



JOHN OKAI

And praise be  
to Providence -  
Hallelujah! yea, hallelujah!  
Praise be to our ancestors -  
to our ancestors -  
Who are  
behind us  
and before us  
Hallelujah!  
yea, hallelujah!  
You are  
opening your eyes  
at last -  
Hallelujah! yea, hallelujah!  
You are  
parting your lips  
at last -  
Hallelujah! yea, Hallelujah!  
You have  
regained consciousness  
at last -  
Hallelujah! yea, hallelujah!  
You are perspiring  
in this cold night.  
Hallelujah! yea, hallelujah!  
Glory be  
to you,  
thou weary Mother -  
Hallelujah! yea, Hallelujah!  
Hollowed be  
they womb,  
now alive  
with the child -  
Hallelujah! yea, Hallelujah!  
Glory be  
to the child  
that soon  
Must be born -  
Hallelujah! yea, hallelujah!  
Here is water  
- drink.  
I had been greatly  
frightened,  
Thinking you would not  
not regain  
Your breath;  
For during  
these long days,  
Along  
these waterless  
thorny,  
And unchartered  
fields,

We had tripped  
twice;  
The blowing wind  
had silenced  
The light  
in our lamp.  
We had  
groped  
with only our  
Toes and fingers,  
You had fainted  
and I had feared,  
Beyond  
recall.  
We have  
at last  
arrived  
At the door  
of the shrine  
Of the Oracle  
of our Ancestors.  
Let us be quiet and listen:  
"Will you,  
o you  
winds,  
Stop  
your singing  
That my people  
May hear  
my words -  
Will you,  
o you darkness,  
Stop  
your breathing  
That my people  
May see  
my face -  
Will you,  
o you  
earth,  
Stop your turning  
That the child  
may know  
It is time  
to start  
moving  
In its mother's  
womb.  
Fall now to your feet  
O troubled  
people  
of mine,

And place  
your anxious ears  
To the charged earth  
and listen:  
Unto you  
shall soon  
be reborn  
The child you  
have so long  
sought.  
But it shall  
be reborn  
Only  
after great sacrifices.  
Yet  
mainly stand  
and bear the pain -  
For this shall be the drop  
That fills  
the cup,  
And sends it overflowing;  
This shall be  
the handful  
Of wind  
that downs  
the kite  
Bringing to an end  
some sad  
song;  
This shall be  
the spark  
That sets  
ablaze  
the bush,  
Unveiling  
for man  
And the blade  
of his hoe,  
The long concealed face  
Of the earth;  
This shall be  
the blade  
of glass  
That breaks the  
camel's back;  
This shall be  
the cut  
That fells  
the stubborn  
tree  
That had long  
defied  
The call  
of the cutlass

To step aside  
from the middle  
Of the narrow path;  
This shall be  
the watch  
That ends  
the night,  
Placing you  
at the start  
Of another  
day,  
Placing  
at the open door  
Of your eyes  
heart and feet,  
A new sun,  
desires  
and paths.  
When the babe  
starts  
Chanting  
in the womb,  
You shall hear  
its song  
Which will direct you  
to a spot.  
You must walk  
all the land  
Till  
you come  
to a stream,  
Which you  
shall know  
By the following sign -  
A darkness  
as dark  
As the blackness  
of charcoal  
Will hang  
over this piece  
Of land,  
And the waters  
of the stream  
Will be black  
and white.  
While waiting  
by this stream  
till  
the child  
Itself shall leave  
the womb,  
Gather into a  
heap,  
these things:

# Genocide or War?

## A BIAFRAN ACCUSES

### Henry Nzegwu

Three stones  
from the foot  
Of the Kilimanjaro  
mountain,  
The eye of cat  
and tail of snake,  
The heart of lion  
and hair of ant,  
The beak of canary  
and skin of  
Elephant  
The feather of eagle  
and bone  
Of tiger  
The stem of white  
colanut tree,  
And over this heap  
pour these:  
The egg of hen  
and blood of  
"Crocodile,  
The waters  
from the Volta  
And the Nile,  
The sands  
from the Sahara  
and Kalahari;  
Then sit  
the mother  
on the heap -  
While waiting  
For the child  
to leave  
the womb,  
The mother  
will bleed  
heavy  
Onto the heap.  
Every hamlet  
shall be exalted  
And the stream  
shall regain  
Its breath -  
All your forest  
shall be replanted,  
Every bird  
shall have its nest;  
Every alley  
shall be rechartered -  
And your rains  
shall fall to earth;

All your seeds  
shall grow  
To multiply -  
And your fields  
shall fertile lie;  
Your stars  
above  
Shall be remembered -  
When we share  
your stick  
and stone.  
When the child  
leaves  
the womb,  
It will look  
at the heap  
And tears  
shall leave  
its eyes  
Onto the heap,  
enflaming it  
Then shall the tongue  
of the fire  
Rise upwards  
and suddenly  
Lick away the darkness  
Leaving  
only white doves  
In the blue sky  
over the blue world,  
As if the moon  
were above -  
But this day  
you shall  
Celebrate  
Only  
as a day  
of rebirth -  
For this child  
has known  
This world  
before -  
And shall simply  
be returning  
Through  
your womb -  
therefore  
You shall simply  
give it a name  
After itself: AFRICA."

Greed and not unity, genocide not war, is what is involved in the Nigerian conflict. Reports after reports have been pouring in from independent reporters who have visited Biafra recently. All of them talk about the genocidal overtones of the conflict. Yet the world is silent and thereby acquiescing to genocide. Hitler was the first ruler to use genocide on a minority but the world reacted indifferently by saying that it was Germany's domestic affair. It took the world more than twenty years after Hitler's disappearance to pass a resolution that after all, genocide should not be an internal affair. Britain and Russia endorsed the resolution.

Today, history is repeating itself in West Africa and the same indifference is maintained by the world. One wonders why two big powers with ideological differences (one democratic, the other communist) swallow their political differences, defy world opinion, and work closely together for the extermination of a small nation like Biafra. The two big powers in the struggle are communist Russia and so-called democratic Britain - a second-rate power. The third power in what will later be known as the "Scramble for Biafra" is Egypt.

One wonders why the big powers are now reversing the course of history and are trying to kill an ant with a machine-gun. The answer lies in one main point. And that is, that Biafra is too rich to be left alone. In this context therefore, it is not a waste to kill an ant with a machine-gun. The wealth is in the ant's hole. Perhaps the economic cure of the big power's disease lies in the total annihilation of Biafra by the big powers for indirect rule through Nigeria.

Biafra seems to be saying to the big powers like Naboth in the bible, "The Lord forbid it me that I give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee". And Nigeria like an agent seems to be telling the big powers, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive but dead".

From Biafra reports of indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets flow in from countless villages. At Onitsha, the Biafran commercial and educational centre, a whole village and buildings were completely razed to the ground. Seventy-two people were said to have died in a single day, in a raid on the famous Onitsha market popularly known as "OTU". The casualties include pregnant women and children. At Awgu (another industrial centre), Oji River (Biafra's main electricity headquarters), Afikpo, Nnewi, Aba, Awka, Abagana, Umuahia, Owerri and many other towns in Biafra came similar reports. The most popular targets are the hospitals, schools, refugee camps and churches. Evidence from the victims reveals napalm and dangerous gases.

But no report is as pathetic as the bombing of the



And there shall be a new voice  
To sing a new song  
And a glass shall show a new face  
Where once appeared  
The old.

There shall be footsteps  
Fresh, free  
To echo down a road  
Where now lies  
A path of stones and thorns  
You tread.

They shall come  
These children of tomorrow  
Wearing the mantle of freedom  
Which their sires  
Have sewn.

You made it with your skin-  
Your bones for a needle  
And sinews for a  
Thread - ?  
He will not know that  
Or  
Knowing will not care  
For  
You cared  
When through  
The village dust and sweat  
You dragged  
Your father's treasured best?

Do not murmur  
And do not cry.  
Yours is to fight and win.  
And he the child  
From his mansion  
Whose walls are sweet with the salt  
Of your tears  
Shall show his -  
Face-  
Black?

But then there shall be Joy.

Ask not how or  
Why-  
Was he not fathered by the brave  
And the brave are men  
And man begets man?  
They shall rejoice  
These children of the morrow  
They shall rejoice

AMA ATA AIDOO

For theirs shall be  
The mantle of freedom  
Sewn  
With your  
Blood  
And  
The marrow of your bones.

1964



Sissie,  
Do you remember when  
Grandfather severed a leg in 1867  
Climbing palm-trees  
So the machines in Manchester  
Would not die for lack of oil?

That was before  
Sitting Bull had to stand for  
The shafts to sink into Cherokee country.

And now,  
They say in order that  
Mrs Smith can do the season's baking,  
Some arms  
Should go to  
Cape Town after all.

But you and I are too precious to die.

And meanwhile,  
I hold a sherry glass in my hand  
Eating shit for a shilling  
Which is not there.

But, wake me early, Sissie,  
When the drums roll.

And if before then  
A splinter from a shell meant for another  
Should pierce my head,  
Gather up my brain for a christmas pudding to  
Texas.

1968



We rose with early fires  
smoking, doubtful  
while the child cried.  
Holding dreams by the edges  
from across the night  
some men went out of our lives.

They flung hearts and thoughts  
last spears before defeat  
through the vast despair  
said they'd meet us there  
at the other fringe where  
blood distils to droplets  
of forgiveness.

Some left at noon. We yawned  
moulding mud by the riverbanks.  
No one asked: They left before  
the haystacks and the beer.

From every point where humans grow  
they went, nurses of the single pulse  
while the world's rhythm falters  
and the age gutters.

We read a silent epitaph  
and hold out memory.

Impaled, faint on neon lights  
of self-forgiving wealth  
I hear their skeletons  
whisper in the urban wind.

Fragments of their faith  
wash shoreward with the waves  
when we wait weightless on the winds  
counting regrets.

What shall we say  
when the fur-lined judges come  
on ermined city streets  
where women coil along  
the fibres of desire?

Who will say this way  
they went to find the soul of man,  
Here, that year, so long ago?  
Perhaps one or two that go  
while crosses whiten  
in the storms of memory.

Can I say I care  
to meet them there  
at the dream edge of despair?



M. C. L.

In the aimless emptiness  
a spark flared  
and moved incessantly  
careless of its own extinction.

I cup my hand,  
vainly  
trying to shelter  
a dimming image,  
trying to rekindle a flickering reflection.

Why? Memories separate themselves  
Slow into isolated strips  
Dissolve in the frames of old photographs:  
you did not hold with them.  
Hopes, twisting and crushing the living moment,  
you rightly hated.  
That private world, firing momentarily  
from separate fears and anger,  
has died a half-death.  
It would be less cruel  
to finish the work  
somehow.

Yet those still hopes and memories,  
that interpenetrating consciousness of self,  
floats in, slow and cold.  
Or you sit  
opposite me  
like a conscience  
or a partner in some insane joke.  
We scowl or laugh furtively  
and I creep away into death  
or leap into beautiful macabre mimicry.

This lifespan stretching all around  
with phantoms moving in it  
cannot be filled.  
Things are too still and sure  
there is no gasping  
no tenseness  
no sudden soar or plunge.  
There is no looking-glass  
no antithesis  
no sharp scaring of the soul  
There is no reason to hate death  
but none to seek it.

Filled . . . . only for a moment  
as you filled it  
but in an ecstasy of pain, not joy:  
in a blaring phrase of music  
a rough, drawn-out chord over a hard beat

vivid colours on a screen  
a back arching under me  
only as the pen flows or a warm laugh  
crackles in the air.  
Filled with these small immediacies  
compulsively;  
only by joy and anger  
thrusting out of a galling centre.

Is it how you felt too?  
Were there looming shapes to flee from?  
Is that why you lived so exquisitely  
balanced on the point of a moment?  
And did you fall, like Icarus,  
only when the intense gathering of your spirit  
dissipated in hopes and memories?

It will help  
to believe that;  
It will help  
to fire another spark  
perhaps.



DENNIS BRUTUS.

Here by the pool my scarred ungainly body shrinks,  
by blue glass depths, kittenish tinkling ripples  
I cool my parched rigid spirit  
with anticipations of champagne.

To lift this once, the foaming goblet  
in harsh joy, bright, brittle, unbending as glass  
while in serene patches of the scraggly well-loved grass  
in a loneliness desperate and vast  
as shooting-star scatterings in glaucous space  
for this one guest at least  
they thrust down a mute vacant glass.

Shatter underfoot  
in a weaving of sorrow and joy  
nuptial and lamentation,  
the pitiful unprotesting glass  
reciting the ambivalent prothalamium:

"If I forget those, O Jerusalem  
where by sad waters I sit down remembering"

let the glass-hard longing, anger, pain  
shimmer and seintillate awhile,  
the bright drops of joy-wine gush  
while the sharp bright edge of action waits  
and fury slakes her thirst a space.

Celebrate  
the fierce joy of victory  
and necessary wounding  
that the day may sooner come  
of our unexiling:  
of our return.

Tehran, 1968