard by a crowd. His somewhat eccentric mannerisms also diluted his potential for impact. But the voice of his poetry made up for any shortcomings of his own.

In Okigbo, until the explosion of Ibo separatism, individualism and universalism were beautifully intertwined. He used to deny that he was an African poet. “I am a poet,” was his simple insistence. In 1964, he had become even more explicit. “There is no African literature. There is good writing and bad writing—that’s all.”

Then came the great Festival of Negro Art in Dakar in 1966. It was a great cultural occasion for black people, and an excuse for some brilliant if synthetic devices of “culturalization.” There was also real art, deep in its meaning, hungry in its passion, alive in compulsive communication.

Who was Africa’s greatest poet for the Festival? Christopher Okigbo was offered the First Prize for poetry. A sense of admiration pervaded the climate of judgement. Some other poets swallowed hard, proudly accepting that extra margin of greatness in Okigbo’s lines. A few poets were more sceptical, less convinced of the aesthetic accuracy of the verdict. Some of the latter might also in turn have been envious.

But a startling pronouncement was made. Chris Okigbo had rejected the First Prize for poetry awarded by the Festival

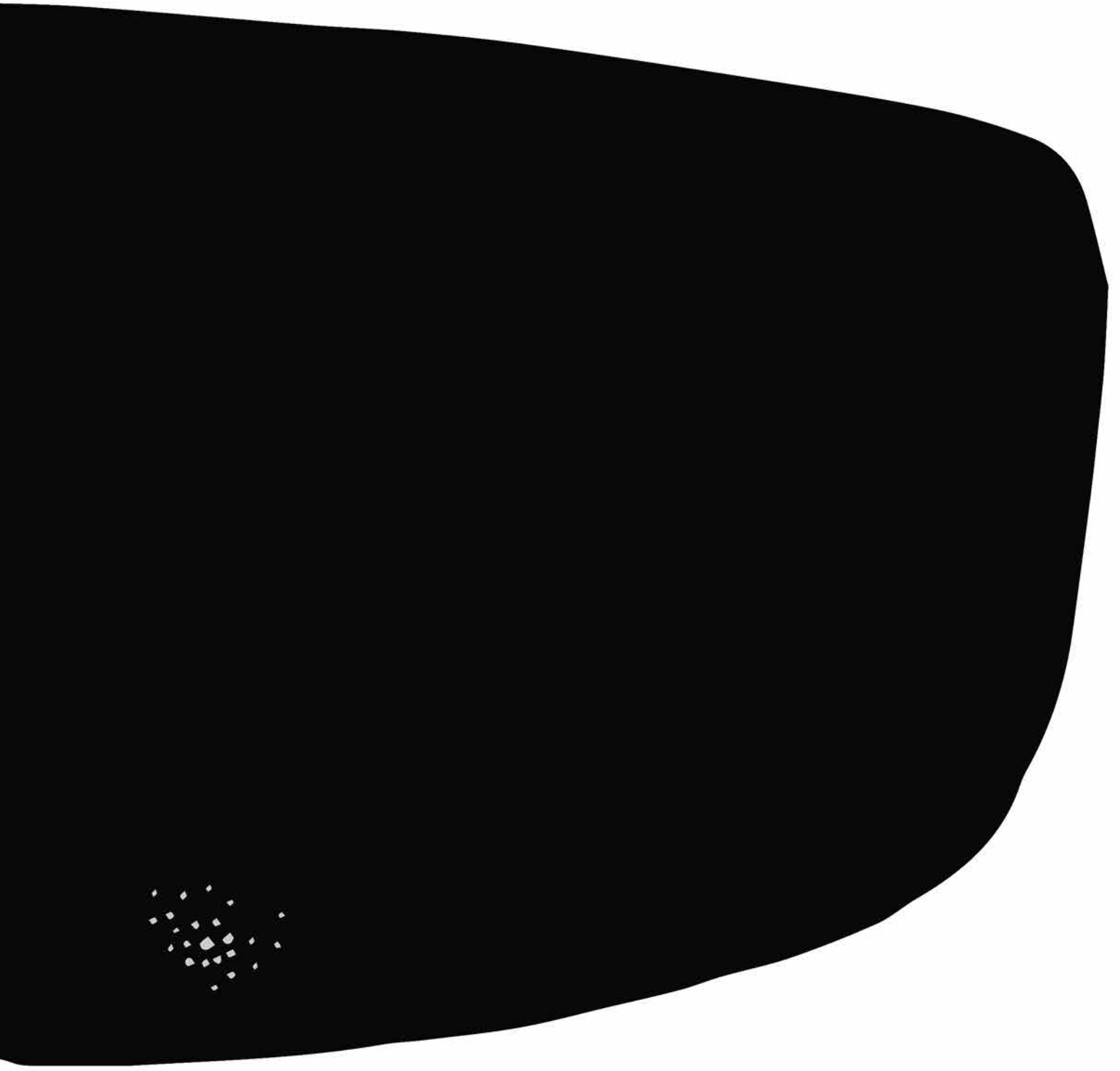
of Negro Arts. Why? His answer had once again that aggressive fanaticism of the paramount universalist. He had proclaimed, “There is no such thing as Negro art.”

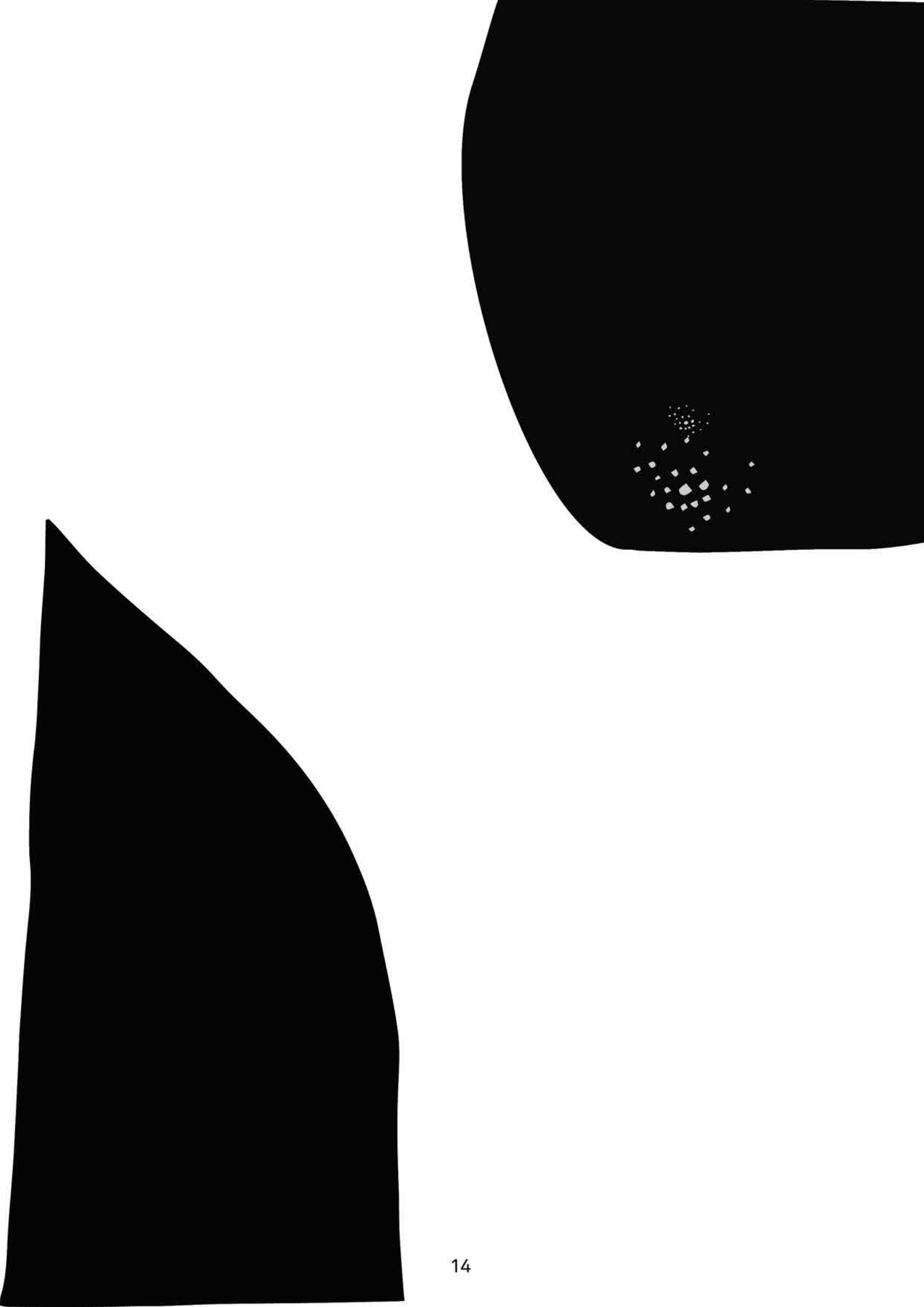
Apolo-Gyamfi, turning to the Elders in the Grand Stadium of After-Africa, said, “Oh, wise Elders of Judgement, consider the point of departure of this great young man. When he refused the prize which fellow black people were awarding him, sharing in the pride of his achievement, he was refusing to mix art with nationalism. However, this same young man who had proclaimed the universality of what is valuable, later put on a uniform, helped himself to a gun, and engaged in a fratricidal war. At the Festival of Negro Art in Dakar Okigbo had refused to dilute art with the milk of nationalism. On the desolate battlefields of Biafra, he was to dilute art with the blood of tribalism.”

Apolo-Gyamfi paused, permitting his argument to achieve its optimum effect. The great Elders pondered over the train of Apolo-Gyamfi’s reasoning, impressed both by its intellectual vigour and by the moral fervour which characterized the delivery. The concluding epigram of the dilution of art had been effectively utilized. There was a slight release of tension among the multitudes in the stadium, people exchanged comments on the case as so far presented, feet were shifted.

Apolo-Gyamfi then proceeded to discuss the great influences on Okigbo’s poetry. Okigbo himself had acknowledged his debt to a variety of literatures and cultures, from classical times to the present day, in English, Latin, Greek, “a little French, a little Spanish.”

To use Okigbo’s own words, “If those





sources have become assimilated into an integral whole it is difficult to sort them out—to know where the Babylonian influence ends and the Classical starts.” The sentence itself captured the theme of continuity in art, of fusion in civilized values, and of eternity as a creative process.

Yet this man who had once recognized the grand panorama of human experience, dwindled into a petty negotiator for the merchandise of violence. He descended from the mountain of human vision into the swamp of tribal warfare.

Hamisi, listening, remembered Jacob Alobi’s account of the plane crash which killed him. But, arising out of his further investigations, Hamisi also recalled another plane load of arms which had crashed in the Cameroons. Christopher Okigbo’s personal effects were discovered in the wreckage. Had he died in that crash? If so, where was his body? It had later turned out that Okigbo was alive, and in Birmingham after all. He had indeed been engaged in negotiations which led to the purchase of the arms and their shipment to Eastern Nigeria. That was before the outbreak of the war, but after the tightening up of tensions between the East and the Federal Government. The East was in preparation for a ghastly exercise. Okigbo was to have flown with the arms, but at the last minute he decided to let the merchandise go on its own. He was spared—only to die another day.

Apolo-Gyamfi was saying, “These are the charges that we are levelling against Chris Okigbo, Elders of Judgement. A gift of nature was squandered on a battlefield. An imagination which would have had another three decades of creativity was offered as a sacrifice. Art is a compact between those who are living, those

who are dead, and those who are to be born. Art owes to the ancestors the nourishment of prior achievement, the cumulative influence of past ages. Art owes to its contemporaries the great experience of immediate revelation, the opportunity of being the first critic of what could be imperishable, the chance to watch a piece of eternity emerge from a womb. Art owes to future generations a connecting link between the cumulative accomplishments of the past and the emerging potential of the future.

“If an artist must sacrifice himself for anything, he should only sacrifice him or herself for the universal. To die for the truth is martyrdom. To die for knowledge is martyrdom. To die for art is martyrdom. But when a thinker or an artist dies for his nation, that is an indulgence. He or she has put the politics of the nation before the power of the eternal. He or she may not have broken his or her contract with those already dead, but he or she has broken his or her contract with the living and with those who are to be born.”

Apolo-Gyamfi concluded with the words: “When an ordinary person or a great soldier dies for his or her nation, that is indeed heroism. When a thinker or a creator dies for his or her nation, that is escapism. Elders of the Ages and of Judgement, that is our case against Christopher Okigbo, newly deceased from Biafra.”

The Grand Stadium had again been reduced to meditative silence as Apolo-Gyamfi resumed his seat. It had been a brilliant performance as far as it went. Many regarded it the best opening statement by a Counsel for Damnation for five hundred years or more.

There were many people in the audience who knew in detail Apolo-Gyamfi's background, and the circumstances of his arrival in After-Africa. He was born into a well-to-do legal family in Kumasi early in the 1920s. He was sent to Achimota in Accra and soon established himself as both a brilliant debater and a versatile student.

But if anyone was musing about Apolo-Gyamfi's background, his train of recollection was interrupted. The signal of the elements thundered out again across the skies, commanding attention and decreeing the next stage of the trial.

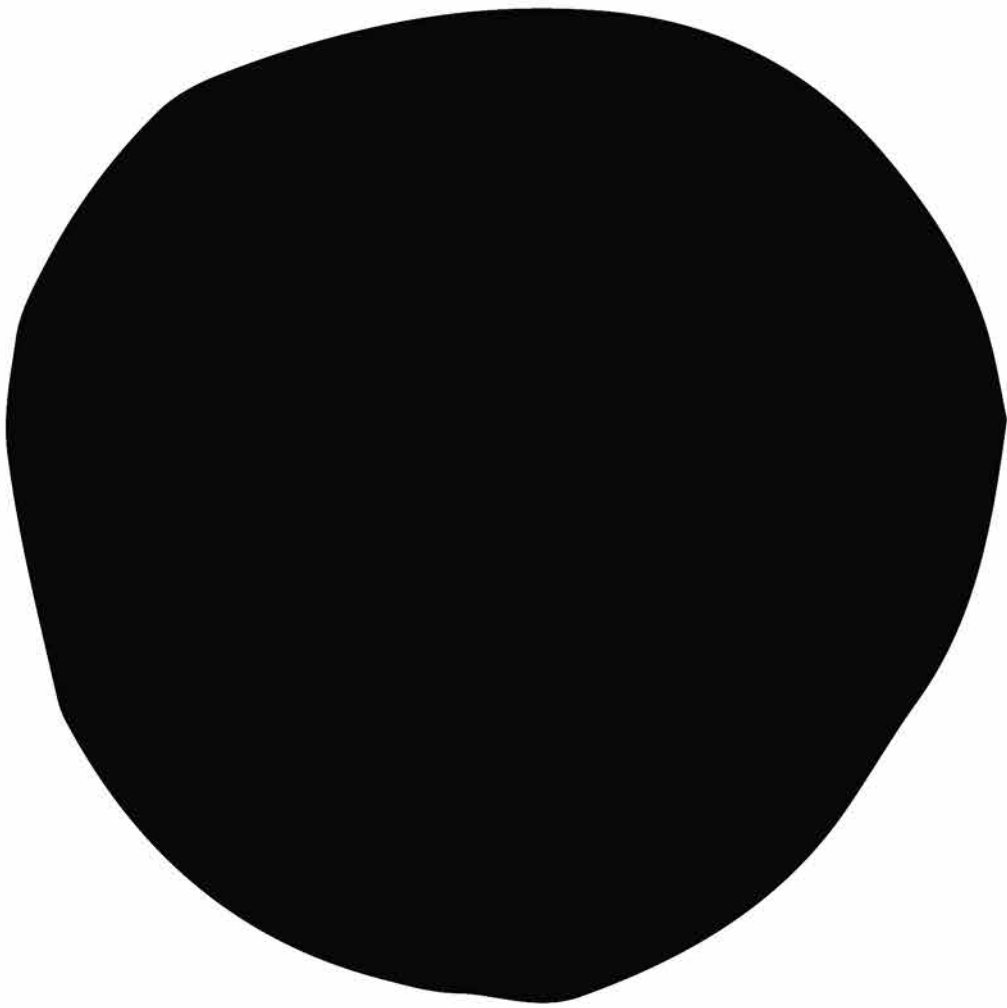
It was now the turn of Counsel for Salvation to make his opening statement. Hamisi Salim rose, tall and resplendent in his juba, but his nervousness was apparent to everyone. To be cast in a battle of argument with Kwame Apolo-Gyamfi was a severe test. He had the further handicap of having had a shorter period in After-Africa than his legal antagonist on that stage.


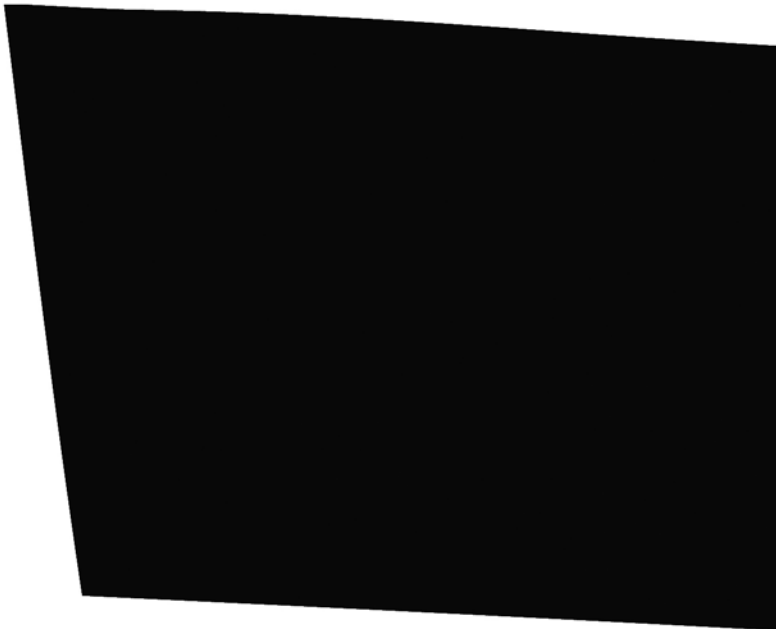
But Hamisi had thought out his case carefully, hoping to strengthen it by the kind of witnesses he would call. He had learnt that the witnesses need not be from Nigeria, or even people who knew very much about the issues underlying the Civil War. Witnesses who were to turn up in person had to be already dead. But they need not be from After-Africa—they could come or be summoned from After-Asia, After-Europe or elsewhere. But the great stumbling-block was that neither Counsel was permitted to discuss with the witness in advance the evidence which was to be brought out. It was one of the skills of this kind of trial that Counsels should choose witnesses by objective calculation of their likely utility. Counsels were expected to

bring out the evidence of the witnesses during the proceedings, in a manner best calculated to serve their own side of the case. It was considered bad form to attempt a prior briefing of a witness, even indirectly. It had therefore become conventionally bad form even to consult with a witness before the event.

Counsel had right of access to as much information about the witness as was available in the Bureau of Information among the offices located on the east wing of the Grand Stadium. Substantial biographical data of every person who has ever lived or died was available at the Bureau of Information. It was up to each Counsel to go into the catalogue, assessing likely witnesses, and then prepare their pattern of questions in the hope of drawing out their witnesses to the maximum benefit of their own side.

But could Counsel invite evidence from people still in the Herebefore? The great Assembly of the Ages had once discussed the possibility of transporting living people on earth in their sleep and bringing out their subconscious to the world beyond the grave in order to give evidence before important trials. The issue had been hotly debated. There had in fact been a precedent of this kind of transpiration in the ascent of the Prophet Muhammad on the night of the Miraj. While sleeping in Mecca, the Prophet had in a single night been transported to Jerusalem, and then upwards to Heaven to participate in a case which decided how many times each day the believers were to be called upon to pray. Muhammad had defended his followers against the excessive demands made by Allah. Five prayers a day was the great compromise, the mitigated sentence which Divinity passed on humanity. The original sentence before the Miraj was ten times that number.





*The Sunbird Sings again
From the LIMITS of the dream,
The Sunbird sings again
Where the caress does not reach,
of Guernica,
On whose canvas of blood,
The newsprint-slits of his tongue
cling to glue...
and the cancelling out is complete.*

But could the same principle of summoning the living to come into the world beyond the grave and commune with the dead and with God now be invoked as a method of subpoena? The Assembly of the Ages, after four and a half decades of debate, decided against summoning the living in their sleep to come and give testimony against the dead. The liberal caucus in the Assembly of the Ages had won. One of their arguments had been that such an invasion of the subconscious of the living for such a purpose was a flagrant violation of the privacy of the mind.

But a compromise formula had at last been accepted by the Assembly of the Ages. In a trial in After-Africa the voices of the living could be summoned as witnesses, provided that those voices uttered were genuine thoughts which had passed through the minds of the living. It was thus possible for Counsel in a trial to call into evidence even a momentary thought which had once crossed the mind of someone living on earth. In some sense this was also a kind of invasion on the privacy of the minds of the living, but it was not as flagrant as what had originally been proposed when the issue of summoning the living to testify against the dead was first introduced as a proposal in the Assembly of the Ages.

General Gowon of the Federal side and Colonel Ojukwu of Biafra were still alive in the Herebefore. They could not be summoned to give testimony before the Elders of Judgement in this trial of Christopher Okigbo. But their utterances on earth, and even the thoughts that might have crossed their minds relevant to this case, could be summoned before the Elders. The very voices of Ojukwu or Gowon would then be heard in that Grand Stadium, articulating those of their own thoughts which had never been expressed

in audible words or rearticulating statements they had themselves previously made on earth.

But would Counsel be calling for the voices of the actual leaders in the Nigerian Civil War? In some ways, this would be too obvious, and part of the skill of trials of this kind was to discover profound links that might otherwise escape notice, rather than simply to go for the obvious witnesses in a case. Nevertheless, a lot depended on what Counsel made of the witnesses that he or she summoned, be those witnesses Nigerian or non-Nigerian, from After-Africa or from without, from the ranks of the dead or from the voices of the living.

Hamisi began his opening statement. He congratulated Kwame Apolo-Gyamfi on a brilliant presentation. He only wished destiny had been as kind to him as it had been to Apolo-Gyamfi. He, Hamisi, had not been briefed by good fortune to start thinking about judgement in art and in law from the age of fourteen. He must therefore apologize if his eloquence should sound less polished, less rehearsed, than the eloquence of honourable Kwame Apolo-Gyamfi.

There was a stir in the Stadium. A good fight was enjoyed in After-Africa perhaps with greater relish than it had ever been enjoyed elsewhere. The soccer matches commanded so much attention partly because, at their best, they were skilful contests with swift movements. A great trial like that of Chris Okigbo at the Grand Stadium was in some ways much more than a football match: it afforded moments of moral revaluation seldom attained even in the great balancing act for the maintenance of a "monotheistic lead" which a soccer game sometimes became. And yet the element of a battle of wits, exploration of weakness, skilful

manipulation of advantage, linked the experience of an intellectual debate to the experience of a soccer match adroitly executed.

Hamisi proceeded to discuss Kwame Apolo-Gyamfi's three categories: individualism, universalism, and social collectivism. Hamisi asserted that Apolo-Gyamfi's tripartite distinction was excessively European. The idea that great creativity derives from individualism was itself not universally true. Much of Africa's art was a collective experience. The legends, the folk songs, the folk tales, the proverbs, the trance of the primeval dance, were all shared moments of being.

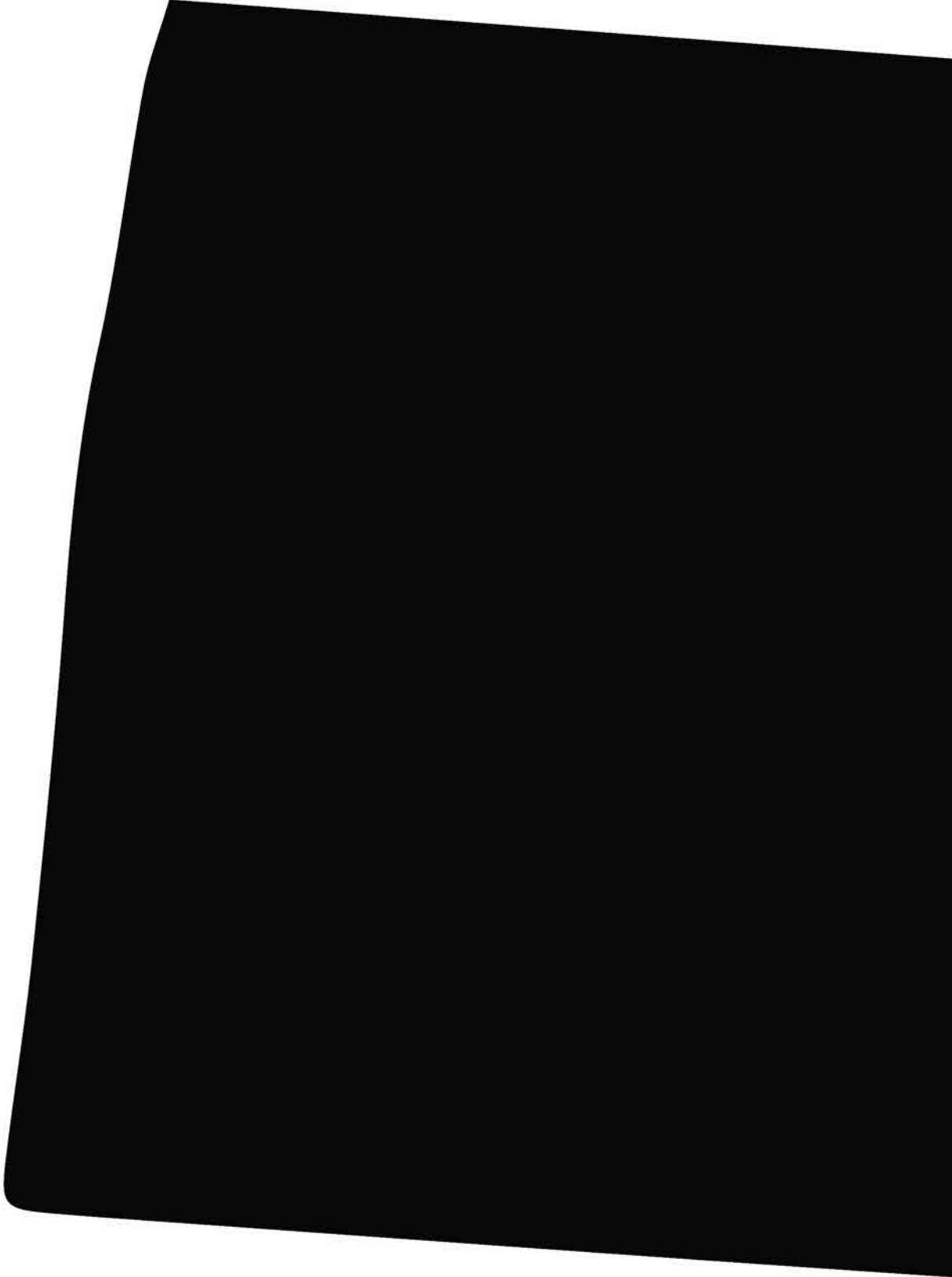
Much of the poetry was intended to be sung. It was not just the private eye of the reader which was called upon to appreciate poetry; it was more the public ear of the listener. Great art in Europe may have been at best a mode of communication; great art in Africa had always been a flow of interaction. Apolo-Gyamfi's description of the artist as being ultimately a person loyal to him or herself as an individual must therefore be dismissed as an alien idiosyncrasy imported from the principles of European aesthetics and wrongly invoked to pass judgement on an African artist.

Salisha, sitting a hundred-and-seventy-three row upwards in the Stadium, swallowed hard with a sense of pride. She reflected with amusement that Hamisi was wrong in his assertion that destiny had not prepared him for this role. He may not have won an essay competition on the concept of judgement in art and in law, but journalism in its day-to-day quest for the meaning of events could also be a good preparation in this respect: those panel discussions on the BBC which Hamisi had moderated or otherwise participated in, those hurriedly

prepared talks feverishly interpreting the events of the day for the radio listener thousands of miles away, those quick readings of books so that they could be reviewed and evaluated, those dialogues with transient participants in Hamisi's radio programmes. Salisha's eyes moistened as she recalled one dialogue, prophetic in also having been concerned with Christopher Okigbo. She recalled the events of that night in London, the polished conversation she had had with Hamisi, the invitation to his flat, his skilful preparation for a moment of sensual conquest, and her ultimate philosophical surrender. Now there he was, dear Hamisi, a little less nervous than at the beginning, proving almost equal to the dazzling brilliance of Kwame Apolo-Gyamfi.

The Elders of Judgement sat on their thrones listening with that inscrutable air of private concentration. Apolo-Gyamfi sat in his corner, a little man with a massive presence, also deeply attentive. He was interested in more than what Hamisi was saying. He had become interested in Hamisi.

Counsel for Salvation was still on his feet. He had analysed some of Okigbo's poetry in terms of its demands on the public ear of the listener. It was true that much of Okigbo's poetry owed something to a cultural heritage external to Africa. It had also been suggested by some critics that the obscurity of Okigbo's lines was a case of subordinating meaning to imagery. Traditional African poetry had to be understood if it was to be a collective experience. There had to be a meaning to what was being formulated in poetic terms. Evocative pictures in words could be a case of brilliant imagery, but not an adequate instance of meaningful interaction.



*I am mad with the same madness as the
moon and my neighbour,
I am kindled from the moon and the
hearth of my neighbour.*



And yet these critics forgot that Okigbo's poetry did not consist merely in evocative visual images, but also in the power of sound and the excitement of listening. By paying special attention to the music of poetry, Okigbo had been loyal to the tradition of song in Africa's aesthetic experience. The poem in the village had been sung partly because it had also to be an adventure in aesthetic listening. In a language alien to Africa, and sometimes in expressions borrowed from elsewhere, Okigbo had nevertheless been loyal to the primordial fusion of word with sound, of image with music, or simply of song. And then, willed almost unconsciously by Hamisi, a voice from the sky suddenly filled the Grand Stadium. There was a resonant and vibrant articulation which arrested the attention of that vast multitude as three short lines from the poetry of Christopher Okigbo momentarily filled the universe.

Then we must sing, tongue-tied,
Without name or audience,
Making harmony among the branches.

Silence followed, a point had been made, the Elders, the crowds, Salisha, and Counsel for Damnation waited for Hamisi to continue.

Hamisi moistened his lips with his tongue, cleared his throat, and resumed his presentation. "Honourable Apolo-Gyamfi has also drawn attention to the great compact between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Again, his conception of these three levels of being is an echo of Edmund Burke, a great Anglo-Irishman, but not necessarily a great exponent of Africa's conception of this compact. The past, the present, and the future are not quite as unilinear as Edmund Burke and Kwame Apolo-Gyamfi seem to assume. We are dead and we are in After-Africa.

Are we the past or the future or indeed the present? I suggest to the Elders of Judgement in all humility, that what was absent from Apolo-Gyamfi's conception of the relationship between the living, the dead and those who are to be born was the simple and obvious principle of simultaneity. We here are discussing the Nigerian Civil War at a time when the same subject is being discussed, though in different contexts, by many on earth. In some respects, the earth is indeed a Herebefore. And we are the "Hereafter" of those who are living. But we are the dead and the dead to those who are living are supposed to be part of the past. If we are in the "Hereafter", aren't we part of the future? Or are the past and the future no more than different sides of the coin of simultaneity?

"It is indeed true that for Africa art is also a compact between the living, the dead and those who are to be born, but certainly not in the Eurocentric terms which Apolo-Gyamfi has suggested. The mediating link in this primeval compact is precisely the specific society to which the African belongs. Art is a heritage from the past, honoured and augmented by the present, and then transmitted to the future. But the transmission is not unilinear, and the continuity is a social continuity. In Africa, it is society which gives meaning to art. How then could Christopher Okigbo be deemed guilty for giving his life in the cause of his immediate society?

"In Africa, the ancestors are kinsmen. The continuity between the dead and the living is a continuity of kinship. How then could Christopher Okigbo be regarded as a violator of the primeval contract when he died in defence of the dignity of kinship?"

The Grand Stadium listened, sometimes impressed by the turn of an argument, occasionally irritated by excessive sophistication. But there was no doubt that Hamisi Salim was accepting the challenge of Apolo-Gyamfi at the level of discourse chosen by Apolo-Gyamfi himself.

Hamisi continued: "I am also deeply disturbed by Apolo-Gyamfi's handling of the two concepts of life and art. Was Okigbo really supposed to value life for the sake of art? Was life to be valued purely as an instrument for the realization of art? Was there an antithesis between art and life?"

Here again the words of Okigbo suddenly filled the Stadium, willed into articulation by the process of Hamisi's reasoning, but the lines this time were not of poetry but of prose. It was the remark which Okigbo had made to Robert Serumaga in an interview in 1966.

"Poetry is not an alternative to living. It is only one way of supplementing life; and if I can live life to its fullest without writing at all, I don't care to write."

A short silence followed before Hamisi continued: "By dying for the Ibo, Okigbo had lived life to its fullest. It was right that he should not care to write."

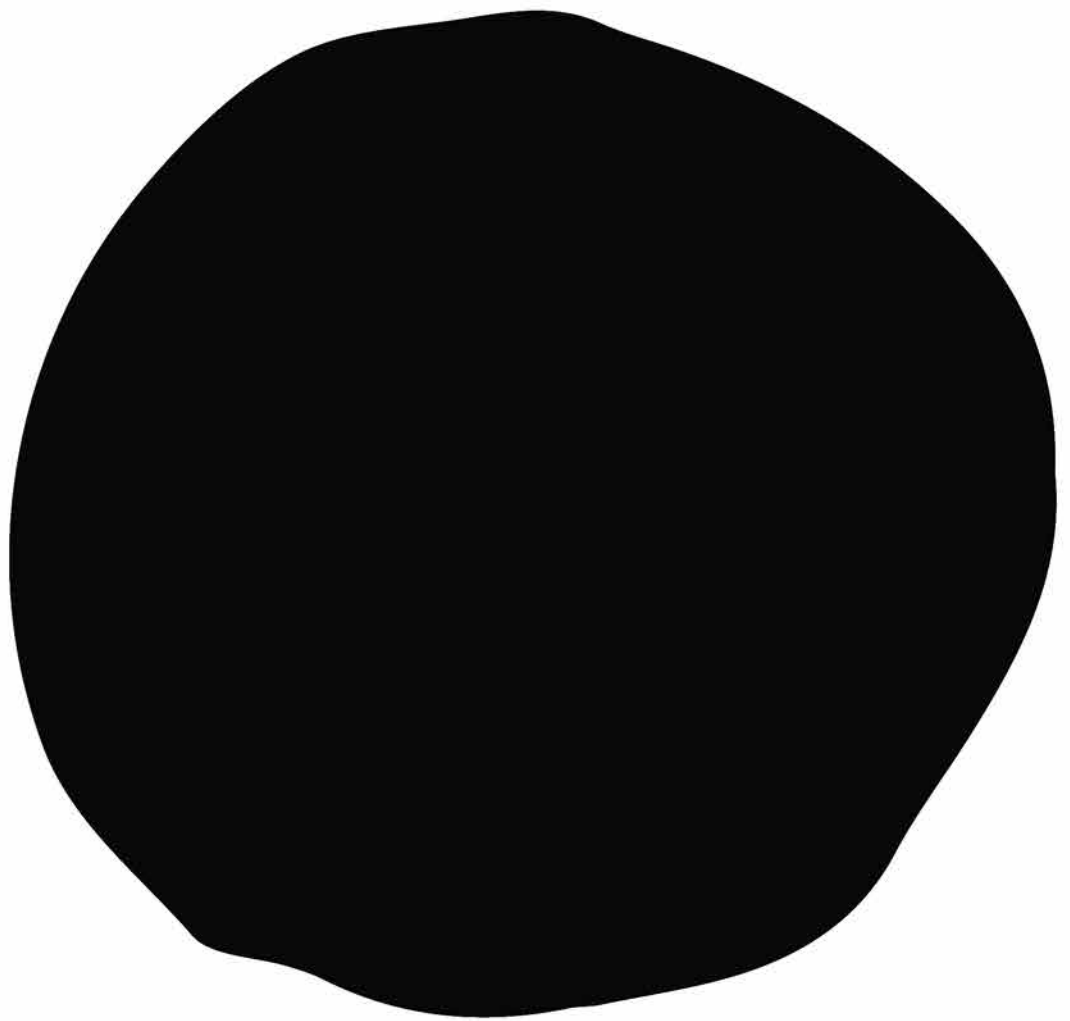
Hamisi then proceeded to enumerate the tragic antecedents to the Nigerian Civil War. He could see it all, the drift towards disintegration in 1964 and 1965; the sharpening of tribal positions; the politics of squalor; the rapid decay of the liberal ethos in the first four years of Nigeria's independence. Then came the coup of January 1966. It looked like a moment of delivery. Blood was spilt. The Nigerian coup was no glorious revolution. But there was an air of painful purification

pervading that optimistic atmosphere of January 1966. Old scores were settled, ugly brutality reared its menacing head. And yet the first pen which was dipped into the blood of the victims of the first Nigerian coup proceeded to write on the white wall of destiny a single gory message—the word Hope!

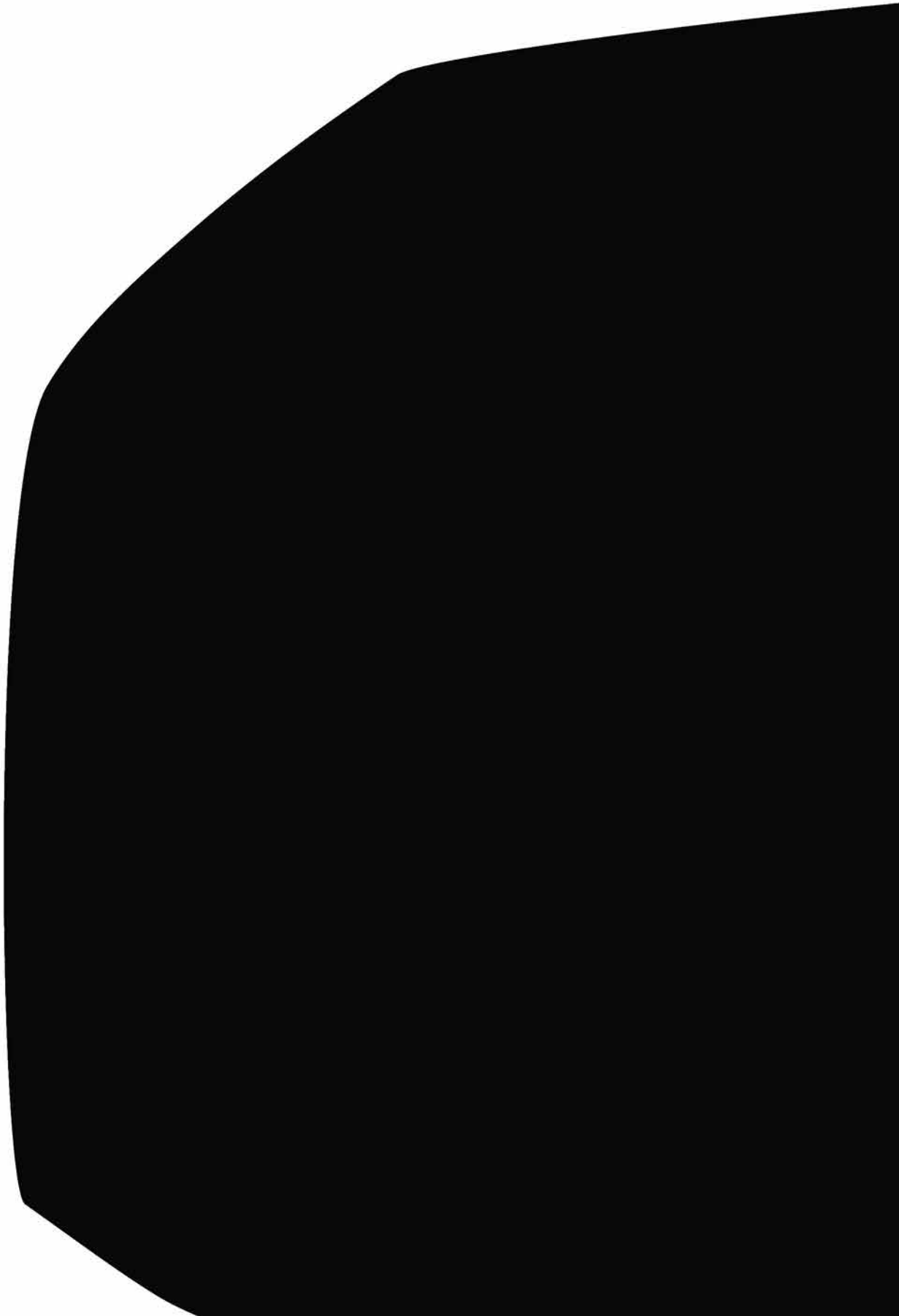
"But it has not worked out," continued Hamisi. "The Ibo took the leadership in this great work of national salvage; but not all brave volunteers get decorated."

The inevitable account of the mounting tension in Northern Nigeria then followed. The first great atrocities were recounted, a moment of vengeance by Northerners against bewildered Ibo. Ironsi, who had been catapulted to power by the first coup, had tried to rescue the situation with one last attempt at inter-tribal statesmanship. But the situation degenerated. A second coup swiftly sent Ironsi forth on his own great trek to After-Africa. He had arrived in After-Africa weary and perplexed. In the Herebefore, history had tried to thrust a greatness upon him, and for a moment he held that great burden in balance; but then his knees began to give way, and he asked his Ibo brother to lend him a hand. The burden of greatness, thrust on shoulders unequal to the task, took its toll. Ironsi stumbled into After-Africa, a monument of one of the great might-have-beens of history.

But whatever the deficiencies of leadership, nothing could forgive the carnage of September 1966. There had been a rumour that something ghastly was happening in the East. It was a broadcast picked up from a radio programme coming from outside the borders of Nigeria. The Ibo, the broadcast report claimed, were literally up in arms in the Eastern Region, cutting the



*When you have finished,
and done up my stitches,
Wake me near the altar,
and this poem will be finished.*



throats of the Hausa. There were indeed Hausa tradesmen and even settlers in the East, and their presence had become a little precarious since the great events of May when the Ibo in Hausaland had sustained such casualties. But had the Ibo in the East risen in belated and ferocious retaliation?

“There is very little evidence to support such a thesis,” asserted Hamisi. Out on the hundred-and-seventy-third row Salisha caught her breath, covered her eyes and shook a little. Abiranja was sitting next to her. He reached out, put his hand on her knee and patted it in benevolent reassurance.

Several other members of the audience had also turned to look at each other, and made brief comments in passing.

Hamisi was continuing: “But despite this flimsy report of massacres against the Hausa coming from a foreign broadcast, the North nevertheless collectively uttered a shrill cry of indignation, reached for knives and swords, and proclaimed a jihad against a defenceless fellows.”

Hamisi swallowed at his own oratory. Brought up as a Muslim he had inhibitions about casting aspersions on fellow Muslims. He normally refrained from carelessly suspecting religious motives behind political brutalities. And he had himself shared the anger of many Muslims at Biafra’s propaganda in trying to rally support for herself on a banner of Christian crusade. And yet here was he, Hamisi, in a battle to save the soul of a Biafran, wondering whether some of the suggestions of that old propaganda in the Herebefore might not be pertinent.

In his role as Counsel, Hamisi had a weakness which in great actors was a great strength. He had the capacity to

identify so deeply with the cause he was espousing that his own responses became almost indistinguishable from those of prior partisans. On the stage Hamisi might have derived great resources of acting power by this compulsion to empathize. In the Grand Stadium of After-Africa, he was also drawing momentary advantage from the sheer sense of commitment which his identification seemed to portray. The cold intellectual detachment of Kwame Apolo-Gyamfi on his feet was now decisively replaced by Hamisi in a mood of real political engagement.

He then used the device of citing case histories of a few Ibo victims of that September nightmare.

There was the case of Vincent Obika, the cobbler. Obika had lived in Kano for nineteen years. He had in many ways become assimilated into the life of the community, and conversed in the local language with exceptional fluency. He had also become sympathetic with many of the ways of the Hausa and Fulani, accepting the social distinctions with the resigned equanimity best exemplified among the British working-class in the Herebefore. Obika had attended many Muslim ceremonies, recognizing that as a non-Muslim he could not become a full participant, but accepting nevertheless that boundary of hospitality to aliens which the Northern ethos at its best afforded with regal allowance.

Obika had once in fact been married to a Hausa drawn from the lower classes. There were problems at the beginning arising from this mixed marriage, but after five years Obika’s own philosophical equanimity won over even the strongest antagonist. His wife, Muna, gave birth to a son, four years after their marriage, just at the time when both were

getting desperate at the long period of barrenness.

Muna died of the great fever in 1963. Their son, Yunus, was then ten. Obika was deeply shaken by Muna's departure, and many in the neighbourhood were moved by his predicament. He became more attached than ever to Yunus.

Nature was still urging in Obika, and he desired company. This time he married a fellow Ibo, a young woman recently arrived from Port Harcourt. Again, it was a relatively happy marriage, though less deep and intimate than Obika's first one. The new wife, affectionately called Sinjo, bore them a son and a daughter. Yunus was still the favourite, but no one begrudged such a clear eldest child the rights to active interaction with the father and the first option in moments of consultation.

And then that broadcast came in September. A fellow Ibo came to Obika's home, telling him of the slaughter which had begun. His wife, Sinjo, and his two younger children were visiting friends two miles away. Obika, the cobbler, by this time owned a car. He packed what he could, and then heard shouts outside his own house. He looked out—yes, they were coming from his own close neighbours and friends. There was a totally dehumanizing rage on their faces. He used the rear entrance and managed to open the garage, got into the car and started it before the approaching crowds knew what was happening. His son, Yunus, and the friend who had called got into the car in time. They drove off in a shower of stones, terrified and incredulous that some of their oldest and best friends in Kano should have worn that face of vengeance.

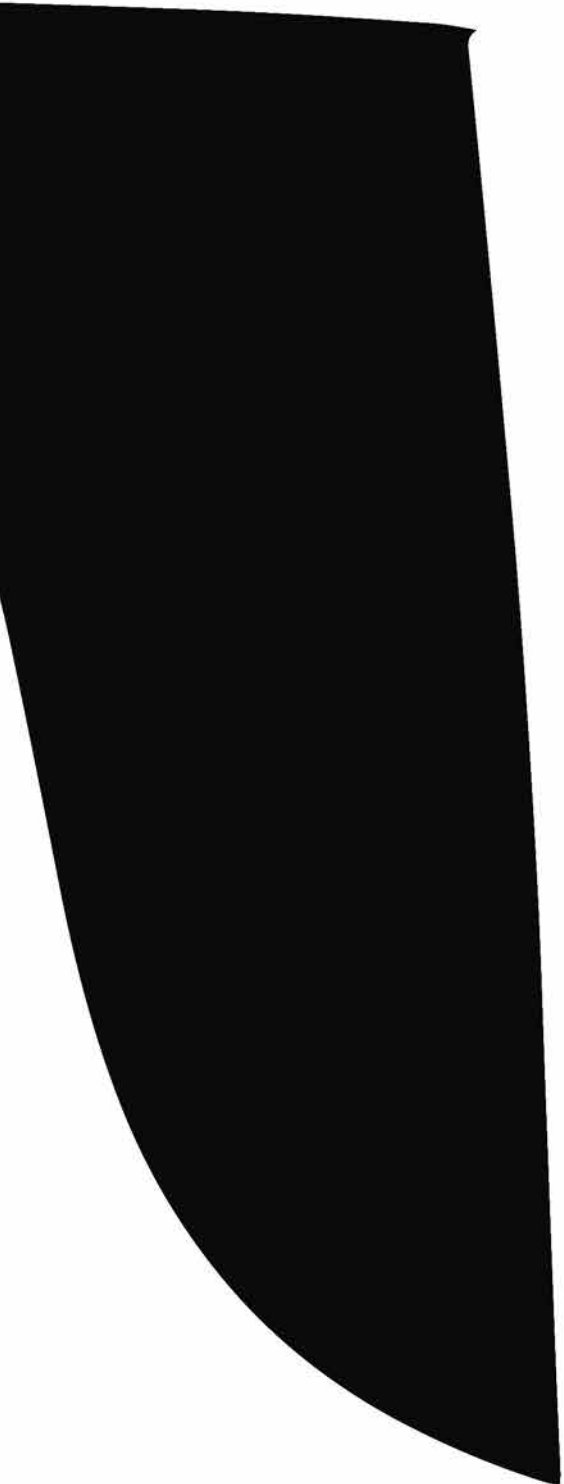
What about Sinjo and the children? Could they still be alive where they were? Obika

swallowed in terror as he stepped on the accelerator.

Hamisi paused in his narration of the day of slaughter. He then turned to the Elders and said, "Oh, my Elders, I crave indulgence to call into the witness box Vincent Obika."

There was a stir in that massive auditorium. This simple cobbler was the first witness to be invited. He emerged from the North Gate, somewhat short, somewhat stout, greying at the temples and growing bald on top. He walked nervously towards the raised stage, and when he got there Hamisi guided him to the special mihrab, a pulpit-like construction, intended for witnesses. The mihrab was raised a little, and Obika climbed the three steps. He stumbled on the third, obviously, a bundle of nerves and awkwardness.





*Thundering dr
in palm grove:
the spirit is in*

From Left to Night

A spatial contribution consisting of an interior, a continuous film altered occasionally, and a permeable library will unfold in the Foyer and the Auditorium of the Haus der Kulturen der Welt. Artist Christian Nyampeta has created an installation which extends the existing question of the position of the artist in the construction of history, and the role of the artist in political action, by focusing on the fictional trial of the late Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo. Okigbo is put on trial in the Hereafter, for having confused universal heroism with parochial martyrdom. Okigbo had advocated art as an affirmation of life, against national and racial boundaries. Nevertheless, he died for Biafra on the battlefield in 1967, seeking cessation from the newly independent Nigerian state. In the face of today's resurgence of socially destructive forms of nationalisms, what tasks await the artist and what are meaningful contributions to the crafting of more habitable futures?

This exploration arises from an archive of events, institutions, resolutions, terms, and practices that constitute and at the same time lay bare a history of the "standard of civilization" inscribed in the existing international system of states. It extends across new and existing structures, texts and imagery, issued from a collaborative, discursive, polyrhythmic and transformatory outlook on the concretization of artistic motives into political habits. *From Left to Night* shares its title with a film by artist Wendelien van Oldenborgh (2014), and a film by the Otolith Group (2015).

In telling the story of Okigbo's dilemma between artistic universalism and parochial allegiance, this booklet traces the narrative of putting the nation on trial, with excerpts from Ali Al'Amin Mazrui's *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo* (1978) and Christopher Okigbo's *Heavensgate* (1962) and *Limits* (1964).

ums and cannons

ascent.



**Christian Nyampeta,
From Left to Night, 2017**

Produced in the context of:

***Now is the Time of Monsters
What Comes After Nations?***

**March 23 – 25, 2017, at Haus der Kulturen der
Welt, Berlin**

**Curated by Rana Dasgupta, Nanna Heidenreich
and Katrin Klingan**

