

Eclipse in Rwanda as Remembering in Psychosocial Poetics of Trauma

Onyekachi Onuoha

Correspondence: Onyekachi Onuoha, Assistant lecturer, Department of English and literary Studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria. Email: onyekachidara@gmail.com

Received: July 16, 2019

Accepted: September 9, 2019

Online Published: September 9, 2019

doi:10.5430/elr.v8n3p25

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/elr.v8n3p25>

Abstract

Trauma exists in a synthetic mode of the referential and this is the underlying temperament in *Eclipse in Rwanda*. The genocide that is chronicled in the narratives of the Nigerian Civil war as recreated in Joe Ushie's *Eclipse in Rwanda* foreshadows the pogrom in the mid 90s. Using Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma as a theoretical framework, this paper examines *Eclipse in Rwanda* as remembering in psychosocial poetics of trauma. This paper further explicates *Eclipse in Rwanda* as a text of memory, which poetically captures the trauma and foreshadows the social construction of natives/ non-natives in Africa at large and in Nigeria in particular. Through the poems analysed in this paper, our findings show that Tutsis' genocide is a poetic fulcrum for the poet to pensively recall the Nigerian Civil War and other hotspots/ narratives of politically motivated violence against fellow citizens. *Eclipse in Rwanda* attempts to entrench the memories of the dead in us through the poetics of remembering and by so doing indict the collective consciences of the society.

Keywords: trauma, genocide, memory, foreshadow, poetics, Rwanda, Nigeria, referential, joe ushie

1. Introduction

The art of remembering in psychosocial poetic is a literary litigation against the power that be and those who have misused the said power to the detriment of others in the society. It questions praise singing that has remodeled the images of murders through the narratives of power and appropriates history of trauma to interrogate such images thereby seeking justice through erecting memorials for those killed by dictatorial powers. Dauge-Poth (2010) alludes to this that "...the most effective way to avoid the recurrence of genocide tragedy is to ensure that past acts of genocide are never forgotten..."(46). Remembering is an art form of holding to account leaders who have in history within the framework of literature. Poth acknowledges the function of remembering as "...bearing witness to the dead through writing not only as a testimony to all that the living claim in the name of the dead" (58). It is a process of getting healing by re-entrenching the past even when it is a product of hurt and threatens the memories of those who had perpetrated this evil. It tries to redefine them in the light of what they have done within the framework of history. Cathy Caruth (1996) notes the function of remembering thus: "Through the notion of trauma...we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not" (11). This is a case for Ushie Joe's perceived silence within his art in respect to the Nigerian Civil war that arises in *Eclipse in Rwanda*. However, we would account for his silence based on fear. The persona remembering his silence notes:

If, in view of situations,
I do not throw the hook
into the spirit world to
fish you out, count me not
a failure. For, as onto a thicket
of thorns the fisherman
throws the sea-wallowing fish,
I fear and fear and fear that
you might land on these hard-
ening, metallic thorns whose

points like needles might mince
 your frail flesh, all to my mystery (22).

What this illustrates is that the fear of the power that be, has made the persona (Joe Ushie) withdraw from commenting or criticizing the cold-blooded murder of those slain in the 1966-1970 genocide in Nigeria. Joe Ushie understands the political and economic stockbrokers back in 1966 to 1970 genocide, and any attempt to have let out the truth earlier would have had it desecrated by lies. The persona is not silent forever as “trauma itself provides the very link between cultures” (11). *Eclipse in Rwanda* provides the necessary link in the culture of genocide in Africa for Joe Ushie to make a case for the slain Biafrans using Rwanda’s genocide as a reference. According to Dona Kola-Panov (1997) “war makes people highly inventive (9)” and this accounts for Joe Ushie’s inventive poetics in view of the fact that the Nigerian state has failed to acknowledge and intervene in the genocide against the people of the Eastern region. Poth observes that “...reading is a form of social witnessing” (46), writing makes the witnessing possible through artistic remembering, as it is evocative in Joe Ushie’s *Eclipse in Rwanda*. In the awakening of the persona to the function of a poet to the memory of his people, the persona says:

I’ll send you these
 lines as golden statue
 that you may, in my
 verse, forever breathe (41).

I have come to the point of acknowledging that the receipt of the poetic monument of *Eclipse in Rwanda* as a poetic referent to the Biafrans massacred in 1966 to 1970 is indeed an ethnic cleansing sponsored by the Nigerian state. This is owing to the silence of the government to the effects and commotion caused by the so-called police action against the recalcitrant eastern Nigeria. Also, the reintegration, reconciliation and restructuring moves were just white paper promises, which did not see the light of day. I am here to celebrate Joe Ushie and at the same time I have also come to acknowledge his trauma, which is found within *Eclipse in Rwanda*; by so doing those who were killed in the pogrom in his verse “might forever breathe”. *Eclipse in Rwanda* poetically chronicles what Herbert Ekwe-Kwe (2006) posits, that:

...Nigeria....Its military officers, the police, Hausa-Fulani emirs, Muslim clerics and intellectuals, civil servants, journalists, politicians and other public figures planned and executed the Igbo genocide-the foundational genocide of post (European) conquest Africa. This is also Africa’s most devastating genocide of the 20th century. A total of 3.1 million Igbo people, a quarter of the nation’s population at the time, were murdered between May 1966 and 12 January 1970 (1).

It is to this magnitude of loss to humanity that *Eclipse in Rwanda* pays tribute to. The text is a referent to something far beyond the sight of Rwanda’s genocide and resident in the persona’s organic space and finding meaning within the poetic muse that aids his artistic composition. Nigeria during the 1966 pogrom and the Rwanda genocide of 1994 are the psychological dispositions that birth the poetic collection under interrogation. This is so because the victimization of the Tutsis seems to echo in the poet’s memory the bloodcurdling conditions his people of the then Eastern region of Nigeria faced. The strength of the foregoing postulation is hinged on Larkin and Morrison’s submission in *Trauma and Psychosis* (2006) thus: “...the possible relationship between the experience of trauma (early sexual, physical and emotional abuse for the most part; although it is recognized that re-victimisation and traumatic stress in childhood are also influential) and the range of phenomena currently referred to as psychosis” (1). Chima J Korieh (2012) corroborates Ekwe-Ekwe’s submission that what happened to the Igbos within 1966 to 1970 was a genocide which most scholars are reluctant to admit and he states that:

While it is plausible to argue that there was no complete annihilation of the Igbo when they lost the war, the actions and behavior of the federal Nigeria during the war did not exclude such genocidal intent. Speeches by Northern leaders called for ethnic cleansing of the north of Igbo people. Pogroms

and mass killings of the Igbo population from a decade earlier
 leave no doubt that the war offered opportunity to implement
 a “final solution” of what was perceived as an Igbo problem (13).

The policy of genocide was at the core of the attacks against the Igbos. It is historical hypocrisy that even those who used “hunger” as an element of war would try to resist admitting the plight of the weak, hungry and starving victims as genocidal. Like Panov (1997) *Eclipse in Rwanda* make this kind of claim as a poetic extension of the poet thus: “...the only thing I could think of were images of the anonymous victims of the war, images I watch day in day out... as long as those images are so strongly present on the margins of my consciousness it would be impossible to write this book any differently” (17). This is in line with Craps (2013) conceptualization of “trauma theory...as an essential apparatus for understanding “the real world and even as a potential means for changing it for the better” (11). Through the poetics of remembering, the persona holds the perpetrators of genocide to account, thereby appeasing the memories of his people. Hammerschlag (2016) acknowledges the role of literature thus:

Literature reinstates the secret but on new ground, not as the
 site of a conventional election, a between-two that can in fact be
 betrayed, rather through an exposure to interpretation and resignification
 to a slippage in meaning by disrupting the relationship between
 agent and meaning, such that the presumed vertical relation of
 revelation is replaced by a horizontal drift (68).

This is the underlying temperament in *Eclipse in Rwanda*. The Rwandan genocide seems to exist as a metaphor for the pogrom in the East; it is psychosis that stirs the creativity of the persona to erect memorials for the victims of Nigeria in the poem. The “stressor” of his experience at childhood re-entrenches Rwanda in his memory as a synthesis of a collective trauma. This is in line with Caruth’s (1996) submission in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, thus: “One’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening another’s wound” (20). The foregoing demonstrates that the mental images of the Rwandan genocide remind the persona of his plight at home. This is buttressed by Caruth’s submission that trauma can be individual and collective as it is reflected herein. *Eclipse in Rwanda* is a collective poetic metaphor for a similar ethnic cleansing far beyond the site of the genocide in Rwanda. It is a memorial for those who were killed during the pogrom and a poetic remembering of Rwanda’s genocide. The persona is shaped by these traumatic experiences that have become a product of his psychological environment to the extent that it has shaped his speech pattern. The poet persona cannot ignore but acknowledges this when he submits that:

Quartered in this shell
 which shapes my tongue,
 how can I change my song
 when the hills burn still
 and the smoke chokes the vales?(2)

The hills in the East still burn as we observe in the just concluded python dance and crocodile dances. These dances choke the dead and the living, and at the same time motivate and inspire the poet persona to stick to his song. The pogrom, which was perpetrated against the East by the Nigerian state, was not just a historical vindictive act against the Igbos it was an action carried out against other ethnic extractions of the East in which given their political identity would not be allowed to be classified as Igbos. The pogrom was not just an ethnic cleansing carried out against the East it involve others who became victims as a result of faulty political classification as Igbos. This act of victimisation finds residence in the minds of those who experienced it. The persona is a young boy of nine in 1967(given his sixty years at present). He may have had several gory sights of destructions of lives and property, which may have in one way, or the other traumatized him till date.

In the “Song of Sisyphus” the persona asks a rhetorical question thus: “How can I change my son” (12). This illustrates the poetic repetition of the persistent nature of trauma within the psychology of the poet persona as it remembers the recurrent injustices of the African society. The poet metaphorically uses the “Sahara” to represent the despotic African leaders and their accompanies who still “shaves the clan’s beard” and “...plays cruel games with

our huts and no one ask why? (12). The poet unconsciously writes himself into the trauma of the people when he uses “our” as an inclusive concept for him and his people. Through his poetic lines, the poet persona questions the collective silence that has aided and abetted different forms of killing clothed in high-sounding lexicons. The *Eclipse in Rwanda* has become a poetic questioning of the complicity and silence by the international communities in the wake of various ethnic cleansings in the world. Consequently, *Eclipse in Rwanda* is a poetic questioning of the machinery of government and how these gears have piloted the affairs of previous administrations. The poet uses metaphoric refrain imbued with rhetorical question to advance the verses of his poetic narrative. Thus he inquires thus:

How can I change my song
when the claws of that leopard
on the throne are deep in the
flesh of our clan’s sheep still
administering tiered death? (12).

The poet persona pictures Rwanda through the metaphor of personifying victimhood within the African state, remembering those who have been massacred by various government-assisted commissioning of ethnic cleansing in Africa and Nigeria. *The use of “leopard” is to highlight administrative indecisiveness in respect to endangered ethnic groups in Rwanda and in Nigeria* (please revise this). It demonstrates lip service paid by various administrations to address and protect the vulnerable within their nation state. The African leadership as indicated by various wars fought on African soil is likened to the leopard who administers death to the helpless masses (who are preys, which the predatory leopard feasts on). This is a satire against bad leadership. The poet persona feels it because the yester-years of political anarchy and chaos are still fresh in his mind. These woes are re-echoed in the present dereliction of the government to pacify the haunted race. This is why, though removed from the immediate setting of Rwanda, the poet still feels their agony and pains. The feeling is built from the similarities in their shared agony. The foregoing is in line with Caruth’s analysis of violence that “...trauma narratives, does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its very incomprehensibility. What turns to haunt the victim...”(6). *Eclipse in Rwanda* is implicit in the submission made for trauma and its carrier in this discourse. What haunts Ushie is far beyond the site of Rwanda, it is resident at home and finds expression in the poetic construction of Rwanda genocide. What *Eclipse in Rwanda* “...tells us, is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known” (6). This “unknown” residual chaos couched in metaphors of lamentation is enlivened in the text given the poet persona’s experiences of the 1966 pogroms in northern Nigeria. The Rwandan site is a remembering and poetic memorial for the death. The collection seek to interrogate the plight of the death as a poetic pointer to the eastern Nigeria totally removed from the site of genocide even when we acknowledge brotherhood in their victimization. *Eclipse in Rwanda* becomes a poetic reminiscence and recollection of those who were killed by the pogroms while Rwanda becomes a referent of their memorial passing-on and identification for the slow death many were subjected to during the pogrom. Caruth (1996) defines trauma as “... as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind (3)” in an attempt to analysis Freud indirectly captures the temperament of the traumatic experiences of Joe Ushie thus:

...trauma... it is the always the story of a wound that cries out, that
address us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not
otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its
belated address, cannot be linked only to what is know, but also
to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language (4).

Ushie poetic remembering tells us about the political persecution we seem to have forgotten in *Eclipse in Rwanda*. The genocide in Rwanda is a known poetic trauma in the text but at a deeper level it leads to what seems unknown in the discourse of Ushie texts as metaphor for those killed during the pogrom against the East. The persona corroborates the foregoing in the *Eclipse in Rwanda* when he submits in a poem “Song of Sisyphus” thus:

How can I change my song
when the caused hands of
our gods of war have turned
their swords on our throats,

breaking the fences of
 our grain field for pests to
 ravage our natural shield? (12).

This is in line with Caruth's concept of the traumatic wound crying out to intimate us of the truth that is not available and that chokes the reality of Ushie to the extent that he had to record in poetic lines the metaphors of Rwanda as a poetic pointer to the under lying meaning of the Nigerian pogrom. *Eclipse in Rwanda* becomes a metaphor for the failure of the Nigerian state to protect its citizens when the need came and Ushie suffers from posttraumatic disorder of his experiences of the pogrom. Joe Ushie is actually illustrated in by Nicholson et al (2010) in his attempt to make a case for early childhood sad experience and its effect on the child leading to future posttraumatic disorder (31). He goes further to state that: "Any effort made to avoid thinking about or remembering the painful realities of their abuse may lead them into patterns of manic anti-social behaviors. At such a young age, trauma has a developmental impact, adversely affecting the child's global identity (31). Ushie's literary identity in the *Eclipse in Rwanda* becomes that of a victim who has embarked on a memorial for those who were killed in the eastern Nigeria defunct state of Biafra as a replicated in the narration of the Tutsi's experiences alongside the complicity and silence of the colonial powers who administratively created these situations. Implicitly, Nicholson et al submission is that the writings of *Eclipse in Rwanda* have redeemed Joe Ushie from becoming a manic anti-social being and conditioned him to be very considerate and mild towards life and its realities. The poetic response of Joe Ushie's *Eclipse in Rwanda* is poetic statement of the extended effect of trauma that assumes a new form in the reminiscence of these memories. There is an underlying metaphor in Joe Ushie's coming to personhood and speaking against injustice that he seems to fail to make a case for the Biafrans killed during the Pogrom. Van de Kalk states that "A critical variable that determines the long-term effects of abuse of neglect appears to be the meaning the victim gives to the event" (Van der and Fisler 1994). Consequently, the poetic lamentation in the text confronts the powers that be by hiding under the concept of metaphor to lay bare his criticisms. Nicholson et al. corroborated the foregoing in their assertion that "...painful experience can be creatively transformed into new relevant creative experience..." (51). They further note; "If the affected is repressed it must re-emerge as a ghost..." (56). Implicitly, the above submission spells that the presence of those killed have found their memorial in the poetic delineation of Rwanda genocide as a re-emerged impression the stifling of such experience on the affected. Memory is a factor in the composition of *Eclipse in Rwanda*, and this is deduced from Nicholson et al classification of memory, which they divided into two, and it includes declarative or explicit memory and non-declarative or implicit memory. The poet persona makes use of explicit memory, which is tipped in the past to compose the poetics lines and evidently, we cannot disassociate his work from the role that implicit memory plays in the poetic birth of the post-pogrom memorial. Consequently, a call for the import of Nicholson et al postulation becomes necessary for the proper conceptualisation of our discourse thus: "There are two main memory systems, declarative or explicit memory and the non-declarative or implicit memory/procedural memory" (66). Ushie like every other writer within the platform of literature and trauma makes use of this two-memory system in his poetic remembering of psychosocial trauma in the society. Nicholson et al goes further to describe the nature of these memories thus: "Declarative is characterised by a conscious awareness of facts and events. It is the active and constructive process whereby what is remembered depends on existing schemata, and is distorted by associated experience and emotional state at the time of recall" (66). The persona is aware of the pogrom in Nigeria; however, his emotion at the interception of the poetic muse uses Nigeria as an underlying narrative without mentioning it. The "schemata" which is Rwanda that motivates his protest poetics also lies within his environment (which has existed in a poetic silence for a long time) while the poet continues in his artistic creations. *Eclipse in Rwanda* is a means of the persona appealing to his ancestors and is an attempt to make peace with the past even when he does not mention the pogrom. Some of those killed belong to his ancestry, and even those of the symbols of his ancestry were violated during the pogrom. The persona corroborates this, thus:

I cannot stop crowing aloud this song
 when the ghosts of my proud ancestors
 curse me for selling the clan's honour
 by my fear anchored inaction(13).

The persona is inhibited by fear to the extent that he believes his ancestors are ashamed of him since he has been silent and complicit as a poet. The ancestors in a metaphysical sense are of the functional role of the poet within the society and are ashamed by the persona's indifference to the plight of his people. The persona is indicted in the sense that he fails to uphold the honour of the dead and indeed his society by speaking about injustices against the

vulnerable in the society. Consequently, the text highlights the transient nature of trauma, which could take the form of a new site while bearing every element of the previous scars as it is illustrated in the poetry collection understudied. The use of “my”, “our” and “I” demonstrate the personification of the individual and *Eclipse in Rwanda* becomes in the word of Caruth “...the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality-the escape from death, or from its referential forces-rather attests to its endless impact on...” Ushie’s life (7). Ushie therefore reconstructs the past events in service of the present. Nicholson et al make a case for the preceding thus: “Declarative memory enables the organisation and reconstructs of past events in the service of present need, interests and fears. Memories of personally highly significant events are usually very accurate, while those for highly significant cultural events are subject to distortion and disintegration over time” (66). *Eclipse in Rwanda* is a representation of the past in the mode of the present, which the persona is addressing and preserving it within the framework of literature. The past, which is life-long, finds a present in the poet’s lamentation where he vows that he would sing:

I will sing lifelong the song
of that child orphaned by design;
of that woman widowed by the plan;
of our streets peopled by bones;
of our black race and its kamikaze race;
of the human rays headed for the west, for waste (12).

The persona through poetic lamentation chronicles the different gender and class of those killed in this government inspired war. Renegading from Nicholson et al, Ushie uses both the declarative and non-declarative memory in his attempt at erecting memorials of their murder in the society. Nicholson et al defines “Non-declarative” ...as comprising memories of skills, habits, emotional responses, reflex actions and conditioned responses. Traumatic memories are examples of implicit memories (66). The disintegration of the gory sight of the pogrom in Nigeria re-emerges in poetic referent to the genocide in Rwanda through the recreation of the ethnic cleansings of Rwanda, which is a metaphor for those slain in Nigerian. In making a case for the repressed in the case of the active inactions of the international community, the persona attempts to exorcise himself from the complicity of silence by entrenching the memories of the dead in his poetic lines to the extent that four years after the publication of *Eclipse in Rwanda* the poet still initiates the plight of the slain in *Hill Songs* demonstrating that he is stuck in the past. Caruth (1996) corroborates the preceding that: “The story of trauma... as [a] narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality- the escape from a death, or from its referential force-rather attests to its endless impact on a life” (19). *Eclipse in Rwanda* reveals the impact of the pogrom and the war on the persona’s psyche. The poem becomes a form of remembering and re-echoing the voices that the poet has internalized, making it an element of his muse. Caruth (1996) makes a case for listening that: “...the new mode of reading and listening that both languages of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly demand...” (22). Although, this is different from Caruth’s “the new mode of reading and listening”, it extends the boundary of his submission to include shouting above the voice that praises the “leopard” that has subjected the people. To Ushie, the process of listening involves speaking out from the premise of trauma to counter-narratives that anathematise the survival of the traumatised people. *Eclipse in Rwanda* extends the boundaries of trauma studies in literature and challenges our knowledge about trauma in its four-dimensional structure of reading, listening, speaking and resisting. Ushie through the poem the “Towner Crier” adds the fourth dimension to trauma in literature as a resisting figure. The persona bears a voice that is alien to the Rwandans but kin-related to his homeland. The persona says of trauma: “We listen to your mouthing of those/ Iron-fisted, self-armouring laws of the leopard /Roared through your pay-staked tongue” (14). This form of listening to the flatterers who have been given the voice to praise the ruler is an attempt to resist the truth and dishonest wailers who through praise singing for unworthy leaders have erected altars of sycophancy to adore them. To Ushie, they care less about those who have fallen as a result of the activities of the leopard. Caruth (1996) further explicates our pursuance to mean the following: “Trauma is a relieved experience of a witness who consciously relieved it once in a while and whose traumatic situation affects his action” (24). Ushie’s traumatic situation at home affects his conceptualisation of deceit within African society. The use of “we” acknowledges the all-inclusive nature of the kind of trauma that is situated within the poetic piece of *Eclipse in Rwanda*. The persona after listening and reading about Rwanda resists the third other that is, the praise singers in the society, Thus: “We hear the bliss-blistered tongue of the trader/ Proclaiming annual pluses which, like the passing/ Excellency’s sigh-reign, agitate the ears of the lean sales boy; (14). The persona’s hearing is that of conscious listening with the aim of enabling the persona resist those whose trade is to turn lies into truth even at the sight of the memory of the

dead. Psychosocial poetics of trauma is a form of reading and listening which resists narratives that seem to suppress the dead and the living within the premise of shared knowledge. This form of listening is called “listening to make a point” although the listening is motivated by traumatic knowledge. The persona laments: “We watch the cosmetic camaraderie of the rented, /camera-daring crowd shouting hosanna to/The leopard, long live the general” (14). The persona chastises those who sing praise for at the military generals at the sites of the dead of Rwanda and Nigeria. The rented crowd of ethnic zealots who sing the praises of the rulers as though they were engaging in the praise of a deity are the elements of criticism herein. The persona appropriates the lexicon of war mixed with religious metaphors to question the deceit in the society. There is the use of rhetorical question for those who sing the praises of the metaphoric “general” thus: “Haba, town crier, how much is your gain?”(14). The poetic listening is to identify truth and strengthen the truth about those who have been killed by the state and to set up their corpse as valid, being capable of humanity. Through listening, the poet indicts the speaker who has spoken in praise of the general who presided over the killings of those in Rwanda and killing of those in Nigeria. The general becomes a poetic referent from Rwanda to Nigeria, which the persona is able to identify abroad as having the same physical and psychological structures. Caruth argues that trauma is tied to history. She acknowledges that to arrive at a meaning one has to place interpretation to the past, a reference to the past that has similarities to what the victim experiences and what Caruth calls the “might of history” (12). However, it is this holding on to the might of history that the persona who is a product of history after listening resists the reclassification of such history in the celebration of the rulers against the memorials of the dead. Thus:

We watch your tongue, a river-bed for the
gushing flood of endless double-talk,
....
We watch your face, dustbin
For the town’s palace-drawn curses
....
We read your mood, groomed to
simulate sorrow for dead rich villains,(14)

We watch, we listen, town crier, but the persona and his communities of oppressed survivals of Rwanda genocide and Nigeria’s pogrom watch in admiration at the attempt of some to twist history in their attempt to reconstruct the personalities of those who aid and abet state killings. The face of these persons becomes an epitome of dustbin for the recycling of the actions of the “palace-drawn curse” into some new to seem positive in the pages of history. Caruth (1996) acknowledges what traumatic history is when she submits that: “for history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs... history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (18). It does not mean that the history need to be distorted for it to acquire the status of trauma and this Ushie rejects vehemently within his poetics of trauma. Although the indirect referentiality is at the core of Ushie’s *Eclipse in Rwanda*, the persona abhors an attempt to disfigure the existence of it by replacing its memorials with the praises of leaders that are supposed to be chastised. The persona exposes the voice, which wants to destroy the memorial of those who were killed by the throne.

can’t hear your voice nor see the
true you besides that mannequin,
screened like chameleon’s colour for safety,
or like the veiled hangman’s circumstance.
Ah, poor crier, you can’t beat the rich!(14)

There is a voice of despair at the end of the poem; the persona acknowledges that the tale of the rich is backed by power and wealth; that he is troubled by the memory he tries to erect as an indictment of state-sponsored mass ethnic cleansing would be given relevance. In the persona’s negligence towards the plight of those killed in Nigeria in the light of the pogrom, the poet laments and begs to be pardoned in the poem “To my unborn children”. He appeals to the consciences of the unborn at large and by extension the dead. Given the existing knowledge of The African cosmology of the dead, the living and unborn all intercede for one other. We are confident to state the persona is speaking to the dead. The persona pleads:

If, given situations,
 I do not throw the hook
 into your spirit world to
 fish you out, count me not
 a failure(22)

The preceding demonstrates that the silence on Joe Ushie's part about the pogrom against the people of the Eastern region in Nigerian was not a failure, but it is motivated out of fear that he uses Rwanda genocide to make this acknowledgement. Caruth (1996) corroborates the foregoing thus: "One's trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may read, the way in which trauma may read, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the key possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (20).

At the remembrance of Rwanda, the Eastern pogrom stands forth in the heart of the persona, and he makes a case for himself and the society implying that at the peak of the pogrom his words would not have made the expected impact. Thus:

For, as onto a thicket
 of thorns the fisherman
 throws the sea-wallowing fish,
 I fear and fear and fear that
 You might land in these hard-
 ending, metallic thorns whose
 points like needles might mince
 frail flesh, all to my misery.(22)

The silence on the part of the persona is motivated by fear as the culprits are still not coming to the terms of admitting it to be a form of ethnic cleansings till today. The persona elects himself to survey the environment for those who were killed, and if the shore is secure he will call them to the dock but if not he would ask them to anchor on another side. Consequently, the shore is not secured, the killings are ongoing in different forms, and the secured place for those who were killed is in the memorial of *Eclipse in Rwanda* that keeps the referent on the heart of those who come in contact with it. Metaphorically, Joe Ushie *Eclipse in Rwanda* becomes a "better shore and [a secured] anchor" for the memories of those killed and buried in unmarked graves of our collective memories and histories (22). This trauma which the poet experiences "defies time" as he encourages the dead who are trying to return to the Nigerian shores space to "sail sail sail away" and the process of the persona making it sail away into minds is by erecting memorials within the structure of *Eclipse in Rwanda* to secure their experiences. Ushie using the image of the television relives the experiences of the pogrom in the East. Speaking from the unhealed heart, he laments: "Just before bedtime, a TV documentary/ fired these sharp needles at my heart: a screen filled with Rwandan woes" like it was filled with Biafran woes (23). In an attempt to capture the gory sight of Rwandan genocide, the persona depicts the gory pictures of those who were killed during the pogrom. It re-erects their memories wherever they are in our heart and force us to have a vivid picture of what they experienced even in their death. Even in death, their remains were not given the dignity of a proper burial, which is required for the dead to find peace. The persona awakens the past thus:

See the paradisaal valleys turned
 into bowls of "human" flesh;
 see the vigilant vultures guarding
 their fortune from a twig above. (23)

This is a replica of the pogrom site at home; it points to the state of the remains of those killed during the pogrom. The corpses transit from a status of dignity to that of worthlessness. This is a referent to both sites of trauma; the one metaphorically represented which is the distant site and the immediate which is closer to the poet. The persona piles metaphors of death and what has warranted it to make a case for how these images affect the psychology of the child when growing. He is one of such product, which has birthed his resolve to recapture these experiences in poetry. He notes:

See those ebony-black moulds
wearing flies as cerements.
See the innocent child urging the fallen
mother to rising and go, for its nightfall.
See that you perforated by man-crafted death.
See the farmlands ploughed by missiles (23)

There is a connection between the sites of trauma based on their plights that is a product of the “leopard” on the thrown. Joe Ushie could interpret the result of ethnic cleansing because he has had these experiences this during his youthful age and he finds the strength to lament the re-victimisation of his people within the site of Rwanda as an extension of that of his people. The persona constantly calls witnesses at the site of killing to see what the actions and inactions have refused the African race too. The persona summons Rwanda “...listen, and you will hear/ your dead weeping for the living” (23) implicit in this seems that Ushie’s dramatic statement is like a man chasing a rat when his house is on fire. However, we cannot confidently state that given the fact that his trauma is tied to another that the text is a direct imaging of the Rwandan condition. We can only submit that it is a referent to a historical pogrom in the poet’s own society. *Eclipse in Rwanda* therefore becomes an extended metaphor. We assume at a deeper level that victims of the pogrom in Biafran also elicit this kind of pity excised by the poet within the structure of poetic memorial Rwanda’s genocide. Caruth (2006) corroborated the preceding does: “...the traumatic nature of history means that events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others” (19) and Rwanda’s genocide is implicated Biafran’s pogrom. Consequently, in the attempt to awaken our consciousness about the various structures of the poetic tombs within *Eclipse in Rwanda* we would see that the international communities are complicity in the death of many in Africa as they aid and abet the killings of Africans through their supplies (military) and (software) hardware for these leaders to prosecute wars against their people. The persona sheds light amidst the eclipse of hypocrisy as he consistently calls attention to these evil actions thus: Look! Brother, look:

at a hotel in some foreign capital
some hemp-eyed drunkard
with his tank-filled tankard is paying
more fuel to burn the mother land. (23)

They pay with the peoples’ collective wealth to favour a particular tribe while they engage the others in fighting for more space, for more rights and more space (23) as a representation of their future. Joe Ushie’s *Eclipse in Rwanda* critically depicts how trauma works in the literature by imbuing the persona with omnipresent insight into discussions and situations that involve the dead. There is the portrayal of the poet in search for the truth about the real case of those who were killed and some at the point of death. In “peace talk” the international communities preside over the dispute and even when there seems to be peace “the homeless and the eaten know of no peace (25).” *Eclipse in Rwanda* is a poetic product of peace for the slain Biafrans and Rwandans: it is a journey to true peace, which begins at the justice of remembering how they were slain and what happened to their corpses. The tombs of this poetic arrangement area form justice upholding the importance of their death beyond their time. He makes use of Greek mythology “Tantalus” a metaphor of himself, and like “Tantalus” he is bounded like those whom he erect memorials for and even amidst this abundance he is “thirsting to death” (26) just as the abundance kills many in his country. The persona laments: This death would have tasted better in a desert,/ not here. (26) The persona wishes that his trauma did not happen in the society but in a desert devoid of people and to him it would have been better.

2. Memory as Style in *Eclipse in Rwanda*

Remembering is a creative motif for the recreation of the experiences and decimation of the people of the Eastern region during the Nigeria Civil War but viewed within the Rwanda’s site of genocide. The poem “Song of Sisyphus” is a reminder of the strong hold of memory on the individual irrespective of how he attempts to suppress such experiences. Edward S. Casey (2000) attests to the foregoing thus: “concrete places retain the past in away that can be reanimated form of memory” (xi). Consequently, an archival memory reanimates the persona’s creativity within the agency of far referent to capture the genocide of his people. The experience, which is the being of the poet of a certain kind of destruction like referent of the Rwanda site, imposed in his Nigeria Civil War experiences. The persona that is “quartered in this shell/which shapes my tongue/ how can I change my son” (12). The persona cannot change his song because the digital memory that panders to the individual socio-political experiences also remind him the broadcast of Rwanda genocide site, which becomes a poetic fulcrum of brutalization and decimation

of his people. The digital space becomes a space for cultural memory in the sense that “Eclipse in Rwanda” that is the titled poem reminds the poet persona the decimation of his people. Consequently, the digital space is a posthumous space that holds the poet persona accountable for the neglect of the plight and silence of his art to chronicle the abuse and subjugation of his people through subtle showing of the memory of the past in the present.

3. Conclusion

Rwanda is a referent for those killed during the 1966 to 1970 genocide in Nigeria. Through the *Eclipse in Rwanda*, the persona erects a memorial for those killed using Rwanda as a metaphor for his traumatised experiences at home. The pogrom in Nigeria and the genocide in Rwanda have been the state-sanctioned acts and international indifference motivated by the political unwillingness to protect the defenceless re-echoes in line with Rwanda’s genocide in Joe Ushie’s *Eclipse in Rwanda* as a psychosocial poetics of remembering. The persona through the poetics of remembering erects various symbols of memorials for those who were killed during the pogrom in Nigeria and the Rwandan genocide.

References

- Achebe, Chinua. *There was a Country*.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Precious life: The Power of Mourning Violence*. London: Verso
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore London: The Johns Hopkins University Press,
- Casey, E. S. (2000). *Remembering: A phenomenological study*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press
- Craps, S. (2013). *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds*. USA: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137292117>
- Dauge-Poth, A. (2010). *Writing and Filming the Genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda: Dismembering and Remembering Traumatic History*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Ekwe-Ekwe, H. (2006). *Igbo genocide and its aftermath – The tragedy of Africa’s unlearned lessons*. Penguin books.
- Hammerschlag, S. (2016). *Broken Tablets: Levinas, Derrida, and the Literary Afterlife of Religion*. New York: Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/hamm17058>
- Korieh, J. C. (2012). *The Nigeria-Biafra War: Genocide and the Politics of Memory*. New York: Cambria Press
- Korieh, J. C. (2013). Biafra and the discourse of the Ibo Genocide. *Journal of Asian African Studies*. JAAS. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909613506455>
- Larkin, W., & Morrison, A. (2006). *Trauma and Psychosis: New Direction for Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203966013>
- Nicholson, C., Michael, I., & Kedar, D. (2010). Ed. *Children and Adolescents in Trauma: Creative Therapeutic Approaches*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Panov, D. K. (1997). *Video, War, and the Diaspora Imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Ushie, J. (2004). *Eclipse in Rwanda*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.
- Ushie, J. (2004). *Hill Songs*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.
- Van DerKolk, B. A., & Fisler, R. (1994). Childhood Abuse and Neglect and Loss of Self Regulation. *Bulletin of Menninger Clinic* 582. Spring.