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WAR AS TRAUMATIC INCANTATION AND RHYTHMIC ENCOUNTER IN PHANUEL  
EGEJURU'S *THE SEED YAMS HAVE BEEN EATEN*

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ABSTRACT

This work deals with individual and group trauma occasioned by war. Phanuel Egejuru's *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten* is a narrative of trauma dealing with how individuals and groups react to the painful experiences of war. The essay attempts to show how the experience of trauma is inscribed in the text and I argue that this novel has literalized traumatic memory in the Nigerian war narrative. In the end the essay explores the reality of traumatic experiences in the Nigerian war narrative. In a way the essay explores the central problems concerning reality and suffering in the Nigerian war narrative using the theory of trauma. The essay reveals how characters and groups react to traumatic painful memories and the extent of recovery of traumatic memories. In particular, I apply Ann E. Kaplan's concept of "suffering terror" to interpret Phanuel Egejuru's *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten* because it will help to explore the impact of war on family and ethnic consciousness in the work and capture the varying ways people relate to traumatic experiences. The study of traumas in the Nigerian war narrative has been scanty. This neglect is surprising considering the sheer quantity of narrative fiction that has emerged from that civil conflict. This neglect is worrisome considering that the traumas of (and perpetrated by) men have been the main focus of such narratives. This study therefore takes up the interesting theoretical history of trauma in Phanuel Egejuru's *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten*. Over the years, trauma theorists have focussed on physical and mental experiences induced by war, but little attention has been given to how economic conditions may induce mental and psychological trauma. It is this bewildering gap that makes it necessary to examine how economic loss has induced trauma in Egejuru's text. I have chosen Egejuru's *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten* because it reveals for us the catastrophic consequences of the Nigerian civil conflict and its economic and social realities on the psychic, social, mental as well as the physical wound of the individuals who voice out their pains in many ways. What is interesting about this novel for me is its confrontation with trauma which is intricately and deeply linked to Nigeria's historical reality. The Nigerian civil conflict is a history most urgently in need of understanding.

**Key Words:** Egejuru; war; trauma; mimesis; Nigeria; suffering; memory; neurosis.

## Introduction

No other event in Nigeria's history has been as traumatic to the psyche and emotional identity of individuals and groups as the civil conflict that engulfed Nigeria between 1967 and 1970. It is a civil conflict which ruptured the psychic equilibrium of individuals and groups who witnessed the conflict or heard stories of that unfortunate experience. Through the creative imagination, Phanuel Egejuru in *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten* preserves the history of that traumatic period. This essay explores the different forms the characters in the novel experience trauma during that tragic war.

One of the most enduring features of the Nigerian civil conflict of 1967-1970 is the reproduction of the trauma of individuals and groups in the literary imagination. These experiences are crystallized in emotional and psychological wounds or trauma. In Phanuel Egejuru's novel, *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten*, the Nigerian civil conflict induces not only physical pain and suffering, but also, more importantly; it induces a psychic and psychological trauma on the protagonist, Jiwudu Osuji as well as his kinsmen of Araugo clan in the Eastern Nigeria who witnessed and experienced the destructive effects of that historical event.

Trauma, what Ruth Leys has called 'mimesis' has become a recurrent feature of the war narrative in Nigerian literature (8). In her book *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Leys used the term trauma "to describe the wounding of the mind brought about by sudden, unexpected emotional shock" (4). As she further states, this was because "Trauma was therefore understood as an experience of hypnotic imitation... because it appeared to shatter the victim's cognitive-perceptual capacities..." (Leys, 8-9). In Egejuru's *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten*, the wound is essentially emotional and psychological. The loss of economic relevance by the men folk is traumatic to both the protagonist, Jiwudu Osuji and the men of Araugo clan. As Freud has noted this state of shock induces "pleasure" (1). Freud therefore argues that "a mental event is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle... or a production of pleasure" (1).

In Egejuru's work, war brings out not only economic trauma, but its reality also contributes to the psychological and emotional traumatic events that pervade the daily reality of the lives of the characters in the novel. As I seek to demonstrate in this paper, the Nigerian civil conflict exacerbates the psychic disruptions of living through this civil conflict as interpolated in the narrative structure of the text. The essay will explore Egejuru's novel within the framework and discourse of trauma consciousness. Cathy Caruth in her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* stated that trauma "is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (3). She further argues that trauma "is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). Egejuru's *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten* espouses and typifies the reality of the historical dislocation that characterised the Nigerian civil conflict in the life of Jiwudu Osuji, the protagonist and his kinsmen of Araugo clan in the Eastern part of Nigeria who lived during that tragic era. It is a story that calls for a healing of the wound inflicted on the Igbo ethnic nation during that conflict.

Over the years, trauma studies have largely focussed on physical and mental ruins of people induced by war and other disastrous events in human history— "perplexing war experiences and other catastrophic responses but few studies have focussed on how catastrophic events such loss of economic means of livelihood may induce mental and psychological trauma (Caruth, 11). It is this bewildering imbalance that this study seeks to confront. In effect, it explores how Egejuru's work narrates the catastrophic experiences of the Nigerian civil war. It deals with the novel's interrogation with trauma which is intricately and deeply ingrained to Africa's socio-historical reality. It is this traumatic encounter with Nigeria's history that is most urgently in need of understanding.

## **Traumatic Encounters and Rhythms in Phanuel Egejuru's *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten*.**

This paper explores the fundamental enigma with respect to the psychological and

psychic dimension of the characters in Egejuru's novel. The word "trauma is described as the response to an unexpected overwhelming violent events or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (Caruth, *Unclaimed...91*). This is why Ruth Leys describes trauma "as an experience of hypnotic imitation or identification" (8). In other words, trauma is a mimetic event or encounter that overwhelms its victim "because it appeared to shatter the victim's cognitive perceptual capacities..." (8). A traumatic situation overshadows its victims as Egejuru's narrative demonstrates. There are many traumatic encounters in the text. First, Osuji Ezeji, Jiwudu's father is regularly traumatised due to his failure to uphold his masculine expectations. Although Osuji has four female daughters, he is psychologically traumatised for his inability to have male children:

In spite of his undisputed title of the king of Yams, Osuji rightly felt that,

his greatest achievement was the birth of his son. No amount of wealth would compensate for a male heir in his lineage. In fact, his failure after more than twenty-five years of marriage to three wives, had been blamed on his wealth in yams. It was rumoured that Osuji had exchanged yams for male children, and his detractors never failed to remind him of his handicap (2).

This failure to procreate male children and the social and cultural implications constitute Osuji's traumatic experiences in life. E. Ann Kaplan identifies this as an example of personal trauma which does damage "to our systems of perceptions and representation" (19). Osuji Ezeji's emotional trauma is described as trauma of loss, similar to what T.M. Luhrman has classified as "quite traumas" (qtd in Kaplan, 19). The specific experiences of Osuji lead to a gendered trauma which arises from cultural pressures to conform to patriarchal expectations. This is quite injurious to the psychic and psychological system of its victim, in this case Osuji Ezeji due to the desire to identify with cultural norms.

The novel itself, as if to emphasize the patriarchal dimension, opens with the naming ceremony of Osuji's only male child, Jiwudu Osuji, the protagonist of the novel. The oldest man in the clan, Nze Anokwuru gives him the name Jiwudu, to emphasize his father's wealth in yams. However, his father calls him Madukaji, which means the worth of a male child is more than the wealth in yam.

The people of Araugo stuck to the name given by Nze Anokwuru because of the circumstances of his birth—his father being the greatest yam farmer in Ara clan who himself is called by his praise name, *Ezeji* or king of yams. The value attached to a male child is in line with some socio-cultural expectations he is required to adhere to. Jiwudu was therefore expected to aspire to be the *Ezeji* of his time: "Ezeji felt that his son would be better off counting his own wealth in male children rather than in the vastness of his yam barn" (3).

As a growing young man, his father Osuji "told him stories woven around the yam culture. His favourite story was the celebration of the New Yam Festival during which he demonstrated his prowess in wrestling. He had remained the undefeated champion of wrestling throughout Ara clan in his youth" (3). Therefore, to fully integrate into patriarchal society: "By the age of three, Jiwudu... was already learning the names of various species of yams. One day his father told him that only men could cultivate the *ji ocha* species..." (3). And to emphasize that he was imbibing his lessons in this masculine culture, Jiwudu told his father during a conversation: "Nna," Jiwudu interrupted, "I will like to have lots of yams like you so that all the people will come and help me in my farm the way they do for you, and I will cook plenty of food for them" (8).

At the end of the discussion Jiwudu told his father and promised: "I will make your barn bigger and bigger and bigger" (9).

For Jacob, Jiwudu's uncle, his brother Uzochi Osuji Oparaugo's unexpected death brought about both physical and psychological trauma. As the news sank: "Jacob staggered to his feet and fell, he tried to get up but he fell again and completely lost consciousness. His friends lifted him unto the carriage of his bicycle and rolled him back to his

compound. It took buckets of water to revive Jacob" (12). Here, Jacob is manifesting the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. His traumatic encounter is because "The news was too shocking for him to bear" (Caruth 12). Jacob's traumatic encounter is classified as "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" which Cathy Caruth argues "included the symptoms of... shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis... to both human and natural catastrophes" (*Trauma* 3). Jacob's collapse and complete loss of consciousness indicates that he has suffered "traumatic neurosis" because the impact of the news of his brother's death has so powerfully engulfed him. The sudden demise of his benefactor is an unexpected natural disaster of great proportion, it happens to victims of "other violent occurrences" (Caruth *Trauma*, 3). This is why the American Psychiatric Association has defined PTSD as "a response to an event 'outside the range of usual human experience' which is 'indeed pathological in the usual sense, in relation to distortions caused by desires, wishes and repressions'" (Caruth *Trauma*, 3). This experience constitutes Jacob's own moment of traumatic encounter. As E. Ann Kaplan has stated "people encounter trauma...by hearing about a crisis from a friend" (2) and Jacob hearing the death of his brother becomes traumatized. This death is a catastrophic phenomenon.

For Adaku, Jiwudu's academic exploits is mingled with traumatic encounter. Her psychological trauma began with the news of her son's success at the entrance examination into secondary school. In response to the news, she said:

'Take heart my son, your *chi* has other plans for you. You are not created to be a big man or leader if it means going to this place which you are telling me. If they sell me and you the money will not be enough for you to go there. If your father had not hurried to his death, sending you to the place would not have produced the least ruffle in the calm pool of his wealth. But death has robbed us of him and there is nothing we can do to almighty death' (22).

As it seems, the root of this trauma is the sudden and unexpected death of Osuji Ezeji and the extreme economic hardship which the family has experienced since his demise. That is why the news of Jiwudu's academic success has become Adaku's moment of traumatic encounter. For her:

...the news of the scholarship was received with missed feelings. At first she cried for joy and gave thanks to God and the ancestors. However, when she went to bed that night, she reflected over the events in her son's life. She was agitated by his latest good or rather ill fortune because she had heard about the mysterious death of prosperous men whose early beginnings paralleled her son's present situation. (28).

Jiwudu's commitment to increase his late father's yam barn and to become the Ezeji of his time motivates him to work hard at his studies. His hard work and determination to fulfil his promise to his late father won him the respect and recognition of his people. He plans to reciprocate their generosity towards him by introducing modern techniques of cultivating yam so that Araugo clan can be wealthy in yam farming and so become the envy of their neighbours in future. It is for this reason that he chooses to study Agricultural Engineering over Medicine. His Araugo people provided him with financial support in pursuit of his education. In addition, his brilliance wins him scholarships which enable him to complete his secondary education. These endeavours bring him honour and recognition of his Ara clan.

After his secondary education, Jiwudu realises that he needs university education to achieve his dreams, but he must work for a while to save money to fund his university education. His choice of the Ministry of Agriculture would help him to maintain contact with farming. After working for a brief period, his mother Adaku persuades him to marry to continue the family lineage since he was the only male child of his father. He agrees in obedience to the tradition of his people and his mother's choice falls on Rachael, the brilliant twelve-year-old daughter of Moses. The two families quickly concluded negotiations on the matter.

Rachael would continue to stay with Adaku, Jiwudu's mother and continue with her own education while Jiwudu would continue to work and save for his university education, until when it will be necessary for them to start a family. Things appear to be going well for Jiwudu and his people of Araugo. Jiwudu wins two scholarships to study outside the country: one to study Chemical Engineering in the United Kingdom; the other, to study Agricultural Engineering in the United States of America. He chooses Agricultural Engineering because it will help him to achieve his dreams of revolutionizing farming methods among his people and increase their wealth in yams and fulfil his role as a hero. His people celebrate his success because they now realize that through him they will soon be in government and their son will bring their share of the 'national cake.'

While he was studying in the United States of America, Jiwudu through the dint of hard work and good fortune works his way into mainstream American culture. The Taylors take him into their home and he begins to think of the possibility of bringing his beloved wife, Rachael to America to join him. Then the outbreak of war in his country shatters his dream and plans. This affects him greatly as he becomes moody and less focussed when he receives the terrible news of the disaster back home. Because of the war in his country, Jiwudu faces a crisis of the non-payment of his of scholarship funds. He would now have to work like other African students who work to fund their education in the United States of America.

The financial crisis became so unbearable to the extent that his academic advisor summons him to know what he plans to do to remedy his bleak financial situation. The kind advisor helps him to find ways of improving his situation. Through the advisor's intervention, Jiwudu goes to live with the Taylors who offer him what seems a reasonable arrangement. This family's kindness helps Jiwudu's financial situation to improve. He engages in raising funds to assist his break-away country with relief materials. The gloomy stories of the consequences of the war back home induces Jiwudu's own traumatic encounter with reality. Jiwudu descends into paranoid psychosis when he received the

shocking news that "the seed yams have been eaten" (177). The Taylors were helpful, including organizing fund raising parties to help send relief materials to "Jiwudu's country" which has been fully blockaded. His people of Araugo associate their good fortunes to their son in America. Rather cruelly, Jiwudu seems to have a big prize to pay for the free accommodation the Taylors offer him. Betty, Nick's wife needs him as a bed companion. He is constantly seduced and finally succumbs into forced sexual relationship with Nick's wife, Betty.

As his study draws to a close, he receives news that the war in his country has ended. He becomes ecstatic and reinvigorated, and nurses the hope of reuniting with his family, especially his wife Rachael. These thoughts make him to work hard at his studies. Through regular letters from home, he becomes aware of tragic realities of the war. It full traumatic encounter hits him when he gets a letter from his cousin Obinna, telling him that his wife Rachael was yet to come back and that "the seed yams have been eaten" by the rampaging soldiers. The news of the loss of the yams is so devastating and traumatic. This is because of what yam symbolizes in Jiwudu's plans for his people of Araugo. The thoughts are very grim as he tells one of his friends Victor what the disappearance of the yams meant to his identity:

"... Just tell me Victor, what will become of those of us whose names contain the word yam? Is my name still valid? How will people react when I introduce myself as Jiwudu Osuji, the son of Ezeji? Wouldn't that provoke endless laughter in the land where cassava reigns? What will parents give their daughters as dowry? Baskets of cassava tubers and bundles of cassava stems, in place of stakes of yams? Tell me my brother, tell me, what are we going to do?" (202).

Jiwudu's traumatic encounter with the civil war is what Cathy Caruth has described in her book *Unclaimed Experience* as the "unwitting enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (2) The traumatic event of the civil conflict is therefore encoded in Jiwudu's brain and memory. As a result



of the news of the loss of the yam seeds Jiwudu develops what Freud has called “traumatic neurosis” (qtd in Caruth, *Trauma* 7). The civil conflict with all the tragic stories surrounding it induces on him a “psychic trauma” which “involves intense personal suffering, but also involves the recognition of the realities that most of us have not begun to face” (*Trauma* vii). For Jiwudu, that reality is the loss of his name. Hell tells his Araugo people who had gathered to welcome him:

“I have heard that the seed yams have been eaten. I have heard that efforts made by many to bring the yams back, have been sabotaged. I have heard that cassava now occupies the farm lands. My people, please tell me what will happen to those of us whose names contains the word yam” (224).

As he was concluding his studies in America, the thoughts of the war at home has become quite traumatic as it dominates his consciousness, he could hardly focus or eat his food again: “He merely pecked at his food, and that night he hardly slept. For the next two days he was bed-ridden, bouts of tension, headaches, high fever and general inertia made his movements sluggish...” (118). The thoughts of war in his country were a traumatic experience. In a discussion with his fellow African students he quipped: “why couldn’t the elders settle whatever differences they had?” (126). His trauma is the constant flooding of his memory by the images of devastation which wars bring. The victim of trauma is completely immersed in the traumatic experience. Especially Jiwudu recalled: “...all the wars he had studied in his history at school, and shuddered at the devastating effects of war. Then he fell into a reverie of what might happen to his people at home” (126).

Here, Jiwudu is suffering from the effects of “traumatic neuroses” (Leys, 11), including emotional tensions, psychiatric disorders and collapse of personality. Remarkably Egejuru’s novel shows that the war was a collective traumatic encounter for the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria. This collective traumatic experience is captured in Jiwudu’s discussion with his South African roommate, Nkosi:

‘I can’t understand it either, but I am afraid of what that might mean for the people at home and for those of us outside the country. You can’t imagine how much I suffer from the mere fact of not knowing what is happening to members of my family...’ (127). The war at home has psychologically affected Jiwudu. The suffering of his people has become part of his daily worries in America:

Like everything else he did, Jiwudu threw himself body and soul into the activities of fund raising for the suffering people at home.... Within six months of the war, Jiwudu looked more battered than the soldiers at the warfront (128-9).

In fact, Jiwudu did not know then that the war in his country would have far-reaching implications for him and his people; it would shatter all his plans for the immediate future and beyond. The consequences of the war had had severe strains on Jiwudu’s concentration. He told Nkosi: “How can we concentrate on what we came here to do, and when we finish, where shall we go if there are no kinsmen to go back to?” (127).

The war evidently was quite traumatic for Jiwudu and people who are Igbo speaking. Jiwudu’s neuropsychiatric breakdown is because his plans for his people has been severely shattered:

...Jiwudu was soon deep in reverie; how was he going to introduce this labour saving device to his country? He tried not think of his favourite crop whose absence from the scenery rendered it even more prominent. He subconsciously searched for stakes with coils of dried yam tendrils on them, but the scene before him was a monotonous stretch of greenery, the maize which the old farmer and his people called corn, was still very green and very tender when cooked (156).

At the core of Jiwudu’s traumatic encounter is his inability of his memory to absorb the news of the disappearance of the yams and its implications for him and the entire Araugo culture. This can be

gleaned in his discussion with Victor. As he told Victor:

Your name is not Jiwudu and your father was never an Ezeji of your town, neither did he lay on you the burden of becoming the Ezeji of your generation. But my name is Jiwudu and my father as I told you, was the Ezeji of his time. You were not there when I promised my father that I would look after his yams and make his barn bigger and bigger and bigger... (181).

It was because the failure to execute this plan that made him to be psychologically and emotionally traumatized when he received the news of the disappearance of the yams from his cousin, Obinna. Obinna in a letter informed Jiwudu:

We young ones are happy now because we shall not go to the farm again as all the seed yams have been eaten by the soldiers, both our soldiers and the enemy soldiers. We now eat cassava and women go all the way to Umagwo to collect cassava after doing manual work for them like *ndi isuama* used to do for us in those days. They bring home cassava tubers to make *gari* and some stems to plant (174).

Herein lies the tragedy of the civil war in Jiwudu's country. This piece of news was too catastrophic and traumatic for Jiwudu's mind to absorb, hence his psychic balance snapped as he begins to chant: "The seed yams have been eaten" (174). Jiwudu was in a trance for many days until Victor, another student from his Igbo tribe came to the hospital and started a conversation about yams: "Then in an almost sober voice he whispered "they have eaten my name." He broke down weeping convulsively" (177). This shows that his fragile mind is not able to bear the mental and psychological wound the war inflicted on his psyche.

The traumatic experiences of the war was not just for Jiwudu. All the students from Jiwudu's part of Nigeria were psychologically traumatized as we learn from this:

On their way home, Victor and Nkosi talked about the effects of the war on the

students from the country. Victor said that many of his compatriots had dropped out of school because they were doing poorly academically. Most of them had thrown themselves into menial jobs to make money to send home. He told of a student in another state who killed himself when he heard that his entire family had been wiped out by a bomb. Several of them had become alcoholics, while two students had been sent permanently to mental hospital (178-9).

It is evident that the emotional wound inflicted on these students is overwhelming which has destabilized their psyche. After commenting on the senselessness of the war, Victor's conversation with Nkosi concerning Jiwudu's psychic breakdown is instructive: "Look at Jiwudu now," continued Victor, "who knows if he would ever recover fully from this breakdown. If it hadn't been for this war he wouldn't be lying in a psychiatric hospital now..." (179).

The war in particular is the root cause of Jiwudu's psychoneurotic break down. This is because it thwarted his plans for his people and shatters his personality. His obsession with Agriculture is traceable to the prominence of his father, Osuji in his farming. Early in the novel, he told his friend John: "My father was famous because of his farming. What's wrong with his son following in his footsteps?" (43) As Jiwudu was settling down well in the United States of America, something tragic went wrong at home: "something tragic happened in his country and the consequences were far reaching for everyone at home and abroad. He heard over the radio one morning in mid-January that the military had taken over the government..." (115). Jiwudu is agonized and traumatized because the war has made it impossible for him to fulfil this plan. The outbreak of war in Nigeria was a traumatic encounter in Jiwudu's life and that of his people: "Three weeks later, a letter from one of his kinsmen in Lagos confirmed the radio and newspaper article. Jiwudu fell into deep depression; he was not sure if his own people in the north were killed" (116).

Jiwudu's traumatic moment is mainly activated by the recognition of the danger faced by his Araugo kinsmen, hence his fragile mind surrendered to it. The traumatic process is awesome. Therefore, Jiwudu's neuropsychiatric break down is the result of cultural and economic loss or deprivation, for the loss of the yams symbolizes the economic and social emasculation of the men-folk. He tells his friend Victor the significance of yams in the culture of his Ara people. He said: "... but I was about to tell you of the significance of yams in the culture of Ara people. For me and Araugo people, the passing away of the yams means the end of many of our traditions and culture that are based on yams" (182). This is the moment that evokes both personal and communal traumatic encounters. Besides, this encounter constitutes the proof of the loss of power that yam symbolizes. Apart from the socially circumscribed roles of male power which the yam culture embodies, it also inscribed in men the status of providers. The reversal in economic fortune induced by the war further diminishes male worth and forms the subject of Seven-seven's discourse as he recalls the communal trauma: "I have continued to ask my *chi* why he allowed me to survive this war and live this life which is worse than being dead. At this point, tears clouded his eyes and for the first time since the war ended, Seven-seven shed warm tears of deep sorrow" (220). It is this loss of economic power and its overall implications that drives Jiwudu into mental delirium. Egejuru uses the loss of the yams to project her gender ideology; the yam culture symbolizes male superiority and power which must give way to cassava culture or the rise of female power as represented by cassava. The end of male value due to the civil war comes in repeated latency and the resultant trauma is the subject of Papa Ben's discourse:

Truly, the death of the yams means the death of us men, but like death things, we never felt our death. We thought we survived the war, but we didn't realize that we are only ghosts of our former selves. How can we continue to call ourselves men when we now look to our wives for everything? When we lower our voices with downcast eyes to ask for food and pocket

money? Can we call ours living? We are now the living who are worse off than the dead (227).

This is how the communal trauma is captured in the novel. This painful traumatic recollection is clearly evident in Henry Krystal's suggestion that "...being forced to recall and remember is in itself frightening and stressful to survivors" of tragic events (qtd. In Caruth, *Trauma* 82). This is exactly what Pa Ben's discourse alludes to. Jiwudu's breakdown at his reception can be likened to the experiences of trauma victim's. This is why Freud describes "trauma as the successive movement from an event to its repression to its return" (qtd. in Caruth, *Trauma* 7). Therefore, the loss of the symbol of masculinity leads to the confirmation of female power for as Helen Chukwuma makes clear: "The cultural subversion is complete: yam was not only demasculinized but obliterated. Cassava gained ascendancy and with it the womenfolk" ("Literary Strategies" 135). The Nigerian civil conflict has been used by Egejuru to reconstruct female power. Whereas women enjoy positive revaluation; men in contrast suffer devaluation and psychological and emotional trauma. The novel in this way dismantles the social structure and reconstructs or reinvents the identity of the woman against "the discourses which place them in positions marginal to subjectivity" (Robinson 135).

### Conclusion

The contemporary African literary landscape has come to favour the narrative of the crises and social disturbances which have shaped the socio-political reality of the continent. Phanuel Egejuru's *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten* falls within the body of literature described as war narratives. The dominant theme of these works is the profound psychological and physical sufferings of individuals and groups. These works depict the miseries, traumatic experiences encountered in the cause of human history. Therefore, the novel depicts the tragedy in its human dimensions. Egejuru's work depicts the trauma of war and reveals the avalanche of pains and psychological trauma which people of the Igbo extraction suffered during the Nigerian civil war. Therefore, the recurring motif in this text is the



recurrence of undisguised bitterness against the Nigerian rulers who have betrayed the people of Igbo ethnic identity in Nigeria and caused it people immeasurable physical and emotional trauma; this is much reflected in the characterization, tone and language of the novel. Egejuru's novel interrogates what it means to be traumatized, traumatic memory and shapes of what constitutes traumatic encounter are issues that resonates and defines reality, the dimensions of life experiences in *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten*.

Ultimately, attempt has been made to gain access to the traumatic history of the Nigerian civil conflict using Egejuru's novel to explore the pathology of individual suffering as captured in the traumatic encounters of Egejuru's text and how it is important to state how the Nigerian war has fertilized the literary imagination of writers, especially those from the former eastern Nigeria. In the end this study has revealed the possibility of the reality historical explorations and engagements.

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