

SOCIAL ADVOCACY AND LINGUISTIC INVENTIVENESS IN SELECTED POEMS OF JOE USHIE

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ABSTRACT

The literary voice remains unwaveringly rooted in its quest for social advocacy. This is evident in the poetic ingenuity of Joe Ushie where he takes up the responsibility of passing a piercing commentary on the sociopolitical misconducts that threaten to ravage the Nigerian (African) society. In doing this, the poet stands with the common man who is relegated by the political bourgeoisies to the fringes of society. From three of Ushie's collections—*Eclipse in Rwanda* (2004), *A Reign of Locusts* (2004) and *Lambs at the Shrine* (2005), the analysis is conducted under the theoretical anchorage of New Historicism and Marxism, and draws richly from the outlining principles of Stylistics to effectively explore the poet's depiction of the sociopolitical fate of the postcolonial Nigerian nation (and continental Africa). By evoking elements of history, the contemporary, religion, socio-moral conditions and politics, the poet gives a crystal-clear picture of a society in fast decline, and in need of moral reclamation. Also, it analytically surveys devices of style such as symbolism, allusion, indigenous linguistic forms, etc. and how they enhance the effective reflection of society. It is demonstrated, in the end, that through a creative manipulation of literary and linguistic elements, the poet gives a far-reaching outcry against social and political wrongs. His poetic oeuvre thus

becomes a reliable channel for the repair of social and political excrescences.

Key words: Joe Ushie, Social Advocacy, Sociopolitical excrescences, Socio-moral, New Historicism

INTRODUCTION

The postcolonial landscape of Africa is one which astounds the average observer with a gallimaufry of depraved and inhumane conducts in the sociopolitical space. In Nigeria, as a veritable instance, the collapse of colonial rule in 1960 had been received with delirium, as citizens clapped, sang, danced, ululating sounds of indescribable joy that conveyed the hope in their eyes—the hope that envisioned a future of self-rule, of democracy, of total regard to fundamental rights, and of total freedom to aspire. Contrarily, these glamorous dreams, alluring as they were, have gradually been ruined and left in tatters by the overtime activities of the political class. This situation has compelled Femi Osofisan to aver that nothing has really changed in the country, rather it plunges in backwardness and decay (17). There has been a hurtful betrayal of the citizenry by their compatriots to whom political power has been entrusted. The national treasury, meant to cater for everyone, has become a gold mine for the leaders who sit leg-crossed to hold the nation to siege.

In the face of the foregoing loss of direction, it takes a writer who subscribes unswervingly to the side of the masses—on the receiving end of the ruins, as himself—to give an uncensored depiction of society in his works. It requires great courage to lend a voice to an oppressed, beleaguered group against the more powerful, advantaged ruling class who are like a ‘teeteth’ machine that grinds the hopes, aspirations and dreams of the common man. Breyten Breytenbach observes that writer is compelled in such circumstances to be the “questioner” and “implacable critic” of society (166). Joe Ushie has remarkably proven to be that one poet who dedicates his literary artistry to pass a sharp commentary on this disorderliness, thereby campaigning for social, political and moral purgation. It is explicated here, how he employs poetry to bring to the society the injustices, corruption, social and humanitarian tension, violence and political letdown, all of which summarize the unfortunate fate of Africa in recent times. From three of Ushie’s masterpieces—*Lambs at the Shrine*, *Eclipse in Rwanda* and *A Reign of Locusts*—the analysis x-rays the

concerns voiced by the poet and the manner in which his configuration of language facilitates the socio-moral and political ideologies he stimulates. Above all, the poet's style is considered as a facilitator of the vision he expresses on the delicate matters of his poetic discourse.

The Voice of the Oppressed

Joe Ushie's poetry engages in activism for the suppressed voices of the heavily marginalized and exploited commoners who constitute the majority in today's societies. The world in general features an awful condition where more than 80 percent of the lowly-placed are dominated and used by less than 20 percent who are privileged and empowered. However, though it is equally evident in economically viable nations of the West and other parts of the advanced world, it is far worse in the African continent. Nigeria is not left out of the scene. And in the face of such moral, political and social anemia as this, there is the serious need for a voice that will refuse to be silenced in its agitation for change. There is the acute need of the literary voice that would "cleanse humanity from moral pollution" (Mahfouz, 124). Joe Ushie, through his poetic resolve, represents this voice. He stands with the oppressed, the voiceless, the relegated; and with the enormous might of the pen, echoes their agony and their outrage in a bid to break the wall that separates them from the ruling class.

In *Lambs at the Shrine*, he dedicates more than a dozen of the poems to condemn the heartrending exploitation of the masses by the aristocratic ruling class. "Badagry Chains", sixteen-lined as it is, compares the activities of the political overlords in Nigeria and Africa to the heinous system of slavery which flourished nearly two centuries ago, but which the continent still bears scathing scars of. Commenting on the archival exhibits of the inglorious past of slave trade in the Badagry Museum, the poet contends: "... I'm/ Awoken to the chains' present/ Deadly grip on my ankles—/ From a brother-master" (12). These lines convey the agony of one who ought to have been liberated, but is enslaved this time around, to his utter disappointment, by a "brother-master"—an emblem of the postcolonial African leadership. It becomes clearer, more so, in the second stanza (made up of a lone line) where it is concluded that "We hang, still, from the chains" (12). The poem presents a disappointing picture, one of a continent in regression; as much as one in which brotherhood and nationhood have both ended in incredulous betrayal. This reflects downright post-colonial chaos. Written in the contemporary, post-

independence time, the poem alludes to the days of slavery and colonial presence in the continent, thus providing critical awareness of history. Additionally, it airs the frustration that accompanies a postcolonial setting that has refused to divorce itself from harrowing strings of colonial manipulation and abuse. This time around, the enslavement is orchestrated by fellow brothers, to whom the mantle of leadership is entrusted. The poet shows this condition to be, indeed, a crying shame.

The same brutal enslavement and exploitation reverberates in “Metamorphosis” where the plight of the downtrodden takes the spotlight. The opening two lines hint at the weariness the poet wishes to air—“For long have I stood/transfixed on the riverbank” (*Lambs...* 21). The frustration, building up in bits, is betrayed in the first line of the second stanza, “As I watch in pity...” (21) the misdeeds of those in power. The persona is bewildered at the ugliness, as his wounded heart is treated to an awful tale “Of radiant brilliance sapped/Into chaff by some crowned clown;/That tale of the defilement of virtue/By the clown sojourning at the peak” (21).

These lines echo the putrefying state of morality in the continent, where nothing is sacred to the ruling class. The perilous exploitation of the masses is again emphasized in the third stanza, shown thus:

I remember the tale of the clown
Accoutered for a feast among fellow worms, using
Our brains to feed himself
Our blood to rinse his mouth
Our bones as chewing stick (21)

The conducts of the leaders are shown by the poet to be blood-thirsty, barbaric and cannibalistic while the masses are hapless victims of these brute desires. A similar image of the savagery is glimpsed at in “Fate of the sheep” where the poet borrows the epithets of the lion and the sheep to respectively represent the privileged ruling class and the doomed masses. In this case, the poem underscores military rule and its ruinous effects on the populace. The men in khaki are shown to be lions, possessing infernal and destructive power which descends with fatal fury on the powerless citizens. The deaths of Ken Saro Wiwa and Dele Giwa stand as historical testimonies to this brutality. The hopelessness of the oppressed and violated

masses is shown in the three lines of the third stanza, where the poet puts it thus:

And the ship died yelling from the
Jaws of the lion like justice from under
The boots of an invincible General (*Lambs...* 24)

The military is portrayed to be brutal and insensitive, which corroborates Peter Onwudijo's description of them as uniformed men "who rode roughshod on the good of the Nigerian people" (149). This also alludes to the historical anomaly of military incursion in the Nigerian political system and its attendant consequences.

The sounds of betrayal and bleeding frustration continue to blare in *Eclipse in Rwanda* which parades poems that are replete with the poet's exposure of the depraved activities of the leaders. In "Manna fall", for instance, Ushie decries the plundering of the people's commonwealth by a privileged few. "Manna" here represents the vast resources of Nigeria and Africa which are supposed to be for all and sundry. Regrettably, these resources are channeled into the pockets of the aristocrats. Ushie shows this in the nanometer, presented wholly, below:

You always say to me:
Manna falls no more
But now I say to you
That manna falls still
And no fall in its fall
But stops in trays of few,
Fixed high in the sky
Who must BLOCK its fall
To us here below (*Eclipse...*15)

This poem betrays the frustration of the people who are angered by the disheartening looting of the nation's treasury, thus leaving the populace to wallow in privation, despair and imminent death. This hopelessness, disgust and disappointment spill into the poetic lyrics of "Tantalus" which bemoans the lack and starvation that the marginalized masses suffer in the midst of plenty. Representing the opulence of Africa with "mountain of gold", the poet is dismayed by the awful condition that despite the overflowing river of national bounties, the citizenry is "thirsting to death

like a mystery” (26). This is the picture that shamefully parades itself in the continent today. Public servants and political watchdogs who ravage the treasures of the land never stop enriching themselves at the expense of the deprived masses.

A Reign of Locusts is another collection that once again resounds Ushie’s activism through a tenacious engagement of delicate socio-political matters. Armed with just the pen and his creative impulse, the poet condemns the wrongs of the rulers without fear. He employs the poem “Ladder” to reflect the political treachery the continent continues to suffer. During political campaigns, the masses are hoodwinked with hollow promises that are never fulfilled after the arrival of electoral victory. The poet makes a direct reference to the villains in government, telling them that they are atop “this fruity tree” only because of the common man (17). Their ascension to power has only been enabled by the masses whose “bare backs of skeleton bore/the ladder...” of their climb (17). The aftermath of victory is that the leaders “leisure in bed of wool”, “wine and dine as god” and “belch and hiss [their] scorn” on the same lowly-placed men who facilitated their ascent. With a dampened spirit, and a tone that expresses utmost exasperation, the poet casts a clear image of the common man’s disillusionment and the unfeeling craze of the leaders in the third stanza, thus:

You leisure, still, even
If the erosion breaks away
A universe of the toiling ants below,
If the floods steal away the earth,
If the eskers raid off the clan,
If epidemics swallow the homesteads,
If the blades of famine mince the race (A
Reign... 17)

These lines reveal that the leaders are unshaken by the agony—physical destruction and natural disasters, disease outbreak and famine—suffered by the electorates, the poor, the abandoned. A similar betrayal is poured out in “Mobile Caskets” which condemns the flaunting of lavish cars by the politicians. These vehicles are purchased with taxpayers’ money while the same taxpayers rot in poverty. The poet occasionally refers to these political saboteurs as “brothers” to further underscore the betrayal that has ensued in the nation. The poet asks a question that is meant to startle their

conscience: “How do we look, brother,/From inside your darkened liprousine?”(30). He wonders if the tint, that blurs their vision, allows the rulers to see the people’s “hunger-bleached” faces and stomachs (30).

To the aggrieved poet, whose voice channels the sorrow of the poor masses, the politicians are unmoved because they do not know what it means to suffer. He says: “Brother/You bear not the scars of the sun’s fury./You know not the colours of hunger/You know not the idiolects of joblessness” (30). There lies in this poem, the agony of betrayal of brotherhood, of a common cause, of friendship, of the citizenry—all for material gains that accompany political power. Thus, with a pained tone that can hardly conceal the grief of abandonment, the common man digs up the near past to remind the betrayers of where they have all come from—both ruler and ruled: “We were one once/Before your rise to this mobile (e)state,/Opaqued like any beautiful casket/Down this tough street we share/Down this rough road we share” (30).

The activities of these vile leaders are said to darken “the infant rays/Of our rising sun” in the titling poem, “A Reign of Locusts” (18). The poet draws a comparative analogy from the destruction by locusts on green plants to enhance his description of the deeds of the self-centred, destructive leaders of the continent. More clearly than ever, the poet portrays the political siege and devastation rocking Africa, a continent on edge. At the helm of political affairs, there is a dramatic scrambling for whatever can be consumed by the insatiable “locusts”. The poet contends that—“Now is a rain of locusts/In a chewing race” (18). This chewing race spells doom for the common man who is relegated to the fringes of society. This is conveyed in the last line of the third stanza, that the gross plundering means “An endless eclipse for the wingless” masses (18). Clearly, this evinces a state of despair for the powerless masses.

This committed poet has a resolve that is apparently unwavering. Apart from showing the hideousness in the exact way it is, Joe Ushie dedicates some of his poems to openly condemn the evil and to campaign for other poets and observers to follow suit. In “Song of Sisyphus”, the poet makes it clear that he cannot watch in silence when the disorderliness continues to overshadow the land. His song of protest cannot be changed simply for fear of death—the death that would eventually, inevitably set in—come what may. Hence, he sings on, because “...the cursed hands of/our gods of war have/turned their swords on our throats...” (*Eclipse...*

12). Going on to stamp his dogged resolve in the fourth stanza, the poet declares:

I will sing lifelong the song
Of that child orphaned by design;
Of that woman widowed by plan;
Of our streets peopled by bones (12).

These lines bring the current happenings in Nigeria to the fore, where people are slaughtered without recourse, where the masks of religious fanaticism and ethnic divide are worn to carry out a terrifying onslaught on defenceless people—yet, many are silent on the matter, including the government whose primary mandate is to secure the lives of the citizenry. If society is silent, the poet cannot keep mute, for silence is like betrayal of the victims whose last, dying cries continue to resonate in everyone's psyche. Hence, in the opening lines of the seventh and eighth stanzas, the poet asserts: "I cannot stop crowing aloud this song" (13). The protest continues to the last line of the poem where the poet upholds that "I will sing, I will sing, I will sing same song lifelong" (13). Hence, for as long as injustice prevails, the voice of protest will continue to echo its frustration, as part of the writer's quest for sociopolitical redemption (Eyang and Edung; 2018).

Bewildered by what is seen in society today, Ushie employs the poem "Town Crier" to confront those sycophants who sing praises to the fraudulent leaders in anticipation of material rewards. Dismayed, the poet quips: "Haba, town crier, how much is your gain?" (*Eclipse...* 14). These praise singers who swarm around politicians betray not only their individual conscience, but also the marginalized masses in general. This letdown is what the poet cannot condone as it sparks his timely intervention. The poet cannot escape an involvement in politics which affects the wellbeing of the masses on whose side he roots his stand. This political commentary underscores the stance of Nadine Gordimer that the writer's power of creative imagination is roused by his or her experience of politics, and that it is often "virtually inescapable in times and places of socially seismic upheaval..." (Three in Bed... 489).

One important point to note in Ushie's activism is that his concern for the stripped, battered, tortured masses pushes him to have a revolutionary leaning. Having had enough of the suppression, the masses, as Ushie prescribes, are left with only one option: show of fury and a

violent takeover. As Bassey Ude notes, poets proffer solutions to the masses when faced by incompetent, greedy leaders (21); Ushie seeks this solution, at whatever cost. The Marxist inclination to a deadly, ferocious push becomes the only redemptive way out of the poor man's plight. A heated fight-back in commensurate measure to the pains suffered is advocated by the poet. This move, in the words of Amilcar Cabral, is "the only valid means for using the sacrifices of the mass of the people to eliminate... oppression of their own class and hence to re-establish their complete cultural and political domination" (National Liberation... 489).

In "Metamorphosis", the revolutionary begins to take form. Ushie calls for an uprising of the once weak, voiceless masses, in the form of "torrents", "hurricanes", "floods", etc. to "push off, toss about and torture yesterday's assailant" (*Lambs...* 22). To the poet, this action will spell victory for the oppressed who will merry at the "drowning" and "sinking" of the usurped oppressive leaders (22). Violence, thus, becomes the sole, reliable option of exorcising the spirits of evil from society and extirpating all of its traces. This poetic call for revolution takes full flesh in the poem "Tropical rain" where the poet recommends the picking up of destructive weapons such as "hammer", "axe", and "spade" (*Lambs...* 26). He advocates for the flooding wrath of aggression to surge from the common man to wash out the long, overdue dry season—a metaphorical representation of the oppressors (27). This irrepressible, unsympathetic flood is shown to be the only cleansing and curative option on the table of the persecuted and aggrieved masses. Ushie puts it thus: "Then shall these streets glitter again/Then shall these shrubs canopied by the/Mighty unfailing dead woods embrace sunrays again/Then, only then, shall this heart know peace" (27). This insurrection, as the poet goes on to show, will not be bloodless, but there is soothing respite in the cleansing, victory and healing it is to bring. Therefore, there is a spirit-raising call for all to put away fear and focus on purifying the blemished land. The poet contends: "...where is the spear, where is the spade?/For how long shall I, for fear of the one death,/Die these several others in silence?" (27). These lines echo the ideological standing of Claude McKay in his signature poem "If We Must Die" that the fear of the "open grave" ought not to deter an oppressed people, however outnumbered or disadvantaged, from facing their adversaries; for it is better to die fighting than be butchered silently, ingloriously (299).

Ushie's radical proclivity reaches a head in "Volcano" where he sustains his advocacy for violence. He desires an eruption that:

Will veer into burrows and crevices, will
Flush out thousand seasons' mountain
Of squalor. The fiery flood, its tensed
Ill-tempered muscles, will push past
Palaces of princes, kings... (*Eclipse* 28).

In this poem, Ushie points out plainly that it is the mercurial, molten heat from the erupting violence of the angered masses that will "wash this immovable hill of filth into the all-cleansing ocean..." (28-29). It is clear that the suppressed ire of the people will continue to swell until it explodes into a volcano that will bring salvation and relief. It is so inescapably imminent that the poet, in a tone of absolute certainty, wraps up the poem, thus: "There will be a volcano at this unknown hill this noon" (29). Consequently, the beleaguered masses are emboldened to take their destiny in their own hands and redefine the unfavourable status quo.

Language and Stylistic Strategies

With language, literary communication is made possible; and with creative manipulation of linguistic variables, literary excellence is attained. How a language is configured, in essence, determines the effectual end product and impression to be created on the reader. To this, Vincent Obobolo remarks:

A well-planned...text...may lose its purpose to the audience if the language employed does not serve as an effective medium of expression. The occasion may be right, the structure of the message may be good, but success depends largely on the rendering of the message. Rendering, here, includes the choice of words, and the style of the person rendering the message (246).

The vitality of style thus becomes unimpeachable. Joe Ushie's poetic language combines simplicity with an imposing fascination. Through the coupling of carefully selected and expertly handled expression patterns, the poet impresses lasting images on his readers. Simple expressions make his poetry easy to understand, as can be spotted in expressions such as: "Every evening, I tell the tale to children/of my forefathers who were warriors,"

(*Lambs...* 13); “When you scratch your backside/To stop an itch on your forehead,/Fiction is born” (*A Reign...* 20). With this approach, devoid of complexities and excessive grammaticality, Ushie’s audience is treated to an enjoyable, gratifying poetic feast.

Ushie’s language, notably, is marked by creative use of symbolism. He subscribes to representing certain delicate, vital, controversial ideas with symbols, because a literary symbol is “...richly—even boundlessly—suggestive in its significance... [as it is] the higher mode of expression” (Abrams and Harpham, 322). Joe Ushie’s poetry is rife with powerful symbols. Right from titles of collections, to titles of individual poems, and to the very lines, symbolism stamps its ground. In *Lambs at the Shrine*, “lamb” is symbolic of the weak, the oppressed, while “shrine” is representative of an agonizing socio-political climate. Thus, the common man becomes a lamb that is slaughtered for sacrifice at the shrine. “Eclipse” in *Eclipse in Rwanda* is symbolic of doom, darkness, sorrow and fear, all of which befell the nation in the wake of the homicide. In the last collection, “locusts” is an insignia of the destructive, avaricious and insatiable leaders who swarm greedily over the continent’s treasury.

In the poem “Fate of the Sheep”, the symbolic use of “lion” and “sheep” comes to represent the oppression of the weak masses by the powerful, and privileged rulers. Thus, the badly-fated masses are left “trembling”, while the “steel-like, bellicose and accoutered” leaders continue “roaring like hell” (*Lambs...* 24). Also, in “Tropical rain”, the contrastive symbols of “dry season” and “rain” are employed to create an emotive effect. While the former represents the ruin, lack and evil gnawing the nation, the latter is representative of the poet’s vision of a cleansing, of restoration, repair and rebirth that will spring forth. Hence comes the placating assurance that “It will surely rain here again/Where the dry season has overstayed” (*Lambs...* 26). Similarly, in “Volcano”, symbols of “fiery flood”, “ill-tempered muscles”, “sparks” and “volcano” are borrowed by the poet to stand for the violent reaction and revolution that should erupt from the masses. By this, all corrupt regimes and their failures—shown equally with symbols of “decaying leaf”, “dead wood”, “violent odour” and “mess” (28)—will be ousted. Noticing the longsuffering of the masses, the poet assures that just as the blistering rage of the volcano builds with time, so will the fire of revolution mount until it is released with consuming ferocity.

Other imposing symbols feature in *A Reign of Locusts*. In “The african bermuda”, the Bermuda Triangle, as used by the poet, symbolically represents the state of affairs in Africa. Here, the continent’s wealth disappears into the hands of the few opportune individuals at the helm of affairs, just as things mysteriously disappear into the real-life Bermuda Triangle. “Canaan” in “Toward Canaan” is a symbol of the blissful, utopic vision, as conceived by Nigerians upon the inception of democracy and self-rule. Contrarily, these expectations have proven to be improbable, against the backdrop of abject political fiasco and ugly betrayal from our political overseers through time. Painfully, therefore, the unending walk towards Canaan—the land that is believed to overflow with honey and milk—continues, as this fabled land proves to be “a tantalizing mirage” that keeps defying our “home-hungry feet” (*A Reign... 9*).

These symbols, as examined, underscore the depth of Ushie’s poetry. Symbolism, as such, becomes a device through which the poet creates forceful and indelible impressions about his subject matters on the minds of his audience. Through this strategy, also, a more intense satire and justifiable opprobrium is aimed at the political class whom the poet holds responsible for the continent’s ruins.

Another device that is prominently present in Joe Ushie’s poetry is allusion. He is frequently seen alluding to historical, Biblical and mythological characters and events in order to make clear the exploration of his subject matters and the descriptive comparisons he desires to make. In “Song of Sisyphus”, the poet alludes to the Greek mythological character, Sisyphus, believed to have been eternally condemned to roll a stone over a steep, but which continues to fall back. This allusion creates a strong literary effect as it describes the continuous failure in the exhaustive effort to build the nation. Also, in “Manna fall”, the poet alludes Biblically to the redemptive intervention of God with the provision of manna to feed the languid Israelites. By this allusion, attention is drawn to the fact that the resources being plundered in Nigeria are free, God-given endowments that should benefit everyone. Unfortunately, same have been plundered by a few of society’s bulk who “must BLOCK its fall/to [those] below” (*Eclipse... 15*).

A further allusion to Greek mythology is made in “Tantalus”. Like Tantalus, the son of Zeus, punished with hunger and thirst in the midst of surplus fruits and water, so is the common man in Nigeria and Africa deprived of basic necessities by those in power. The masses are made to

abide with frustration, like Tantalus, “thirsting to death like a mystery” (*Eclipse...* 26). Laden with sorrow, frustration and despair, the poem betrays the agony of the Nigerian masses. Out of boundless, immeasurable disappointment, the poet retorts that “This death would have/tasted better in a desert” instead of in a place of abundance (26). Clearly, allusion enhances description in Ushie’s poetry.

Important to note, also, is Ushie’s representation of the indigenous language and African speech mannerisms in his poetry. The poet understands the identity-giving nature of his mother tongue and, as such, introduces his native Bendi words such as “kpoh-cha”, “keki-ulong”, “Ashi-ande”, “Angeb-ishang”, etc. which are asterisked and interpreted as footnotes. This borrowing from the indigenous language enables the poet to better represent the African experience in his writing and also comes to validate the “other-endowed” characteristic of the English language, which Adekunle Adeniran explains to be the influences on the English language, by writers, situations and geographical effects. Generally, Ushie taps from the rich oral traditions of Africa as he draws richly from traditional poetry, folklore, proverbs, etc. to confirm Ayo Bamgbode’s avowal that Nigerian literature’s “filial attachment to the oral tradition has remained strong as ever” (312). Overall, Ushie’s approach to style marks him out as a maestro of poetry on the one hand, and facilitates his socio-political activism on the other. His style also particularly provides him with the needed poetic spice that gives depth and severity to his satires.

CONCLUSION

When other reparative mediums loosen their resolve, literature remains committed to the search for societal advancement. Through poetry, Joe Ushie has exemplified this unflinching steadfastness. In all of his collections, the poet dedicates his creative ingenuity to exploring the excesses of postcolonial African leaders in a simultaneous parallel with the anguish of the exploited, devocalized masses. He shows the common hopes of the citizens to be brutally raped by those who bear the staff of leadership. Ushie’s activism is so patterned because he is concerned about the nation’s (and, of course, continent’s) future in his writing, as he exhibits in his poems “To my unborn children” and “Evening tales”. In the former title, for instance, he laments that the unborn (the continent’s future) ought not to be born into the grimy ruins of today: “I fear and fear that/you might land on these hard-/ening, metallic thorns whose/points like needle might

mince/your frail flesh, all to my misery” (*Eclipse*... 22). This deep concern for the future proves right the position of Mohamadou Kane, that the future must be given primacy in the author’s writings; and that the traumatized public should not be neglected for personal gratification (66).

With a deliberate approach to linguistic choices and style, Ushie stands out from the fold. He patterns his language to project his humanist ideological leanings, thus enhancing his involvement in social, political, economic matters to facilitate the liberation of the oppressed and voiceless. He sticks to this ideology and employs an admixture of approaches—pleading, wailing, diplomacy and revolt—to see it achieved. Therefore, his poetry, though melancholic and lamentative, leaves the downtrodden with hope and a beamer of light that will metamorphose into full radiance, to shine upon “this grief-ridden world of ours” (Kane; 122).

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