

Recalling Traumatic Memory in Hyginus Ekwuazi's *That Other Country*

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Received: 26 /02 / 2026

Accepted: 30 / 03 / 2026

Published: 15 / 07 / 2026

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## Abstract

The Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 has continued to enrich the tradition of African war literature. Decades after the tragic event, those who witnessed the war and those who benefit postmemorially from accounts by witnesses continue to mediate their direct and vicarious experiences artistically. While Hyginus Ekwuazi's *That Other Country* belongs to one of the recent engagements with the war, it offers the most sustained versification on the experience. Although his verse in this regard, which borders on memorialization, has attracted critical attention, this paper extends this engagement by exploring the traumatic nature of the memory depicted in the collection. Drawing on theoretical insights from Joshua Pederson's revised literary trauma theory, the paper argues that trauma is indeed both memorable and speakable. It shows that the poet persona's memory of the war experience as a teenager remains accessible not just in the form of a belated traumatic return, but also as a witness who can relate his experience, firstly to his lover and secondly to his literary audience through *That Other Country*.

**Keywords:** Hyginus Ekwuazi, Memorability of trauma, Nigerian Civil War, Speakability of trauma, *That Other Country*

## Cite as

Adebisi-Adelabu, K. (2026). Recalling Traumatic Memory in Hyginus Ekwuazi's *That Other Country*. *Atras Journal*, 7(2), 108-122. <https://doi.org/10.70091/Atras/vol07no02.08>

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Atras Journal/ 2026, published by the University of Saida Dr Moulay Tahar, Algeria  
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## Introduction

After nearly two decades of military dictatorship, Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999. Even though the president who emerged after the long years of military rule was a former military general, rights to freedom of speech and association were relatively well guaranteed and enjoyed by all. These rights had been part of the casualties of the dictatorship era, as Decree 4 and Decree 22 of the era ensured that any speech or action deemed anti-government was treated as treason. Those caught in foul of the decrees were jailed, made to disappear, assassinated, or subjected to judicial murder. One of the notable and early group beneficiaries of the new democratic order was the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). The group, founded in 1999 and led by Ralph Uwazuruike, set out, as its name suggests, to bring the dream of a Biafran nation to reality through the principle of non-violence. It started with organizing rallies and protests, raising awareness of its vision, and rekindling nostalgia for the botched secession attempt by the former Eastern Region of Nigeria in the late 1960s.

This historical resurgence of the Biafran dream through MASSOB activities may trigger renewed interest in the literary reimagining of the Nigerian Civil War or in its memorialization by the post-war generation of Nigerian writers. Although Ekwuazi witnessed the civil war as a teenager, he would not write about the event until over four decades later, about a decade after MASSOB activities started. In *That Other Country*, his fourth poetry collection, he dwells on memories of the civil war. Aside from the possibility of MASSOB activities, the collection was also inspired as a kind of intertextual dialogue with Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), published four years earlier. Adichie's interest in the Biafran story was evident in her play, *For Love of Biafra*, published in 1998 and predating MASSOB's activities. However, MASSOB's political activism gave Adichie the impetus and resolve to write what would become a masterpiece in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Yet, the awareness about the history of the war engendered by the resurgence of creative engagements with the war in the 1990s actually inspired MASSOB activities. Whether the former or the latter, the way the politics of power negotiation or power grab in Nigeria feeds memories of the past and shapes the present sense of (in)justice can also not be ignored.

Following the launch of General Abdulsalami Abubakar's transition to democratic rule program in 1998, three major political parties emerged: the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All People's Party (APP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). In light of the history of the June 12, 1993, election and the death in jail of the speculated winner of the election, Chief M.K.O. Abiola, northern Nigerian political elites and power brokers worked the political

process to ensure that the two major contenders for the presidential seat emerged from the Southwest of the country. This is to assuage the region of the injustice of the 1993 election annulment. The politics clearly worked against the interest of a strategically positioned Igbo aspirant, former Vice President Alex Ekwueme, who had worked assiduously for the growth of his party, the PDP. A Yoruba man who had shown no interest, was not a party member, and was, in fact, in jail, was sponsored to become the president. This seeming gang-up against the Igbo aspirant must have been received by the majority of Igbo as a continuation of the Civil War alliance between the North and the West to checkmate Igbo political ascendancy, thus inciting a nostalgia for Biafra.

It is also quite probable that the sense of "injustice" and a lack of equal opportunities for all Nigerians, seemingly felt more by the Igbo, stoked the literary re-imaginings of the war, as well as a sense of fractured identity for the Igbo person in Nigeria. They are beginning to see themselves as less of a Nigerian and more of a Biafran. Consequently, the need for solidarity around the Biafran identity surged. To realize or enhance this, invoking a collective memory of the war's pain was also found quite useful. Therefore, if Uwazuruike's mass movement drew sympathizers due to the pains of the past and a sense of injustice in the present, it should not be particularly surprising. As leaders and members of MASSOB purveyed narratives about the past, and later by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), it would not be long before sympathetic Igbo writers found the same subject worthy of artistic appropriation again. The memory of the war has therefore become a popular theme in creative explorations by Igbo writers in recent Nigerian literary history. Besides Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Isidore Diala's *The Lure of Ash* (1998), Obioma Chigozie's *The Road to the Country* (2024), Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), and Hyginus Ekwuazi's *That Other Country* (2010) are some of the other notable examples in the last two decades.

Ekwuazi, whose collection *That Other Country*, the text of interest in this article, is a notable voice in the modern Nigerian poetry landscape. The collection is the poet's fourth, following *Love Apart* (2006), *Dawn into Moonlight: All Around Me Dawning* (2008), and *The Monkey's Eyes* (2009). He has also published *One Day I'll Dare to Raise My Middle Finger at the Stork and the Reaper* (2015). These titles have not only earned him literary prizes and accolades, but they have also established him in the canon of modern Nigerian poetry as a poet of great significance. Although late in terms of the temporal emergence of literary production compared to his poet-scholar contemporaries such as Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Okinba Launko, and so on, Ekwuazi has made up for his late arrival on the literary scene with great exploits. He has won the Association of Nigerian Authors' prize twice, been nominated for the

highly prestigious Nigeria Prize for Literature (NLNG Prize) twice, and for the Wole Soyinka Prize for African Literature once.

In this article, the researcher examines Ekwuazi's memorialization of the Nigerian Civil War, beginning with the pogrom against the Igbo, as a creative work intended to draw attention to the lingering trauma of the Biafran War. Unlike other recent memorialisations of the war by writers cited above, Ekwuazi's selected poems offer a memorialization by a witness to the event. Drawing on the work of a witness to the tragic event, this article demonstrates how Ekwuazi's *That Other Country* validates the recent scholarly view that trauma is both memorable and *speakable*. The researcher draw on the theoretical postulations of Richard McNally and Joshua Pederson to make the argument. For a proper analytical mooring, the reseacher uses the next section to reflect on the theoretical assumptions that trauma is difficult to claim and recall by early trauma theorists such as Caruth (1995;1996), Felman and Laub (1992), and Hartman (1995), and the new propositions to the contrary by McNally (2003) and Pederson (2004).

## Theoretical Reflections

Contemporary theorizations and formulations around the concept of Trauma, especially in literary scholarship, have always been justifiably traced to Caruth (1995), especially in *Trauma: Exploration in Memory* and *Unclaimed Experience* (1996). In groundbreaking works, Caruth offers new insights into Freud's (1917) conception of Trauma to show how traumatic events impact memory. Alongside Caruth, scholars such as Felman and Laub (1992), Hartman (1995), and La Capra (1999; 2001) have advanced shared perspectives on memory and Trauma. Most significantly, they hold that Trauma disrupts memory, resists literal representation, and is understandable only in retrospect.

These trauma scholars, sometimes referred to as first-wave trauma theorists or the Yale School of trauma theorists, privilege three main tropes in trauma narration, namely, absence/silence, indirection, and repetition. Following the assumption that Trauma is never registered in the memory of its victim when it happens due to its shattering force, these theorists subscribe to the notion of traumatic amnesia on the part of the victim. Consequently, they espouse a praxis whereby engaging with Trauma in literature involves probing for gaps and silences in the text. For Herman and Caruth, for instance, Trauma is particularly unspeakable, at least explicitly. Like Herman (1992) observes that trauma patients "find it more and more difficult to use words... and may spontaneously switch to non-verbal methods of communication, such as drawing or painting" (p. 177), during unbearable moments of therapeutic narrative, Caruth also argues that Trauma resists literal language. Common to these

early theorists is also the notion of the belated return of Trauma.

The foregoing theoretical assumptions invariably shape earlier critical reception of trauma narratives. About a decade ago, however, attempts have been made to extend and rework this conventional Caruthian model. Gibbs (2014) is one of the proponents of the need for modifying the model. He is particularly critical of what he describes as "the tired techniques of postmodernism" (p. 244), which are usually deployed in analyzing trauma narratives, especially the praxes of fragmentation and temporal distortion. Craps (2013), Balaev (2018), and Pederson (2004) are other notable voices in this regard. Craps, for instance, objects to the assumption that Trauma is universal and transhistorical. Instead, he argues that context determines Trauma, and its study must therefore be approached with such an epistemological consciousness. He specifically argues for the inclusion of non-Western experiences and understanding in trauma studies.

As for Balaev, unlike the classic trauma theory, Trauma can be meaningfully represented in narratives through coherent and linear plotting, just like it can also be fragmented. Like Craps, she argues that cultures, histories, and contexts are crucial to conceptualizing Trauma. However, unlike the Caruthian model, she also argues that many trauma texts demonstrate the possibility of recovery, transformation, and healing. In short, she theorizes a "pluralistic model" of Trauma, one that partly supports and partly opposes classical theoretical standpoints. Pederson, the theorist from whose work I draw key insights, also proposes a radical rethinking of the Caruthian model, which relies heavily on the works of Freud, van der Kolk (2014), and Herman (1992), by arguing for the memorability and *speakability* of Trauma.

Drawing primarily on McNally's work, especially *Remembering Trauma* (2003), which explicates a psychological understanding of Trauma and memory, Pederson simultaneously critiques some of the assumptions of early trauma theorists and proposes his own model of literary trauma theory. Rather than Trauma resisting representation and being unspeakable, Pederson puts forward the view that traumatic memory is not only accessible, but that victims can actually construct a reliable account of their experience. In other words, he is of the view that traumatic memories are both memorable and *speakable*. Therefore, he urges that critical attention should be directed to the text rather than to gaps and silences in it, as Caruthian theorists had earlier propounded. These are not just radical shifts from the familiar order; they are challenging ones worthy of being put to the test.

In addition to turning attention to the text of Trauma, Pederson also emphasizes attention to what he calls "augmented narrative details. Relying on McNally's finding that trauma may actually enhance memory, rather than obstruct it, he stresses the point that traumatic memories

"are potentially more detailed and more powerful than normal ones" (Pederson 2004, p. 339). By this, he implies that writers are more inclined to textualize Trauma with greater or even excessive detail. He therefore exhorts readers and critics to pay attention to what he calls "textual overflow", or to "event descriptions replete with details" (p. 339). While this may easily apply to prose narratives, it is doubtful if the same can be said of verse. By the very nature of prose narratives, there is ample room to explore ideas and experiences in great detail, sometimes to a point of excess. This is hardly the case with poetry, where economy of words is a virtue. Perhaps it is in anticipation of such a challenge that he also calls attention to the multisensory nature of traumatic memory. Since poetry is often given to sensory depictions, apprehending traumatic memories from a multisensory perspective would prove very productive, as apt, dense imagery from the visual, aural, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory senses would compensate for excessive wordiness.

While Pederson (2004) also postulates that traumatic memories may be "temporally, physically or ontologically distorted" (p. 339), he maintains that the distortion hardly changes the substance of the memory but may impact its affect. Described by McNally (2003) as dissociative amnesia, the distortion manifests as a misperception of time and sensations, and a misapprehension of reality. Most importantly, Pederson insists that Trauma does not wipe out memory but may distort it. With this emphasis, Pederson (2004) directs critics' attention to instances of "confusion, shifts in place and time, out-of-body experiences, and a general sense of unreality" (p. 340), while indirectly espousing Vickroy's (2002) notion of empathetic engagement or ethical witnessing.

### **Recalling and Speaking Traumatic Memories**

In this section, the researcher explores the possibility of using Pederson's theoretical assumptions to read three poems from Ekwuazi's *That Other Country*. The researcher finds this particularly inviting in light of Craps's, Vickroy's, and other latter theorists' extension of trauma theory into postcolonial discourse. Ekwuazi's poetic imagination in the collection is not only postcolonial in its engagement with the impact of colonial history on the African political system, but also in its resistance to ongoing attempts at official erasure of aspects of the Nigerian Civil War's history. Perhaps it is also important to note that, despite the postcolonial lens through which the war's trauma may be viewed, the poems are rooted in traditional African epistemology, which privileges burden-sharing in adversity. In such a knowledge and cultural system, it is considered particularly useful to unburden one's mind after any tragic experience or troubling memories. Even in contemporary contexts, Adebisi-Adelabu (2023) has highlighted the vitality of this need. Therefore, the essay at hand, contrary to widespread assumptions, examines the memorability and *speakability* of trauma, using Ekwuazi's "The

Pied Piper Sang of a home he didn't know", "There's No Chiseling Out Words from the memory that Makes the Palm Moist", and "...Why the Sea is Boiling".

As Adebisi and Aguele (2017) note about Ekwuazi's engagement with trauma in *The Monkey's Eyes*, many of the poems in *That Other Country* also inscribe traumatic memory. The poem "The Pied Piper Sang of a Home He Didn't Know" deals with the trauma of the pogrom perpetrated against Igbo residents in parts of the defunct Northern region of Nigeria in 1966. While the pogrom took place before the formal declaration of war on July 6, 1967, by Colonel Yakubu Gowon, the event literally marked the beginning of open hostilities between the major parties to the Nigerian Civil War, the then Northern Region and the Igbo majority of the Eastern Region. Besides the extreme degree of violence unleashed, the figures of people killed and injured were put at tens and hundreds of thousands, respectively. If it were not so for the Nigerian side, the event must have marked the beginning of the civil war for most Igbo Biafrans. Indeed, no account of the war can justifiably exclude this tragic event. Fortunately, the persona in "The Pied Piper Sang of a Home He Didn't Know" survived the tragedy as a victim-witness of the consequent trauma, which is the object of the probe here. The persona begins:

The years have not diluted it –  
the smell of  
blood and  
fear and  
impotence  
I can still taste the smell on my dry tongue

I can still see the camp... in all its surreal clarity (Ekwuazi, 2010, p. 64)

As evident in the above lines, the impact of the pogrom on the persona's psyche remains almost as fresh as it was many years ago. Firstly, the lines speak of the enormity of the psychological pain and distress the persona has had to struggle with since the unfortunate event. Secondly, they validate the view that psychological pain can be more hurtful and insidious than physical pain. While the persona did not suffer physical harm during the pogrom, he witnessed the killing and burning of human beings, leaving him with a psychic ulcer that has refused to heal. The initial lines of the poem from which the excerpt above is taken show that the traumatic memories associated with the pogrom, as narrated by the persona-survivor in this poem, presuppose that trauma victims can remember as well as describe their experience. Nothing conveys this fact better than the details that follow the colon punctuation mark at the beginning of the excerpt above. In what Pederson (2004) would call "textual overflow", the

persona provides details about the camp from which he secured escape from the "yawning jaws of death" (p. 64). In what used to be a prison, not a single prisoner was left there again, except others who were refugees like him. Therein, the smell of burnt human flesh wafted in the atmosphere, just as deafening screams of the dying rent the air, and everyone cried, as more refugees found their ways into the camp. He even remembers how the guards at the camp ransacked his pockets and kicked him.

The above detailed recollections testify against the notion that traumatic memories are unregistered. If anything, as also admitted by McNally, victims may not frequently think about their trauma. The fact that they do not think about it, however, does not mean that they cannot recall or speak about it. A close attention to the last line of the excerpt above impels one not to miss a possible significance of the elliptical dots between the beginning clause and the succeeding phrase of the verse. For proponents of trauma *unspeakability*, this would signify silences and gaps that suggest difficulty in the process of recall or expression. However, the information that follows the ellipsis shows a reflective pause, observed to accurately provide a certain kind of detail: surreal. Alternatively, it is easily suggestive of a reluctance to provide details, which are eventually provided.

As part of the narrative details that lend credence to the memorability of traumatic events, the poet accounts for the multi-sensory nature of the persona's experience. From olfactory, gustatory, visual, aural, to tactile imagery depicted in the poem, textual overflow is not only registered, but traumatic memory is inscribed with an intensity that makes the recollection vibrant and vivid. With such diction, the persona's recollection appeals to readers' different senses, bringing the details forcefully home to them.

In the second section of the poem, the persona recalls the experience of some three children who were also victims of the pogrom's physical violence. Clearly, unlike someone whose memory is obstructed, the persona remembers knowing two of the children and their relationship to him. They were his kid brother's friends, and their elder brother was his classmate. Regarding the girl, the third child, who was a stranger to him, he can still remember "deep blotches of blood on her dress" (Ekwuazi, 2010, p. 65) and even figure out her age. If these details are remembered by the persona several years after the traumatic event, they could be explained by early theorists as a case of belatedness. Yet, remembering the details can be taken as evidence of the memory's presence or "aliveness" in the first instance, despite the state's political censorship of it. Even more interesting in this section of the poem is the persona's apparent capacity to speak an otherwise *unspeakable*, including the trauma of others. Two of the three children, the boys who "had witnessed the killings / of their father and their

elder brother" (Ekwuazi, 2010, p. 65), in an instance of peritraumatic episode, describe the details of how their father and brother were killed. The elder brother in particular recalls:

The way we kill a snake at school,  
with sticks and stones, that was  
how they killed Daddy when they  
brought him down from the  
ceiling...blood... there was blood  
everywhere...blood  
everywhere and he was not moving... (Ekwuazi, 2010, p. 65)

The younger one, more devastated by the tragic event, instead of verbalizing his own witness of the horrendous act, only "ran his fore finger across his neck / over and over and over and over" (Ekwuazi, 2010, p. 65) to describe the manner in which their older brother, Basil, was slaughtered. The boy's recourse to non-verbal expression, for the Caruthian trauma theorists, would easily confirm that traumatic memory is elusive. The fact that he expresses the memory through non-verbal cues, however, indicates that his memory of the trauma is both intact and recallable. Perhaps the shock of the event, occasioned by the crude barbarity of slaughtering a human being like a cow, makes it difficult and repulsive for the boy to verbalize. It is also possible that the same reason accounts for the persona's constraint to speak up after listening to the boys. Giving voice to the description, the older brother compares the killing of Basil to the way cows are killed in an abattoir. Basil's neck was cut in a manner that "only one small flesh held his head to his body" (p. 65). For the persona, the effect of these detailed and forbidding descriptions not only blew particles of dust into his eyes, but it also landed deep inside him "where nothing has been able to dislodge them" (p. 66).

Again, the observation in the above line confirms the view that adverse experiences are hardly forgettable. He also recalls that as the killings continued, and bloated vultures scavenged for human entrails, he counted twenty-three of the birds hovering over human carcasses. The precision with which the number of birds is described here also speaks to the memorability of trauma. The persona is not only able to recall his own traumatic experience in detail, but he is also able to recall that of fellow victims so vividly. This suggests that traumatic memory is not only accessible, but that its narrative account can be reliable. For Pederson (2004), this description, replete with so many details, would indicate that traumatic memories are not elusive and need not be scoured for in silences and gaps in a text.

Whereas the depiction of the memorability of traumatic event in "The pied piper sang of a home he didn't know" urges the need to redirect attention to its inscription and speakability, rather than silences and gaps, the poem "There's no chiseling out words from the memory that

makes the palm moist" further, though indirectly, dwells on the horrific, harrowing and traumatic experiences of the Nigerian Civil War as well, especially the starvation and death of children and, of course, the violence of shell blasts and machine guns. These experiences remain locked in the poet's memory. However, the sight of a certain creche and primary school, functioning as Nora (1996) describes a *lieux de mémoire*, regularly recalls the experience. On a prompt by his partner to drive by the route where the school is located, the event associated with the site of memory painfully floods back:

each creaking, hand-  
 pulled scarecrow-manned  
 truck brim-packed with  
 children each child, with  
 spidery legs,  
 distended belly and hair the colour  
 of bleached, adulterated palm oil:  
 each child he poster for full-blown  
 kwashiorkor...  
 one truck turns right  
 to another hastily drug mass grave (Ekwuazi, 2010, p. 94)

In line with Pederson's dictum that, in teasing out elements of trauma, attention should be shifted from gaps to the text, engagement with the text above is found quite useful and revealing. One can see in the text not just the forbidding visual imagery of vulnerable children but also the capacity of the imagery to inflict psychological violence on both direct and vicarious witnesses of the spectacle as well. Besides children who had been reduced to shadows of real selves before their death, the adults in charge of their burial had been so starved that they looked like scarecrows. With the proportion of the tragedy underlined by the idea of "truck brim-packed with children" (Ekwuazi, 2010, p. 94), the potential of the spectacle to traumatize others is also underscored. The augmentation of trauma verse dealing with mass deaths and descriptive details such as thin legs, bloated stomach, and bleached air color may no longer have any effect on the dead victims; it surely has on vicarious witnesses, just as the actual spectacle has on survivor-victims. Thus, the deployment of augmented narrative details also foregrounds both the memorability of trauma and the reliability of the memory in question.

Despite these and his partner's polite request, the persona does not respond to the query about why they are taking a longer route instead of a shorter one. He does not take the shorter route because sighting the school along the route would bring back painful memories of the war. As he briefly reflects on the traumatic details of the war, he asks himself: "In what God-given and man-spoken language / do I tell her about all this? / Just how do I chisel out words from the memory / that makes my palm moist even at night?" (Ekwuazi, 2010, p. 95). From

these self-directed questions, it is evident that the persona has not forgotten the trauma of the war. Rather, he finds its memory too painful to share, which accords with the Caruthian view that trauma is an experience that is so painful that the mind cannot process it normally.

Given such a view, one may be inclined to see the figuration of trauma in the poem as a form of trauma-speak, in light of Caruth's theory. However, to the extent that a closer look at the persona's rhetorical questions above suggests that the memory of the trauma has always been intact in his mental faculty, but just fearful to recall, the idea of amnesia is difficult to apply. Besides, in the early part of the poem, the persona admits that he had been anticipating the current situation and had "stored away the smoked words for this occasion". This further reinforces McNally's position that "proponents of traumatic amnesia conflate an unwillingness to think about trauma with an inability to do so" (Pederson, 2004, p. 337). In fact, McNally and Pederson endorse the view that a memory of trauma is usually enhanced in its victims.

In the poem "...Why the sea is boiling", the memory of the Nigerian Civil War also occupies a central place in Ekwuazi's versification of national imagining (Adebisi, 2009) and national consciousness (Adebisi-Adelabu & Aguele, 2018) of his country. Framed aesthetically as an address to his lover, the persona presents the piece as a monologue that reflects on the trauma of war for the average Igbo person. As versified in the first section of the poem, the traumatic memory seemingly returns in the form of nightmares, hallucinations, and the like. However, by the second section, the persona informs us:

The busy hands of the daytime clock  
weave me a shroud with which to  
bury my memories – but at night,  
they arise these suppressed  
memories, they arise  
they arise to walk the landscape

of my mind and they are unchecked  
and uncheckable as nightmares (Ekwuazi, 2010, p. 21)

From these lines, we learn that the traumatic memories under reference are merely suppressed, rather than lost. This subversion of the notion of amnesia, usually associated with Caruthian trauma, is interestingly metaphorised here as temporal consciousness. While the daytime pushes the trauma memories into the background, apparently due to other urgent engagements, they return at night when the mind is less preoccupied and more relaxed. Could this then be coextensive with the extant understanding of trauma as espoused by first-wave theorists? In other words, does the idea of trauma belatedness, and even amnesia, by these

theorists not simply imply that traumatic memories are merely temporarily displaced by other matters in need of more urgent attention? Indeed, it seems quite logical that due to its unpleasant nature, a traumatic memory is not likely to be found stimulating by its victim. Therefore, such a person's mind is more likely to gesture in search of more pleasant or neutral engagements to fill or replace trauma's unpleasantness. Therefore, as the poet persona observes in the lines above, traumatic memories are retrievable. However, their recallability depends on auspicious temporality. In fact, on such occasions, the memories force their way into the consciousness of the bearer. In the persona's recall of the war, he also remembers the names of friends and relatives who died in the war, clearly demonstrating how intact and detailed the memory is.

One of the key assumptions of Caruthian trauma theory, which Pederson (2004) also contradicts, is the inability of the traumatized to construct a reliable narrative of their experience, even when they choose to narrate the experience. Pederson, sharing McNally's understanding, observes that the traumatized are never robbed of their cognitive capacity to remember what they experienced. If anything, the more severe the trauma, the more likely they remain unforgettable. Some intimations of the possibility that the traumatized often lose the ability to accurately recall their experience are evident in the first section of the poem. This is particularly noticeable in the disposition of the persona's lover, who exhibits some anxiety and uncertainty about the mental equilibrium of the persona, following a return of his traumatic memory. The lover's fear, expressed in painful, questioning looks and remonstrations about the persona, in mumbling an unending number of names, and in profuse sweating at night, all of which are recalled by the persona, points to the credibility of his memory.

Indeed, despite the doubt cast on the reliability of the persona's narrativization of his trauma by the lover's disposition, the persona's ability to reliably recall is powerfully articulated in the second section of the poem. He particularly calls our attention to the fact that his memory is usually troubled at night, but hardly so during the day when he is busy with other matters of life. He also recognizes the fact that his memory at night works like nightmares, that is, disorderly and incoherently; just as he admits that the names he mumbles in his sleep are those of friends and relations who died in the war. All of these underscore consciousness, agency, and control in the persona's memorialization processes and praxes, and consequently undercut the impressions of doubt and anxiety that the persona's lover has earlier brought to bear on an otherwise reliable account. In short, as Pederson agrees with McNally, the fact that a person does not frequently think about their trauma does not mean that their memory of the same is altered or lost. This unmistakable voicing of trauma in Ekwuazi's

poetry is what Awuzie (2020) would describe as an expression of the agony of the civil war for the Igbo. It is also symptomatic of a muffled but lingering voice trying to resist official erasure.

## Conclusion

By recalling and speaking memories of a war that is traceable to colonial legacies, Ekwuazi's poems have been brought into a cursory dialogic encounter with postcolonial trauma theory of Craps and others, and more seriously with Pederson's revised trauma theory. Contrary to the widely-held view, promoted by early trauma theorists, that trauma is unregistrable in consciousness and *unspeakable* for its victim, this article has shown that trauma is both memorable and *speakingable*. While allowing for the possibility that trauma victims may choose not to speak about their experience, it counters the notion of automatic traumatic amnesia in victims. The painful and traumatic experiences of the Nigerian Civil War are read as a memorialisation which speaks to the enduring psychological scar that Igbo witnesses to the war still bear. By such a symbolic gesture, Ekwuazi, though a teenage witness, becomes an adult conduit for postmemory, as well as a voice of resistance against official and unofficial attempts at erasing the memory of the war.

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## AI Statement

This document has been enhanced through the use of Grammarly which was employed to refine its linguistic style and correct grammar and spelling. While the incorporation of these technologies may introduce some AI-generated linguistic patterns, it is important to note that the core intellectual content, data interpretation, and conclusions presented are entirely the work of the author.

## Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

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