

War and Absurdity: Reading the Manifestations of Trauma in Uwem Akpan's "Luxurious Hearses"

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Abstract

This essay examines the circumstances of Jubril, Chief Ukongo and Colonel Usenetok, three casualties of Sharia war fleeing to safety in Uwem Akpan's short story, "Luxurious Hearses" in her collection, Say You're One of Them (2008). The paper particularly identifies the loss of personhood that afflicts these individuals as a result of war; that loss of self that manifests itself in absurdity. Akpan paints poignant and convincing pictures of the horrors of war, of the physical and mental dislocation of individuals in a war situation. This paper finds that for those caught up in the throes of war or conflict, life has one basic meaning – physical survival.

Introduction

Nigerian "war literature" has almost become a genre of its own, yet Chimalum Nwankwo maintains that depictions of war in African literature have not been taken seriously enough because "war is Africa's muted index." He however goes on to say that "muted as it is, one could read beyond simply trying to capture the regular zeitgeist which good national literatures capture. The index could guide the insightful reader towards the foundation of Africa's numerous perennial or still unfolding tragedies" (13). Nwankwo alleges that most of Africa's problems can be traced to a long and turbulent history of wars and their unsavory consequences (13). The considerable corpus of war literature depicts the numerous situations associated with war—the loss of lives and property, the senseless cruelty and destruction, the physical dislocation and deprivation, the tense excitement, mystery and suspense, and the trauma of living through such trying times. However, the dire consequences of war on the psyche of the individual, the dislocation of the mind are the subject of Uwem Akpan's

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attention in “Luxurious Hearses” (2008). Akpan demonstrates that while the tangible physical costs of war are huge, the loss of humanity that occurs in war situations is worse.

The purpose of this paper is to look at some of the ways in which war trauma manifests as absurd behaviour in the personalities of the characters we have selected for study and illustrate that the loss of personhood that occurs in war situations has terrible implications for society. That war is central to Nigeria’s history and has contributed to shaping the Nigeria of today is evident in the corpus of war literature that we have. In *Burma Boy* (2007), Biyi Bandele recreates the experiences of Nigerian soldiers in World War II. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu assert that Bandele’s novel sketches the “chequered contours of the Nigerian soul excited by the closeness to gruesome death in a setting where the essential dignity of man and respect for life are at zero level” (123). War stories also abound in poetry. Obi Nwakanma, in *Horseman and Other Poems* (2007), pays tribute to valiant Nigerian soldiers. A solitary female voice in Nigerian war poetry, Catherine Acholonu presents a woman’s point of view about war. Her *Nigeria in the Year 1999* (1985), is filled with images of rape and collective pain suffered by women in times of war. She provides poetic evidence that women suffer cruel abuses in war time. Onyebuchi Nwosu’s dramatic depiction of a Biafran family disintegrated by war in *Bleeding Scars* (2005) particularly points out that even when a war is over, the physical and psychological scars still “bleed” profusely. That these psychological scars bleed so much more than physical scars is amply demonstrated in Akpan’s “Luxurious Hearses” – hence the presentation of a war scenario in which people have been completely robbed of illusions—a situation that reveals itself in different absurd behaviour.

Akpan presents the physical and psychological experiences of the individuals affected by the sharia war in Khamfi during a period that must have been the 1980s because the book situates the particular incident in the period when the military had just left power and ECOMOG forces were in service in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s treatment of the Nigerian Biafran war in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Akpan’s focus is not on the physical war itself but on its effects on the

minds of individuals. This essay analyzes three of the motley assemblage of persons in the luxurious bus carrying Christians away from the Muslim town of Khamfi where they are being mindlessly killed. The fragile existence of Chief Ukongo, Jubril and Colonel Usenetok and their relationships with other persons in the bus reveal that for these individuals whose lives have been shattered by war and conflict, the losses they suffer go deeper than physical dislocation and deprivation. They suffer different degrees of loss of self and the inability to hold their minds together which manifests in absurd behaviour. We witness that for these persons, life has only one basic meaning – physical survival. All they seek in this text is the physical removal from closeness to death; they do not have any aspirations, ambitions or plans for their relocation to the safety of the south. They do not think beyond the immediate present and escape. The essay also examines the absurdity of human relationships in conflict situations.

Absurdity

Absurdity can be described as something that defies logic; something that seems irrational or that cannot be reasonably explained. The concept of absurdity in this paper is taken from Martin Esslin – a drama critic whose writings about the theatre of the absurd have come to be the accepted terms that describe literature that shows the world as “an incomprehensible place” (1266). Particularly concerned with drama and theatre, Esslin posits that while “happenings in absurdist plays might be absurd, they remain recognizable as somehow related to real life with its absurdity, so that eventually, the spectators are brought face to face with the irrational side of their existence. Thus, the absurd and fantastic goings on of ‘The Theatre of the Absurd’ will, in the end, be found to reveal the irrationality of the human condition and the illusion of what we thought was its apparent logical structure” (1266). The part of Esslin’s absurdist theory that is particularly applicable to our purpose in “Luxurious Hearses” is his insistence that the Second World War has brought with it “... the discovery of vast areas of irrational and unconscious forces within the human psyche, the loss of a sense of control over rational human development in an age of totalitarianism and weapons of mass destruction, all have contributed to the erosion of the basis for a dramatic convention

in which the action proceeds within a fixed and self evident framework of generally accepted values” (1267). This irrationality identified by Esslin provides an explanation for man’s lack of a conscience, the thirst for blood and the meaninglessness of human life evident in the war situation in “Luxurious Hearses”.

Albert Camus’ existential philosophy further explains the inherent absurdity of human life illustrated in Akpan’s text. Camus conceives of the world as:

possessing no inherent truth, value or meaning; and to represent human life – in its fruitless search for purpose and significance, as it moves from the nothingness whence it came toward the nothingness where it must end- as an existence that is both anguished and absurd. (qtd. in Abrams 1)

The anguished and meaningless existence of man on earth is captured in Camus’ *Myth of Sisyphus* in which Sisyphus is condemned for eternity to the futile job of rolling to the top of a steep hill a stone that always rolled back again (Encarta). A world without truth, meaning or purpose would be predisposed to the bestiality that is visible in war.

Camus’ contention that human existence is inherently absurd aligns with Esslin’s recognition that wars are often illogical and war situations provide the enabling atmosphere for the release of the irrational in the human psyche. The two theorists imply that the perception of the world as having a logical structure is only an illusion. The imperative therefore, is to rise up to the challenge of presenting the realities of war and its aftermath in their works. This implies that an honest representation of life must include the presentation of irrational realities such as the tangible and intangible absurdities of war and its aftermath. Akpan does this successfully in “Luxurious Hearses”.

The three characters chosen for study in this paper stand out in their manifestation of traumatized absurd behaviour. They are Jubril, a young boy from whose lenses we view the situation, Chief Ukongo, a self-glorifying traditional ruler and Colonel Usenetok, an Ecomog

soldier whose mind is in shreds. Jubril is just a teenager but his life is like the country Nigeria: multi-religious, multi-ethnic and a hybrid of cultures and languages. Akpan describes the multi-linguistic situation of Nigeria as ‘a babel of languages’(191), emphasizing the confusion of lack of understanding and alluding to a similarity to the confusion in the biblical tower of Babel. Jubril is a Christian and a Muslim; he is also a southerner and a northerner. This is indeed an irrational, absurd situation for any individual in a country “where ethnic and religious hate simmered beneath every national issue...” (Nnolim, 213).The irrationality of Jubril’s young life begins from the absurdity of the peculiar circumstances of his birth. We witness that he is aggrieved that “his personal story was not as straightforward as he would have wanted. Over the years, he did everything he could, not to remember the parts he knew” (243). The shame of his dual ethnicity and dual religion is the beginning of his traumatized life. Jubril’s feels shame about having a Christian southern father and a Northern Muslim mother because the ethnic and religious division is so entrenched that children grow into it without conscious effort – hence he equates southerner with “infidel” and tries hard to groom his northern identity (244).

That ethnic and religious dogmatism are indeed irrational is seen in the enmity between Jubril and his brother Yesuf resulting from their conflicting religious and cultural choices; enmity so severe that it defies logic. Jubril actually watches in support as his Muslim brethren stone his biological brother to death for professing the Christianity instead of the Islam and he feels nothing but righteousness. The greatest absurdity of this religious scenario is that he would have liked to join in killing his brother to “protect the honour of his family, neighbourhood and Islamic faith” (216). Only a total loss of sensibility can make it possible for a young man to have preferred to join others to kill his brother for nothing more than the latter’s belonging to another religious faith. It is testimony to a terrible loss of humanity resulting from conflict that has become innate. The paradox is that other Muslims hold up Jubril “as a true Muslim for not allowing family loyalties to come between him and his religion when Yesuf was given his just deserts...” (217). Religion that should unite people in love or at least teach tolerance is the weapon of opposition, division, hate and pain.

In “Luxurious Hearses”, the word ‘Christian’ or ‘Muslim’ confers on the individual a life or death sentence in just seconds. The fraternity Jubril was enjoying in the bus disappeared the second the stump of his right wrist identified him as a Muslim; this identification amounted to an immediate and irreversible death sentence. Jubril’s attempt to convey the mangled story of his religious identity meant nothing to them, “Their murderous looks told him it was useless. These were not the stares of Catholics or born-again or ancestral worshippers..., their stares reminded him of his fundamentalist Muslim friends, Musa and Lukeman” (321). In identifying an enemy that must die for professing a different faith, both Muslims and Christians are the same; illogical, unreasoning and unyielding. Musa and Lukeman discard in a heartbeat, a shared childhood of friendship and brotherhood in Islamic attitudes as they try to kill Jubril in religious zeal and frenzy because he is tainted with Christian blood. Similarly, Tega, Ijeoma, Emeka, Madam Aniema, and Chief Ukongo do not hesitate to slit Jubril’s throat at the realization that he is Muslim. None of them would even give him the benefit of a hearing; the friendship they shared in the bus means nothing in the face of a conflicting religious identity. Both Muslims and Christians presented in this text appear to be incapable of any deep-seated feelings of attachment, affection or love in any meaningful way—it’s all about religious identity.

Jacques Lacan’s theory of alienation helps to explain the attitudes and behavior of characters in “Luxurious Hearses” and free them from the abstraction of absurdity. Lacan, a psychiatrist and a disciple of Sigmund Freud, identifies what he describes as “a fundamental alienation in the individual’s sense of self” (450). Michael P. Clark (1994) explains that Lacan’s sense of self is oriented in the direction of ‘an other’ who is perceived as “omnipotent and thus a potential rival to the self, the ego that emerges from this stage inevitably bears within it a hostility or “aggressivity” that threatens the very stability attributed to it” (450). He summarizes Lacan’s theory of alienation as follows: “Lacan therefore concluded that the human identity is formed only within an intersubjective context in which alienation and aggressivity are the norm rather than aberrations” (450). This idea of innate aggression and alienation aligns with the attitudes of Akpan’s characters and explains why Jubril’s

childhood friends and comrades in the bus are able to turn into deadly enemies instantly. Lacan's theory sheds some light on the total absence of affection between Jubril and his brother, Yusuf. In addition, it positions their isolation from each other within the realm of normal behaviour.

This inordinate hold onto religion at the expense of family, friendship and altruism also leads to the conclusion that war situations will easily destroy even close filial relationships. This alienation from feelings, or the insulation of sensibilities, is the consequence of violent emotional injuries such as witnessing too much cruelty. Psychologists might argue that this 'shutting down' of emotions is a method of self-preservation, an unconscious effort to preserve one's sanity in what Emenyonu describes as "unique human conditions brought about by war" (xii). Clearly, loss of humanity, absurdities in individual psyches, actions and relationships are very visible consequences of conflict and war in this text.

We also note that none of the occupants of the bus has any ambition or plans for tomorrow. Jubril does not even know where he is heading, neither do Ukongo and Usenetok. Jubril holds on to a tattered piece of paper and the name of his father's village, on which hinges his hopes for an identity that will keep him alive. This tattered piece of paper is "like an energy boost" (209). Akpan does not provide for his characters any hope or possibility for gathering what Nnolim describes as "the splintered shards of their broken lives" (148). We get the impression of people suspended in time and space, a bleak picture of hopeless traumatized existence.

Trauma

Trauma describes experiences that are physically and emotionally damaging and painful. Physical trauma is damage to the physical body which may be caused by accidents such as gunshots, burns, electric shocks, bone fractures and birth stress. On the other hand, emotional or psychological trauma is severe damage or injury to the mind and emotions that has lasting psychic effects. In the introductory chapter of her book, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992), the American psychiatrist, Judith Herman, posits that psychological trauma is a disordered behavioural state that one

is left in after terrifying and stressful events. Herman maintains that “traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely but rather because they overwhelm in ordinary human adaptation to life” (31).

Similarly, Maureen A. Allwood et al (2002) point out the adverse effects of violence and deprivation during wars which ‘overwhelm’ the coping skills of individuals, especially children, making them vulnerable to externalized and internalized adjustment difficulties (450-457). Both Herman and Allwood are particular about the fact that traumatic experiences ‘overwhelm’ the individual and hinder adaptation and integration into society. We can deduce that a natural consequence of these adaptation difficulties must be alienation. These psychiatric studies also cite catastrophic war experiences, as well as witnessing horrific killings, violent and malicious attacks as causes of psychological trauma. The varied victims of war assembled in the “luxurious bus” in this text act out attitudes which illustrate the postulations of Herman and Allwood. For Akpan, in the war situation presented in the novel, buses such as this one are more appropriately means for carrying corpses than transportation for humans because people and corpses occupy spaces side by side. Some of these buses are so filled up with corpses of war casualties being ferried home for burial that there are only a few spaces left for living persons. They are really ‘luxurious hearses’.

Akpan’s x-ray of the characters in interaction in this particular bus reveals that they are all traumatized and violated by war and they manifest different absurdities in behaviour. Jubril, for instance, suffers both physical and psychological trauma. He suffers from the terrible physical pain of having his wrist violently chopped off as religious punishment for petty theft; at the same time, emotionally he contends with a permanent crisis of identity. His peculiar circumstances have resulted in Jubril’s alienation from everything and everyone. He is unable to identify with his mother who is a Muslim, like him, or his brother who is Christian, as their father was. His sense of isolation is such that in this “between life and death scenario”, in the bus, where it should have been easy to bond with others in similar dire straits, he is unable to fit in. “He could not feel anything for these Muslims (who had disowned him), nor for the Christians with whom he was fleeing” to safety (218). The reason is that Jubril has always

been a victim of conflict. Even before this Khamfi war, he had lived his entire life in war situations; war between his two conflicting ethnicities, between two opposing religions, and among different cultural attitudes and languages. It would be difficult to expect ‘normal’ behavior from anyone in Jubril’s situation.

The trauma of the ‘wars’ in Jubril’s psyche is also seen in his absurd reactions to the women and television in the bus. As a Muslim, he would have preferred to trek a thousand miles on foot rather than sit in the same vehicle with a woman. The paradox is that he is also fascinated by women: he watches them closely, vacillating between liking them and hating them. He compares their hairdos, nails etc. “He was like a person addicted, the more women he counted or watched, the more he needed to assuage his TV anxieties” (202). The psychological dislocation of his mind shows in the effect that watching TV has on him: it makes him feel as if “he is pushing himself into a bottomless pit of temptation and sin” (201) ,for he had heard of the incredible power of TV to corrupt and tarnish the soul. Ironically, watching women, which formerly was the ultimate sin, becomes safe when he faces the greater evil of TV. These absurd attitudes result from the physical and psychological wars that afflict him.

Chief Ukongo is an aging, displaced self-acclaimed traditional ruler. We are introduced to him when he occupies the young Jubril’s seat and refuses to leave. He is aggrieved that fellow passengers do not recognize or acknowledge his exalted status as a royal father. . . a royal father should at the very least have the liberty of taking over another’s paid seat. Educating them on the appropriate way to treat a royal father, he says: “to let a royal father take the better seat is nothing compared to what we actually deserve” (274). He intimidates Jubril to the extent that the boy begins to feel guilty for demanding his seat and to think that giving up his seat to a chief is the only decent thing to do. Ironically, a few minutes later Chief Ukongo turns around and tries to help Jubril take over the Soldier’s seat (289). In response to the request to produce a bus ticket, Ukongo replies, “Soldier, do you know that I am not even supposed to be on this bus? Do you know that I am supposed to be helping the government solve this national crisis... not being insulted by a madman!” (280). He blissfully ignores the issue and calmly turns his attention to his preferred

subject— his importance. His fixed attention on his beads, the manner in which he strokes and clacks them together against each other “with measured alacrity” (279) and the manner in which the chief wallows in his laments about his lost glories, all point to a mind that has snapped.

Ukongo’s personality is disintegrated, or at the very least, unstable. At the point where the passengers appear to have settled down in the bus, he continues to be restless. We are told that “the momentary peace that pervaded the bus had evaded this man. Every now and then, some indiscernible angst brought tears to the gullies of the chief’s eyes” (269). We see him take out his identity, look at it and cry for no visible explanation. His constant shifts between their present reality as displaced war victims, grand ideas of his own importance and a non-existent possibility of restored grandeur, are pathetic and absurd and like Jubril’s attitudes, almost border on insanity.

The soldier, Colonel Usenetok, appears to be the most traumatized. He has a head full of rotten dreadlocks with an army beret sitting “like a crown of disgrace” (278) over them. In appearance, he is like a madman and in behavior, he is not much better. He carries a sickly looking dog ever so gently “as if it were a two-day old baby” (278). Soon we realize that the sickly, smelly blood-vomiting dog is the focus of his existence. He prays for his dog: “the gods of our ancestors will not allow you, Nduese, to die!” (282). It is clear that this unnatural attachment to the dog is his tenuous hold on illusions of love and family. His is a mind in disarray, yet Usenetok retains some rationality and a convoluted sense of self-worth. He is outraged that Chief Ukongo refers to him as a madman, and asks; “you are insulting me after all I have done for this country?” (280). He promptly produces his identity card to validate his worth, and with a sense of self importance he announces to them, “Colonel Silas Usenetok... ECOMOG Special Forces!” (280). Usenetok vacillates between attitudes of honour, logical reasoning and meaningless logic. The other occupants of the bus mock his wretchedness, they are amazed that he reached the rank of Colonel in the army without amassing wealth by whatever means. He tells them that he “fought in Sierra Leone without pay. Government still hasn’t paid me for a year now... I didn’t steal your money!” (284). Monica is particularly blunt and scathing; she asks him: “And you dey

call yourself army Colonel?...You be yeye man o! Why you no steal? You no be good Colonel at all...you tell us soldierman, wetin you dey retire to now?" Usenetok replies "To dignity and conscience" (284). His talk about dignity and conscience is impressive and takes one by surprise; it is an aberration, coming from an almost insane soldier in ragged camouflage uniform. At the same time, he shouts at the top of his lungs, telling the bus about the rebels of Liberia and the child soldiers of Sierra Leone. Incoherently but with boundless energy, he rattles on endlessly about how he killed many of them and imbibed cocaine to be able to "march at the pace of cocaine madness exhibited by the child soldiers" (289). Other occupants of the bus exhibit varied absurd behavior. For instance, we see that at the other end of the bus, Emeka is out of control too, trembling like a sick man, speaking without catching his breath, flinging himself out of the window every now and then ...his (Emeka's) is a different type of absurdity. Usenetok on the other hand displays "the madness of the war front", a mind that has snapped fighting savagery in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Jubril, Chief Ukongo and Colonel Usenetok act out attitudes that illustrate that the cost of war is both palpable and impalpable; that every situation of war comes with damage that goes deeper than merely the physical and the tangible. Wars take their toll on the human mind, and the extent of this toll is seen in the reactions of the refugees to the turmoil around them. Akpan presents a religious war so fierce that "madness whipped up the red dust of Khamfi" (239). The Khamfi the passengers watched on TV was "the corpse capital of the world. Churches, homes, and shops were being torched...the unblinking eyes of the news camera poured its images into the darkening bus, zeroed in on charred corpses sizzling in electric-blue flames " (235). Only a total loss of sensibility (self) would permit the bestiality that makes possible the magnitude of the destruction they watch on the TV. The loss of humanity seen on TV is also evident in the lukewarm feelings/reactions of the refugees. We note that they show only a passive fury regarding all the terrible sights they see on TV. It is amazing that the strongest reaction they show to the gory sights being televised is to spur on the winning side in the conflict.

While their sensibilities are so shredded and hardened that these gory sights produce only lukewarm reactions, it is remarkable that the sight of free fuel wasted in the hands of almajeris provokes them to an active show of anger. Akpan states:

The refugees rose to their feet at the sight of hungry looking almajeris running around with fuel and matches, setting things and people afire.....It was not really the sight of corpses burning-or businesses of their southern compatriots being leveled by the fire bombs, or the gore when some of the kids were fried in gas before they had a chance to use it that roused the refugees. All over the country, people had developed a tolerance of such common sights; decades of military rule, and its many terrorist plots directed at the populace, had hardened them. What riled them was the sight of free fuel in the hands of almajeris (235).

We are confronted with a dearth of sensibility that makes fuel wastage more important than the death of people; fuel has more value than homes and corpses burning.

Thus the characters' lives are aberrations and their sensibilities are shredded to the point of loss – the loss of self that enables bestiality, a hardening of minds and souls that makes it possible to sit with corpses and feel nothing but resentment for the spaces the corpses occupy. They are people from whom joy has been removed, leaving only an isolation from humanity. What should have been sorrow translates into absurdity and irrationality; it is a strange world of strange reactions. The town is the same as the people—in varying stages of destruction; we see people and neighbourhoods burning senselessly. We are reminded of Jeebleh's reflections on the destruction and senseless slaughter of persons in the Somalian war in Nurrudin Farah's *Links* (2003). Jeebleh describes the war torn Somalian city as a place of sorrow:

Many houses had no roofs and bullets scarred nearly every wall.... The streets were eerily, ominously quiet. They saw no pedestrians on the roads, and met no other vehicles. Jeebleh felt a tremor, imagining that the residents had been slaughtered "in one another's

blood”, ... He would like to know whether in this civil war, both those violated and the violators suffered from a huge deficiency—the inability to remain in touch with their inner selves or to remember who they were before the slaughter began. Could this be the case in Rwanda or Liberia? Not that one could make sense of this war on an intellectual level (70).

What Farah’s *Jeebleh* describes and reflects on here is the absurdity of war situations, as we find it in Akpan’s “Luxurious Hearses”. Akpan’s concern with the loss of personhood caused by war is also echoed in Farah’s novel, hence Jeebleh points out the huge psychological deficiency that all parties involved suffer in war—the loss of sensibility that makes it possible for people to slaughter one another in cold blood.

An appropriate summary of the characters and situations in “Luxurious Hearses” is captured in Camus’ description of absurdity. He maintains that absurdity is the presentation of man in “a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile... this divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity” (qtd. in Abrams 1). This means that absurdity in life and literature embraces the manifestation and depiction of arbitrary, illogical, irrational characters, thought processes, behaviours, situations and places. Akpan depicts the absurdity of human life in war, the discovery of what Esslin describes as ‘the vast areas of irrational and unconscious forces within the human psyche, the loss of a sense of control’ and the loss of personhood that manifests in war circumstances.

Conclusion

Charles Nnolim points out that 20th century African literature was about what Europeans enslavers, imperialists and apartheid operators have inflicted on Africans, but modern African war literature depicts what fellow Africans are inflicting on their brothers and sisters (148-149). Akpan’s “Luxurious Hearses” is quite detailed in its illustration of what Nigerians are doing to their brothers and sisters under the guise of religion. This depiction of the experiences of southern Nigerian Christians fleeing

from the Sharia (Muslim) massacre of non-Muslims in the Northern part of Nigeria reveals how their psychological energies have been disintegrated and shredded to snapping point as a result of the horrors they experience. The author exposes the reader to varied manifestations of trauma in the minds of these dislocated individuals which emerges in the form of different absurd attitudes. Akpan illustrates the effects of war on the human psyche, the psychological erosion of self and humanity, the hardening of heart and the bestiality that can easily take over the human mind, and the impact on human relationships. Like the absurdities we find in the characters of Jubril, Chief Ukongo and Colonel Usenetok, the human relationships Akpan presents are also absurd. We find that those affected and violated by war suffer a huge deficiency or loss of personhood that results in depravity and absurd behaviour.

Akpan also reflects on the paradox of religion as an instrument of love and hate. He questions the relativity of truth as regards the fanatical issue of religious identity, the inability of human beings to reach a compromise or understand a different point of view, and above all, the insensitivity to the palpable and impalpable injuries of war that could have been avoided. War is clearly presented as illogical and absurd and those affected by war manifest this absurdity in thought processes and behaviour. Akpan depicts, with an insight that only literature can provide, how the impact of war goes beyond the tangible, and he brings out clearly the absurdity of this religious war.

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