

## **Postcolonial History, Memory and the Poetic Imagination: Interrogating the “Civan” Metaphor in Joe Ushie’s *Eclipse in Rwanda*.**

James Tar TSAAIOR, Pan-African University, Nigeria

### **Abstract:**

*This paper, therefore, ploughs the furrow of postcolonial history, memory and the poetic imagination deploying the poetry of the Nigerian poet Joe Ushie. In particular, the paper negotiates the Rwandan genocide as a tragic foreground of the imperial process through its indulgent, artificial fixing of boundaries to accomplish its empire-building project in Africa. But beyond the colonial mediation in, and onslaught on, the cultures of others, the paper argues that African societies have also been complicit in their agonistic and violent history as the Rwandan genocide amply demonstrates. The paper concludes that a martial culture reminiscent of Civan, the warmonger, which manifests itself in private and especially public domains will only entrench intolerance, ethnocentrism, communal wars and violent death on the continent.*

### **Introduction**

For some time now, the negotiation and interrogation of the plethora of problems plaguing postcolonial Africa have remained the burden of African poetry and, indeed, literature and history. Indelibly inscribed within the schema of this interrogation is the overwhelming perennial concern and engagement with history and memory which, understandably, stem from the repercussions the chequered complex of problems has had— and is still having—on the continent. Africa’s postcolonial contradiction finds manifestation in political perfidy and subterfuge by a decadent political elite, economic paralysis and strangulation by a petit bourgeoisie in active collaboration with their counterparts in the metropolitan centers and a crippling social morass and moral atrophy. Much of these problems can be located in the historical contingencies of the colonial and imperial enterprise as well as the betrayals and ineptitude of the postcolonial leadership. But as Makouta-Mboukou observes, “the enemies of man are not only found outside one’s own house but also within it.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in an increasingly postmodernist world of tremendous development in science and technology, digital and satellite communication, much of Africa continues to tell a tale whose leitmotifs are recrudescing fratricidal conflicts, genocidal wars, corruption, poverty, hunger, disease, injustice, greed, gratuitous ethnic nationalism, etc. Paradoxically, the continent is richly blessed with human, mineral and economic resources.

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<sup>1</sup> J. P. Makouta-Mboukou, “New Ecological Sources for Black Literature,” *Essays in Comparative African Literature*, Wilfried Feuser and I.N.C. Aniebo (eds.) (Lagos: CBAAC, 2001), p. 73, pp. 64-79.

This paradox is what Femi Ojo-Ade calls a “corpus of contradictions.”<sup>2</sup>

Jidefor Adibe articulates this paradox which defines Africa and is complicit in the generation of crises and conflicts with external propelling exigencies thus:

No continent is pulled in as many directions and often conflictual directions as Africa. It is the continent where different countries, and even nationalities within countries, are sharply divided, and sometimes defined by emotive external allegiances. Hence, we have Anglophone Africa, Francophone Africa, Lusophone Africa, Arab Africa, Bantu Africa, Christian Africa, Islamic Africa, Diaspora Africa etc.<sup>3</sup>

It is this warped state of affairs that has provided the impetus for many African writers— and in this case poets—who feel sufficiently concerned to appropriate public space to valorize a continent’s ignoble condition and unebbing tide of adversities.

### **Joe Ushie and the “Civan” Metaphor**

The “Civan” metaphor is a veritable trope which idealizes the overweening gravitation or proclivity to war and conflict in Africa. As such, it celebrates and promotes martial confrontation among communities, ethnic nationalities and nation-states. It espouses to the condition of, and imperative for, communal conflicts, social unrests, political instability, and economic despoliation. It is an obsession which turns war and conflict into a pastime or vortex. The metaphor, therefore, represents the propensity to war and communal conflict - quite often for their sake - which much of Africa has been embroiled in and has become synonymous with. The trope is derivable from Civan, a man from Utange clan in southern Tiv country in Nigeria’s Middle Belt Region who was a mercenary extraordinaire, and around whom there exists a historically verifiable narrative concerning his martial prowess and lust for blood.

Civan mistakenly killed himself when he drew his mythical, rusty sword from its sheath with characteristic anger. The sword was too close to his throat and the sword severed it. This has entered Tiv loric tradition and people now say: “You have killed yourself like Civan.” However, to be charitable to Civan, he never turned his sword against his community as many African politicians do. It is within this belligerent trope and agonistic schema that we situate the discursive interrogation of war and conflict in the

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<sup>2</sup> Femi Ojo-Ade, “The Black Man’s Burden: Christianity in Black African Fiction,” *Essays in Comparative African Literature*, p. 127, pp. 125-156.

<sup>3</sup> Jidefor Adibe, “Africa: Cursed by History?,” *African Renaissance*, Vol. 2, No. 6, November/December (2005), p. 6.

African poetic imagination through the motions of history and memory archives using the poetry of the Nigerian, Joe Ushie.

Joe Ushie, a Nigerian poet and scholar, who is engaged in both academic circles and in the public domain form the centre-piece of his poetic *oeuvre* as he stands unswervingly for the cause of justice, equity, fairness and the protection of the people's constitutional rights and freedoms in Nigeria.

*Eclipse in Rwanda*, Ushie's one of great collection of poems, belongs to the African tradition in verse which focuses on the role of history and memory in shaping collective consciousness, the raging issue of war and conflict and the self-humiliation and self-annihilation that has enveloped postcolonial Africa. The collection is a strident and poignant statement in condemnation of the wanton pogrom of genocidal magnitude that Rwanda suffered in 1994 and is an insightful commentary on the complicit role of history and memory in the genocide. The debacle was between the Hutu and the Tutsi of Rwanda. Within the time the slaughter lasted, more that 800,000 people, mainly Tutsi but also moderate Hutu, fell victim of the war. Such conflicts, to Mohamed, are "inevitable so long as material and social resources are unequally distributed."<sup>4</sup>

But this title is a gross understatement as the eclipse is not restricted to the Rwanda geographical space. Ushie's effort is an eloquent testament to the specter of death that persistently haunts a continent under siege and the savage sway of murderers and vampires who lust insatiably for blood. Blood has, indeed, become a veritable metaphor for postcolonial Africa which is embroiled in cataclysmic wars with the self: Angola, Algeria, Burundi, Congo D.R., Ethiopia-Eritrea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, and in this perspective Rwanda. This paper, therefore, deplores the lust for blood and interrogates the culture of death which has become entrenched on the continent deploying Ushie's poetry particularly *Eclipse in Rwanda*.

### **History, Memory and the Rwandan Crisis**

The socio-political and cultural precipitants of the Rwandan crisis and much of the Great Lakes region which also include countries like Burundi, DR Congo, Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, Malawi, Central African Republic and Zambia, can be located in the violent historical and cultural project of imperialist and colonialist Europe and its empire-building machinations. Various European nations dismembered Africa and other peripheral lands in the great scramble for and partition of Africa through military aggression and established territorial control and epistemological over-lordship over these spheres of influence using the Berlin conference of 1884-85. The peoples of the Great Lakes region were indiscriminately massed in artificial nations without regard to their ethnic configurations and cultural constellations as in the case of the Hutu and Tutsi found in both Rwanda and Burundi. This ethnic heterogeneity and the manipulative policies of the colonial authorities soon caused mounting tension among the

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Mohamed, "Shame Culture and Inter-Group Conflicts: Experiences from Sudan," *Journal of Cultural Studies* 5.1 (2003), p. 68, pp. 68-86.

ethnic groups which have continued to reverberate into the present long after colonialism.

These conglomerations of populations, Femi Osofisan corroborates were “formed by colonial fiat from disparate ethnic groups and rival kingdoms.”<sup>5</sup> Hence they lacked that coherent center and national ethos for the formation of viable nationhood. Related to this was the divide and rule strategy the Belgian colonial authorities devised to administer the territory. This policy favored the minority Tutsi whom the Belgians entrusted with political leadership while the majority Hutu were consigned to work for the former. This ethnic hierarchy which superimposed one ethnic group on another was soon to aggravate the ethnic tensions that were already simmering or smoldering waiting for the opportune moment to erupt. According to Oshita,

During the 20th century, the Belgian colonization of Rwanda tended towards a reinforcement of the existing hierarchy in the socio-political system. The Belgians perceived the indicators of potential conflict in the system, and engaged their missionaries to preach submission. . . .<sup>6</sup>

The immediate cause of the Rwandan genocide was the assassination of the late president, Juvenal Habyarimana, of the majority Hutu by elements in the army from the Tutsi ethnic minority. This complex power politics had characterized Rwandan history since pre-colonial times but became more pronounced during the colonial and postcolonial eras and became a veritable product of the retrieval of historical memory for settling contemporary political scores. Enraged Hutu militias waged a war of ethnic liquidation against the Tutsi and moderate Hutu in 1994 following the assassination on the suspicion of continued Tutsi domination. This suspicion was no doubt nurtured and sustained by Hutu collective historical consciousness and memory of their domination by the Tutsi minority. The apprehension located in a history of domination inevitably played a decisive role in shaping prevailing realities in Rwanda but also in Burundi and much of the Great Lakes Region. According to Crawford Young, “When cultural communities collectively perceive serious threats to communal status in the political environment, group solidarity tends to increase.”<sup>7</sup>

This was what occurred in the Rwandan crisis. The events leading to the genocide were orchestrated and received their Hutu justification and legitimacy not just from the assassination of Habyarimana but from a

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<sup>5</sup> Femi Osofisan, *Literature and the Pressures of Freedom* (Ibadan: Opon Ifa Readers, 2001), p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> Oshita O. Oshita, “The Tutsis and the Hutus: The Unending Indigenous Wars in the Great Lakes Region,” *Current Viewpoint*, 3:1 & 2 (2001), p. 44-45, pp. 43-47.

<sup>7</sup> Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 161.

colonial history that conferred exclusive prerogatives of political leadership in the hands of the Tutsi minority. The Hutu who saw their claim to political leadership after a long period of Tutsi hegemony thwarted with the assassination of their kinsman felt it was time to evoke and invoke history and memory to settle the historical injustice. The machinery of ethnic hate and cleansing went berserk. The new media became an indispensable weapon in the prosecution of the offensive as the state media, especially the electronic media was employed to fan the already festering ethnic hostilities. The Hutu metaphorized the Tutsi as cockroaches that did not deserve to live. The deployment of the new media in the shaping of memory and historical consciousness demonstrates the many ways in which new technologies possess the power to influence contemporary historical realities. The bloodbath which followed became known as the Rwandan genocide around which Ushie's volume is based.

The universe of the collection has a tripartite structure. The first: "Rays of Tears" houses twenty-five poems; the second: "Village Voices" has six while the third symbolically christened "Echoes from the Silent" hosts eight poems. Although these explore seemingly varying and disparate subject matters, they are nevertheless organically linked conferring the collection with thematic harmony and structural coherence. The collection enacts a self-critical and self-interrogative poetic discourse that radically negotiates Africa's post-colonial experience defined by fratricidal wars and pogroms. Ushie's cardinal argument is that for Africa to transcend these rites of self-annihilation and arrested development, an alternative strategy of self-purgation and destruction of the war (Civan) instinct must be employed.

The most venomous barbed statement of the collection can be found in the first part. In the opening poem, "Song of Sisyphus," the poet assumes the Sisyphian figure and appropriates his song in lamentation of the catalogue of harrowing and purgatorial experiences ranged against "our black race and its kamikaze race" which is "headed for West, for waste."<sup>8</sup> Here, the poet implicates history and its conspiracies through European slavery and slave trade, the colonial and imperial encounter and other western forms of political, economic and cultural permutations with profound repercussions on the black race. In the constrictive and restrictive "Shell" where the poet dwells, a conflagration has visited the land and its smoke smothers the inhabitants. This conflagration is a metaphor for the Rwandan genocide but also represents other crises the continent is experiencing. Its princes have turned leopards burying their claws in the succulent flesh of the sheep they are meant to herd, decimating them in senseless recrudescing wars. The poet questions rhetorically:

How can I change my song  
when the claws of that leopard  
on the throne are deep in the  
flesh of our sheep still  
administering a tiered death?

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<sup>8</sup> Joe Ushie, *Eclipse in Rwanda* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1998), p. 12.

How can I change my song  
when the cursed hands of  
our gods of war have turned  
their swords on our throats. . .?<sup>9</sup>

Ushie's magisterial poetic submission is that it is the rulers metaphorized as leopards and imbued with the Civan spirit of war that have plunged Africa, the shell in which he finds himself, in an endless cycle of war, conflict and death. Against this backdrop, the poet viscerally avows that he will not change his song "until the cock pays its terminal toll to nature" and will "sing same song life long"<sup>10</sup> until these atrocities are stopped. The repetitive mention of "I will sing" underscores the urgency and immediacy of the song and the poet's committed duty to denounce the decadent rulership preying on the people.

"Manna fall" dilates this thematic preoccupation of the privileged elite in Africa who have ensconced and entrenched themselves in power and erected a dynasty of greed, oppression and repression of the marginalized majority, and are instigating wars and conflicts to sustain their hold on power. Punning on the word "fall" which simultaneously signifies descending to earth and inadequacy or insufficiency, the poet submits that manna still falls from the generous heavens save that some few opportune and opportunistic ones with trays "fixed high in the sky. . . BLOCK its fall" to the poor and downtrodden "here below". It is significant that block is in capital letters for emphasis but also suggesting the military aggression and force with which the blocking is executed. It is this hostile and unhealthy disposition by the elite which runs counter to social and natural justice that impoverishes the mass of the people and renders them susceptible to elitist manipulation during artificial moments of conflict and war.

In "Tale of the applicant", the poet dwells on the necessitous and precarious existence of the army of job seekers running the tide on the streets of postcolonial African capital cities. The poet states concerning the tragedy of the youths of Africa rather synecdochally:

My life wrapped in a file,  
I run the treadmill round  
these streets, a grain-  
bearing searcher for an  
oasis<sup>11</sup>.

The applicant whose life is "wrapped in a file" bears a grain in a vast desert scavenging for an oasis to sow it, an allusion to his willingness to mobilize his creative energies and regenerative potentials for the uplift of his psychically disoriented and norm less society. But strangely enough, he is denied a space. He hazards on a mansion wearing "a metal crown of thorns" on whose gate hangs gracelessly "a howl: Beware of Dog". The applicant sees both the rich owner of the magnificent architectural edifice and himself as

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.17.

mutual prisoners; "I by your greed and you, by dread of me."<sup>12</sup> The unfortunate fate of the applicant is the horn of hemlock many a youth must drain to the dregs in contemporary postcolonial Africa. It is these frustrated and pessimistic job-seekers robbed of a reassuring future that sadly constitute a ready pool of conscripts as child soldiers and "revolutionaries" for the mindless prosecution of the ethnic wars and conflicts which have become an obsession and a vortex with deleterious effects on the continent.

It is in the "eponymous" poem, "Eclipse in Rwanda" that the true complexion of the enormous problems ravaging post-colonial Africa are brought to the fore. Although the poet does not define the partiality or totality of the eclipse, it is clear that Africa, symbolized by Rwanda, is skirting precariously on the precincts of a yawning abyss with the rising tide of sanguinary wars and woes waged by brothers against brothers. In these communal destructive cataclysms, "hew man" flesh of ebony-black moulds wear "man-crafted death". The entire physical space of farmlands is "ploughed by missiles" while vultures, a metaphor for foreign collaborators, financiers, mercenaries and other sinews of war- vigilantly "guard their fortune"<sup>13</sup> of blood money and mineral resources in the safety of living abroad. It is a fact of history that the colonization of Rwanda and other parts of Africa by the Europeans was for the exploitation of mineral resources, farm products for the metropolitan industries during the industrial revolution and for markets for the finished products. It is this historical fact that the poet foregrounds in this poem.

Employing a new historicist perspective of the Rwanda imbroglio and that of the entire Great Lakes region, Oshita Oshita implicates the politics of cultural and ethnic pluralism, irresponsible and irresponsive governments, the violence of colonial history and the involvement of foreign concerns in the mineral resources in the region. He states rather elaborately:

The indigenous war between the Tutsis and Hutus in the Great Lakes region, more than anything else, has internationalized ethnicity as a vehicle of conflict generation and sustenance. The ethnic content of the crisis in the Great Lakes Region accounts for the passion with which the entire conflict is being prosecuted. Fundamental to the crisis is the invocation of primordial sentiments by the Hutus and Tutsis, sentiments uncritically passed down from generation to generation. The political economy of the Tutsi-Hutu conflict in the Great Lakes region shows that the indigenous wars are propelled primarily by a combination of intolerance and leadership failure in the Central Africa region as a whole.<sup>14</sup>

He further states on the irresponsibility of successive regimes and the clandestine involvement of foreign governments and multinationals:

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>14</sup> Oshita, p.46.

Most authorities in the region have found a convenient diversion from the need for good governance, and are preoccupied with extirpating rival ethnic elements. The external actors—US, France, Belgium, the multi-nationals, and other proxies—have continued to enjoy the illegal business in solid minerals in an environment of unequal exchange. In all these, underdevelopment and increased instability remain the constants.<sup>15</sup>

The specter of underdevelopment, hostility and instability has been haunting the region inexorably with the indigenous black population threatened with systematic self-decimation. Painfully enough, the decomposing bodies hosting flies to feasts, according to Ushie, are black and not white which bespeaks the communal annihilation of the black brotherhood. The poet states pithily:

See those ebony-black moulds  
wearing flies as cerements.  
See the innocent child urging the fallen  
mother to rise and go, for it's night fall.  
See that youth perforated by man-crafted  
death.  
See the farm lands ploughed by missiles.<sup>16</sup>

There is a binary opposition constructed between the color “black” and “white” referring to two racial categories, though united in the rape and violation of a continent. The victims are blacks who are casualties of the sanguinary conflagrations. But transcendent to this, the victims of this “Civan” consciousness and penchant are usually the weak and poor, mostly innocent children, the youth and women who are subjected to serial rape and the undermining and hyphenation of their very humanity. Importantly too, farmlands are desecrated, triggering famine and death, the present condition that has assailed much of the Great Lakes region.

In the same vein, those “hemp-eyed drunkards” and the veritable vultures who precipitated such debacles, in the first instance, are sheltered from them on “foreign trees” (foreign capitals), leaving the hapless and innocent majority as the victims. The poet rails the gods for shirking their inalienable responsibility of shielding the people from such misfortunes. But when the poet urges the belligerent combatants to fight on for more lands, ethnocentric rights and space in the words,

Fight, Batutu, fight!  
Fight Watusi, fight!  
Fight for more lands  
Fight for more rights  
Fight for more space  
Fight brothers, fight. <sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Ushie, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-24.



we know that he is at his ironic best. Ushie retrieves the history of tension, conflict and war which has defined the relations between the Hutu and the Tutsi in Rwanda and which culminated in the 1994 genocide. With this unwholesome situation, the poet in "Peace talk" cynically deplores the imperative of reconciliation during airport and conference ceremonies. To him, true and enduring peace commences at justice and that the semantics of peace are meaningless to the homeless, the hungry and the eaten as to them such peace talks are a smokescreen to whitewash the incendiary dispositions of the warlords and their factions.

But in this miry situation of chaos and dearth of patriotic and humane nationalists, there are some illustrious few who stake their pride and lives for the cause of justice, equality and the general reorientation of society in all ramifications. "For Gani" is a poem cast in the mould. There is an impressive monumental roll which mentions Gani, the Nigeria radical lawyer, moral and social crusader in the ranks of other leaders and thinkers such as Galileo, Socrates, Guevera, Ortega and Mandela who lent voices to the silences of the masses on the margins and sought to ameliorate and rehabilitate the condition of otherness foisted on the *hoi polloi*. Mandela, particularly, has been described as representing "not just the best of Africa but the best of humanity" (*NewsAfrica*, 4). These venerable statesmen are not only humanistic in their disposition but do not think in one direction: towards themselves like the average African politician. In the words of Nkeonye Otakpor concerning the promotion of a humanistic and welfarist ethos,

The creation, maintenance, sustenance and promotion of the human interests and welfare is a categorical imperative. Indeed, in the absence of this devotion individual life as well as that of a community will be in jeopardy. For this reason, the creation, maintenance, sustenance, protection and promotion of human interests and welfare is an ontological commitment.<sup>18</sup>

One defining character of the struggle by these populist and progressive souls is to enable and ennoble the mass of the people through collective effort that will enhance their humanity, unity and cohesion against the fragmentation of the (post)modern state, what Louis Althusser characterizes as its "ideological state apparatuses". Anthony Giddens (1999) comments on the first dilemma that confronts the progressive forces in the modern situation:

The first dilemma is that of unification versus fragmentation. Modernity fragments; it also unites. On the level of the individual right up to that of planetary systems as a whole, the tendencies towards dispersal vie with those promoting integration. . . the problem of

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<sup>18</sup> Nkeonye Otakpor, "Being Human," *Current Viewpoint* 3: 1&2 (2001), p. 3, pp. 3-11.

unification concerns protecting and reconstructing the narrative of self-identity in the face of the massive intensional and extensional changes which modernity sets into being.<sup>19</sup>

It is this dilemma between unification and fragmentation in the (re)invention of ethnic identity and nationhood that partly orchestrated the Rwandan crisis and that of the entire Great Lakes region.

In what looks like a revolutionary situation Vladimir Lenin talks about in *The State and the Revolution*, the poem martially titled “Volcano” constructs a radical and revolutionary world as the mutually antagonistic and irreconcilable relations between the Manichean classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed cannot continue inexorably. Thus, “THIS NOON,” the poet proclaims:

    this no man’s  
    hill standing here in  
    silent surrender can erupt. . .

    The fiery flood, its tensed,  
    ill-tempered muscles, will push past  
    palaces of princes, kings. . .

    there will be a volcano here at this  
    unknown hill this noon,<sup>20</sup>

a volcano will erupt violently and in its virulence and fury bath the society of the opulent in its lava and drain it of the avalanche of mess and debris and purge the land. Apocalyptic in theme and eschatological and millenarian in vision, this poem suggests the inauguration of a new dawn after the protracted or drawn dynasty of darkness. It is, therefore, a flicker of hope and excites an upsurge of optimism in the harassed and harried populace to inscribe themselves in the fabric and texture of the society.

The landscape of “Village Echoes”, the second part of the collection, is reminiscently bucolic or idyllic but with a strong and pungent message. It evokes a space whose socio-cultural canvas is littered with images of poverty and deprivation—conditions which are fertile for war and conflict—as in the poem, “Song of the orphan” whose pathetic song surges waves of empathy for his human condition in the reader. The orphan has been “stung by life’s wasps” in a “weird world” inhabited by an “ill omen hanging the dog skin bag.”<sup>21</sup> The unenviable situation of this orphan who is blamed rather than complimented for whatever exploits he executes including flaying an ant’s skin, pulling hair from the palm and the capture of a live lion, is

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<sup>19</sup> Anthony Giddens, “Modernity and Self-Identity: Tribulations of the Self,” *The Discourse Reader*, Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland (eds.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 416, pp. 415-427.

<sup>20</sup> Ushie, pp. 28-29.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

symptomatic of the fate of many orphans in African societies whose parents have been casualties of wars and other communal debacles.

“To a head hunter” is a cautionary note to the rich and the powerful who assume supremacist airs and are under the illusion that every other person or thing is subject to them. This particular poem yields a tissue of meanings because of its elasticity of signification. But specifically, its message is directed to those who occupy positions of leadership in society but rather pander to their egocentric ends to the detriment and neglect of their people. Such selfish head hunters who prey on the lives of the people will soon become preys themselves. In an Afrocentric temperament, the poet deplors this attitudinal tendency towards the self by African rulers and recommends the alternative of a communalistic ethos which binds rather than severs and individuates. It is this elitist selfishness and gross greed that occasions poverty and other privations which, inevitably, culminates in war and conflict.

“Echoes from the silent,” the third part of the collection, exhumes the traditional thematic concern of the poet and, indeed, artist as the vate and defender of his people and enters a statement on the role of the artist as the mouthpiece and custodian of his society. Because art, as Ngugi reminds us in *Homecoming*, does not thrive in a void but is given existence by the panoply of socio-political, economic, cultural and other historical conditions surrounding it, it cannot but be necessarily reflective of the realities in the society (xv). As such, it is the sociality and functionality of art that confer on it that sense of relevance as any work of art cast in the hue of asociality ultimately veers off the lane of authenticity and launches itself in a crisis of relevance. This is also the argument of Achebe in *Hopes and Impediments*, a collection of critical essays that negotiates the post-colonial African condition with its hopes and the formidable impediments posed by Euro-America and Africans.

His language, deceptively simple but pregnant with signification, also incorporates lexical items from his indigenous tongue. Words like “Keki-ulong,” a creature with an unusual life history and fate, “Kekimlikwu”, a shrub of medicinal value with a stunted growth; “Ashilisa,” traditional bowls fabricated from clay and “likelegedie,” which are seasonal birds and forerunners of the harmattan, evoke a cosmogonic traditional Africa world which has shaped the poet and his voice. But beyond this, it is also a world defined by an egalitarian and communalistic ethos with in-built mechanisms for the management, resolution and prevention of violent conflicts and wars which have become synonymous with a continent in the throes of war, crisis and arrested development. These conflicts usually got resolved in those days through societal mechanisms without necessary resort to the horrendous military option used today.

A picturesque imagery laces Ushie’s poetry. In the first place, eclipse which informs the title suggests a “conspiracy” by celestial bodies which cause (partial) darkness on earth. This creates a mental picture in the reader about the enormity of the post-colonial African situation where Africa has been thrown into dense darkness by a traitorous and treacherous political leadership. Through the deployment of figurative language, the poet

delineates a landscape which Abdul JanMohamed characterizes as “Manichean,” relieved in the binary opposition of leopards and sheep, (a predator-prey relationship), giant trees and shrubs, vultures and cocks, mansions and huts, among others. Through this binarist schemata in a terrain of hills and valleys with pockets of plenty and vast poverty, the poet brings to the fore the lopsidedness that warps human relationships in our world which marginalizes, oppresses and represses the majority of its population and depletes it through senseless wars and conflicts. Thus, a mood or atmosphere of uneasy calm pervades the collection. This subterranean tension finally erupts in the volcano, a symbol of a revolutionary vanguard that will inaugurate new, far reaching changes in society. This volcanic eruption is anticipated and when it occurs, we are not taken aback.

### **Conclusion**

*Eclipse in Rwanda* valorizes the condition of an embattled society undergoing the throes of transformation from the fringes to the core of life amidst the stupefying odds ranged against it. The collection beams with effervescent hope for a new beginning since the eclipse, from all indications, is not total and the sun will radiate its healing, iridescent rays on a world in stygian darkness. The volume peaks significantly at two points: it combines thematic appropriateness and a searing vision in the navigation of the murky waters that Africa, in her post-colonial condition, is fatally plunged into. It intensely interrogates the “Civan principle” which is irredeemably dedicated to war and conflict in Africa and advocates the alternative paradigm of harmonious and peaceful co-existence for African progress and development. Ushie has impressively distilled from history and memory the requisite raw materials for the articulation of his poetic message. He has called to service his poetic imagination and sensibility in negotiating and interrogating the Rwandan and, indeed, African condition.

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