

THE **ROAD** TO THE  
**COUNTRY**

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

BY CHIGOZIE OBIOMA

*The Road to the Country*

*An Orchestra of Minorities*

*The Fishermen*

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CHIGOZIE  
OBIOMA



MASOBE

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To Adamma, who first called me “Daadi”  
and to the memory of all who perished during the war

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The story of a war can only be fully and truly told by both the living and the dead.

—*Igbo proverb*

It is not easy to speak about Biafra—it was like the end of the world, of civilisation. Half of the population was starving, dying, and most were too weak to even care about sheltering from the war going on around them. Writers and journalists who were there, like Kurt Vonnegut, would tell you that this war was of such scale that more small weapons were used within the borders of this small country than in the Second World War! . . . If World War I produced new diseases like trench foot, this war gave us new diseases like kwashiorkor and cancrum oris. The war was the reason the French doctors who were here formed Doctors Without Borders.

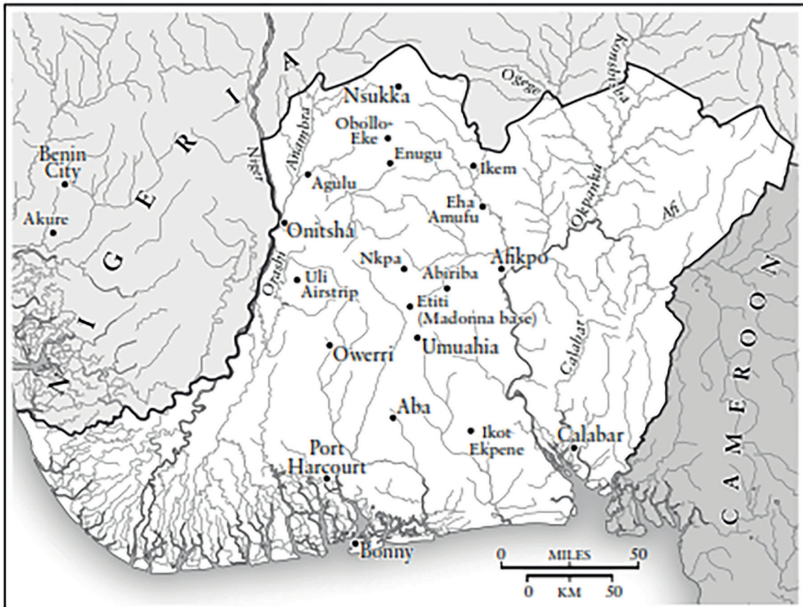
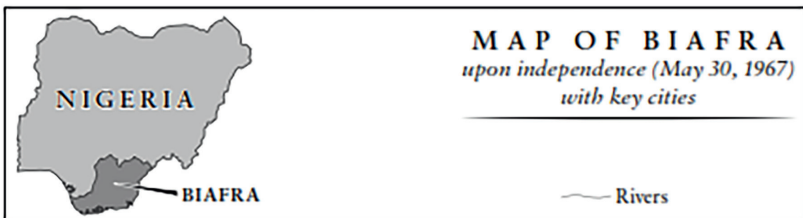
—*Anonymous*

We can only tell the story of Biafra as if it did not happen, as a speculation or riddle, or something that may yet happen—maybe as a vision, as fiction, or a prophetic warning.

—*Sergeant Isaiah Nwankwo,*  
*Biafran 39th Battalion, January 1970*

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## Cast of Characters

The following are the names of the people whom the Seer, Igbala Oludamisi, encountered in his eight-hour vision which stretched into the early hours of March 19, 1947:

### **1947—AKURE**

Igbala Oludamisi, also called “the Seer”

Tayo Oludamisi (his wife)

### **1967—AKURE**

Adekunle “Kunle” Aromire (the unborn man, subject of vision)

Tunde Aromire (his brother)

Dunni (their mother)

Gbenga (their father)

Uncle Idowu (Adekunle’s uncle)

Nkechi Agbani (friend)

### **1967—51ST BRIGADE, BIAFRA 1ST BATTALION**

Felix, also called Prof (comrade)

Bube-Orji, also called Bube (comrade)

Ndidi Agulefo, also called Fada (comrade)

Ekpeyong, also called De Young (comrade)

Major Patrick Amadi (Battalion Commander, 1st Battalion)

Brigadier Alexander Madiebo (General Officer Commanding, 51st Brigade)

Captain Irunna (Commander, D Company, 1st Battalion)

### **1968—BIAFRA 4TH COMMANDO DIVISION**

Agnes Azuka, also called Agi (comrade)

Rolf Steiner (General Officer Commanding)

James Odumodu, also called Inamin (comrade)

Taffy Williams (battalion commander)  
Lieutenant Layla (officer, Special Commando Platoon)  
Sergeant Agbam (translator for Steiner)  
Captain Emeka (second in command)  
Sergeant Wilson (platoon commander)

**1968—BIAFRA**

Chinedu Agbani (Nkechi's brother)  
Ngozika Agbani (Nkechi's sister)

**1969—BIAFRAN 12TH DIVISION, 61ST BRIGADE**

Colonel Joseph Okeke (brigade commander)

**1969—NIGERIAN RECAPTURED TERRITORY OF IKOT IKPENE**

Mobolaji Igbafe (soldier, Nigerian 3rd Marine Commando Division;  
Kunle's primary school friend)

**PART 1**

# **THE BIRTH OF THE STAR**



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THE ROAD TO the hills is tenuous in the dark. When approached in daylight, it presents itself as a straight path. At night it acquires a mystic character, appearing sinuous and much farther. But once the Seer crosses the small creek, the road becomes more distinct, glowing under the eye of the moon as if patiently waiting for him. The trees at the foot of the hills are thin and short, but their leaves—like those of all old trees—bear in them a provincial history of the universe. And now, having reached the summit of the hill, he stands in triumph. The star he has been following for much of the night has dissolved into a mosaic of colours—a bright purplish mass ringed with scattered archipelagoes of yellow and crimson. He stands under the fugitive colours of its light, teetering on the verge of tears.

The Seer unrolls the raffia mat first, then sets down the things he has brought: a silver bowl, a water-filled demijohn, an amulet of stringed cowries and snake teeth. With the weight of dreams bearing down on him, he empties the demijohn into the bowl. The water stirs, bubbles up, and settles, its dark surface creased with spots of bluish starlight. He feels an anxious thrill in his body, for he knows that he is inching closer to that moment when Ifa's vision will begin and he will bear witness to the future of the child about to be born. The Seer has done this ritual only twice before: once under the supervision of his master a decade ago, in 1937, and three years later by himself. He has come to these hills bearing the dignity of a transgressive, knowing that he seeks this vision in part to redeem himself. Since the death of his beloved wife, his life has been stripped of its purpose by grief, so that all he wants now is to someday understand what happened to her.

He clasps the amulet between his fingers and looks up at the horizon as it constricts, folding into the center where the prominent star he'd come to observe stands radiant. The star combusts in a spasm of light and falls, tracing down like a flaming spear. It comes to rest just above the hill, over the Seer's head, drowning him and the bowl in its bluish light. The Seer gasps, for he knows the meaning of this: the person whose star falls out of the sky and rises back up will be among the rarest of mankind, an *abami eda*: one who will die and return to life.

"Baba, are you seeing this?" the Seer says, pointing to the sky as if his master, dead now two years, can see it. For so long, he's been wanting to experience this galactic miracle his master had often spoken about, to bear witness to the vision of a life that will defy death. After twenty-five years of practicing astral divinations, he has beheld it.

The Seer throws the amulet into the bowl. The water bubbles, calms, the ripples spreading in a widening gyre. The Seer begins to hear voices—first distant and indistinct, as if worlds unknown and familiar are bleeding into one another from different times and planes of existence. Colours flash in his eyes as voices erupt, fade out, and rise again out of the chaos. All the while, he mutters incantations. Around him, the night thickens. Drawn by the strange light of the bowl, insects mob him, and bats flit about the surrounding trees.

The first images of the vision are grainy—like something seen through wet glass. But slowly it clears, and there appears the figure of a man in a room with a yellow bulb hanging from the ceiling by two coloured wires. He is young, dark-complexioned, with a boyish face. The man is looking out the window of the room.

As if he has slid from the old universe into the vision's new, future one, the Seer finds that he can see the same things as the unborn man in the vision. He gazes through the unborn man's eyes for a moment, transfixed, awash in the light of this yet uncreated world.