



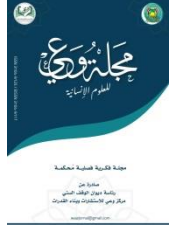
مجلة وعي للعلوم الإنسانية  
Wai Journal for Humanities

ISSN: 3104-9125

E-ISSN:3104-9117

# مجلة وعي للعلوم الإنسانية

العدد الثالث / ٢٠٢٦م، الصفحة: ١١٤١-١١٦٠



الكبت والأحداث السلبية بوصفهما سبباً نفسياً للصدمة من خلال الذاكرة والتكرار في  
رواية البذرة البرية لأوكتافيا باتلر

Inhibition and Negative Events as the Psychic Cause of Trauma  
through Memory and Repetition in Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*

م.م. زينة محمد طاهر

Assistant Lecturer: Zeena Mohammad Tahir

كلية الآداب - قسم اللغة الانكليزية - الجامعة المستنصرية

E:zeenaalsheikh@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq

## المخلص

## الكلمات المفتاحية

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تناول الصدمة بوصفها نتيجة للكبت والأحداث السلبية في رواية البذرة البرية  
لأوكتافيا باتلر. وتسأط الضوء على التطور النفسي للصدمة بوصفها نتاجاً نهائياً للمشاعر المكبوتة  
والأحداث القاسية التي تصيب الحالة النفسية الكاملة للشخصيات. وعليه، تهدف الدراسة إلى استكشاف  
الكبت النفسي والأحداث السلبية باعتبارهما السبب الرئيس للصدمة، والتي تُستثار من خلال الذاكرة  
والتكرار. أي إن الشخصيات تصبح مصدومة نفسياً عندما تمر بأحداث سلبية تستمر في مطاردتها.  
وهي تعاني من هذا النوع من الصدمة لأنها تواصل تذكر الأحداث السلبية الماضية وتعيد تكرارها  
بصورة مستمرة.

تعتمد منهجية الدراسة على المنهج النوعي، مع التركيز على القراءة الدقيقة لسلوكيات الشخصيات وذكرياتها. كما سيتم توظيف تحليل نصي نفسي-تحليلي لهذه السلوكيات والذكريات، بهدف الكشف عن الكبت — بوصفه قمعاً نفسياً بحد ذاته — باعتباره السبب الجوهرى للصدمة، وذلك نتيجة ميل الشخصيات الدائم إلى استرجاع الأحداث السلبية وإعادة تكرار تأثيرها السلبي في حياتها.

## KEY WORD

## Abstract

Behavior,

Butler, Memory,

Psychoanalysis,

Repetition,

Trauma

This study attempts to examine trauma as a result of inhibition and negative events in Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*. It sheds light on the psychic development of trauma as an ultimate product of inhibited feelings and harsh events inflicting the whole psychic states of the characters. Therefore, the study's objective is to explore psychic inhibition and negative events as the main cause of trauma triggered by memory and repetition. That is, the characters become traumatic when they undergo negative events which continuously haunt them. They suffer from this kind of trauma because they keep remembering the past negative events; and they constantly repeat them. The study's methodology will be qualitative focusing on a close reading of the characters' behaviors and memories. A psychoanalytic textual analysis of the these behaviors and memories is going to be followed for the sake of unravelling inhibition, which is repression per se, as the integral cause of trauma due to the characters' tendency to keep recalling and repeating the negative influence of negative events on their lives.

## 1. Introduction

The study of trauma largely depends on the psychic conditions of individuals.

Psychoanalytic scholars posited several traits of traumas and its pertinent impetus. One of the most evident causes of trauma is a severe distressing personal experience brought about specific events. Such events hold tragic

incidents and devastating effect upon individuals' unconscious mind because trauma needs "special assistance or rehabilitation because of the event" (Tafoya, 2018, p.160). As a result, they develop symptomatic indications of repressed trauma making them psychically disordered. By time, the repressed negative events come out of the unconscious mind; and it makes individuals behave in a depressed or whimsical manners. This is due to the fact that they are almost overwhelmed by its influence because they become more stressed and depressed than ever. In this case, traumatic individuals believe that they are prone to prolonged psychic suffering.

Threat is another indicator of trauma. To clarify, individuals become traumatic as a result of a psychic damage incurred by intimidating peril. Consequently, individuals become nervous and frightened if they pass through threat inflicted upon them by other people. The psychic consequences of this threat might include, but not limited to, anxiety, psychosis, physical fatigue, insomnia and so forth. They do not lead a stable or desired life since their personal safety is completely endangered. Hence, threat is a pernicious cause stimulating the development of trauma within the psyche of intimidated individuals that need "to talk about what happened, and that there is the

possibility of re-traumatization” (Grosch-Miller, 2021, p.27). As typical causes of trauma, tragic events and experience tighter with threat make individuals traumatic due to two concomitant factors which genuinely trigger trauma, namely, memory and repetition. On the one hand, memory refers to individuals’ uncontrolled remembrance of past events and experiences that had left their physic wound in their unconscious mind. On the other hand, reposition refers to their continuous recalling of these events and experiences without logical grounds. This means that they are moved by its initial influence upon their psyches, and, in turn, they appear in a form of physic disorder on their behaviors and reactions as a result of “repeatedly triggered implicit memories” (Fisher, 2017, p.128). Therefore, this study attempts to examine trauma in Octavia Butler’s *Wild Seed*.

## 2. Literature Review

Butler’s *Wild Seed* received different critical interpretations. Andrew Deman (2005) tackles the novel from a feminist perspective. The study centers on the female protagonist who suffers from a gender conflict suppresses her and leads to her social deterioration. It focuses on the historical development of gender oppression through identifying the novel’s narrative descriptions of the main

protagonist who exemplifies the typical lives of contemporary women. In doing so, Butler accentuates the negative living conditions of females in a male-dominated atmosphere which encompasses the notions of good and evil concerning women's gender affairs. In this sense, Butler composes a realistic literary recount that "presents a strong female heroine, existing within a shifting physical body, operating in a feminized conflict between good and evil" (p.6). Deman (2005) traces the gender conflicts between men and women by dealing with the life of the heroine. Yet, he (2005) does not offer ample discussions of the traumatic influence of these conflicts. The current study, however, will concentrate on the traumatic peculiarities of the female protagonist rather than such feminist insights.

Raffel Burton (1995), furthermore, approaches the novel through interpreting the theme of slavery. This theme is scrutinized by emphasizing the role of African heritage in sustaining and reclaiming the African original identity deformed by slavery and its related migratory issues. This is because the Africans leave Africa for America; and their identity gradually changes due to the different living conditions in America. Consequently, Burton (1995) claims that the novel involves the drastic identity changes in the time span before and

after slavery since “striking precursor is *Wild Seed* (1980), which mythologizes Butler’s black African heritage in an extraordinary fusion of both pre-slavery African and post-slavery American strands with what seems clearly the most urgent impulse behind all her writing” (p.454). Burton’s (1995) study explores the radical changes of African identity during different periods of time. Furthermore, it offers sufficient examples of how African native cultural heritage which might play a crucial role in empowering the distorted identity by dint of slavery. However, it does not deduce the traumatic consequences of slavery upon these African people in America. This trauma, accordingly, will be more developed and explored in this study.

Marilyn Mehaffy and AnaLouise Keating (2001) study the novel by applying post-colonialism to examine the issue of race portrayed in the course of the plot. They (2001) maintain that the novel hinge on Butler’s own view of ethnic race and how it represents the sense of belonging of the characters that have strong racial attachment to their homeland. Nevertheless, they (2001) claim that the novel is a mere critique of contemporary national race that had been overwhelmed by several forms of human racial differences. Just so, the novel’s fictional events aim “to critique contemporary ‘race’ relations and to

displace them with other forms of human difference” (p.47). As a result, Mehaffy and Keating (2001) conclude that the novel provides various literary themes on race and how it has interacted with other races on the same national demarcations. But, they (2001) do not infer the psychic traits of these races; and these traits will be revealed in this study through applying the concept of trauma.

### 3. Analysis and Discussion

Butler's *Wild Seed* tells the story of Doro and Anyanwu who perform extraordinary powers resembling science fictional recounts. They are African personalities living in a traditional atmosphere. Doro is depicted as a super-powerful man with exceptional abilities to since he is almost a spirit. He is a deadly ghost haunting and devastating the life of anyone in his way. Anyanwu, on the other hand, is a woman talented with strong spiritual capacities. She is endowed with healing ability for people who are cursed with, for example, magic or any other kind of spiritual illness. She is able to transform herself into any kind of animal or even other people in her healing rites. Butler employs these characters to demonstrate how power and spiritual ability intermingle with each other in order to be independent through gaining strength and infinite knowledge. In the long

run, Doro and Anyanwu exemplify the spiritual characterization duality of power and authority. They are depicted as immortal powers since they lead very extreme living fluctuations and events.

The novel's events are associated with the white people's imposed authority over the African natives. These people are approximately portrayed as colonizers that inflict their social supremacy over the Africans. Anyanwu undergoes this kind of experience because she and Doro are controlled by the colonial confines: "Anyanwu watched carefully as the white woman placed first a clean cloth, then dishes and utensils on the long, narrow table at which the household was to eat. Anyanwu was glad that some of the food and the white people's ways of eating it were familiar to her from the ship" (p.75). This situation indicates Doro's and Anyanwu's inability to be independent or powerful. For this reason, they resort to magical and extraordinary power to gain equal powers like colonizers. Strikingly, they are depressed by this hegemony; and they could not cope with it. Being so, they are disappointed by its effect upon them. Hence, this colonial incident is a major event dominating their personal experience; and it create the first indication of their trauma because its "logic as psychic adjustments rooted in the vicissitudes of defenses

and the exchanges of psychic agency predominance” (Fisher, 2020, p.45). The predominance of traumatic events eventually leads to the accumulation and formation of trauma in the unconscious mind.

Doro and Anyanwu, consequently, resort to psychic inhibition as a way of escaping from their harsh reality. They could not get along with the new life, especially when they are unwillingly forced to interact with foreigners and strangers. Anyanwu is not allowed to eat with other people. She is deprived of her essential living needs. She becomes hungry and she could not obtain her portion of food. Consequently, she gets upset and anxious, but she inhibits this experience to forget it. Yet, it is triggered back by memory and repetition as described in the following lines: “she could sit down and have a meal without seeming utterly ignorant. She could not have cooked the meal, but that would come, too, in time. She would learn. For now, she merely observed and allowed the interesting smells to intensify her hunger. Hunger was familiar and good” (p.75). The novel’s narrative perspective encompasses Anyanwu’s memory and repetition of her negative experience. But she attempts to get rid of this experience by forgetting it to be safe of its dangerous influence upon her psyche. In psychoanalysis, this forgetfulness is the core of psychic inhibition

through which bad or suppressive events and experiences are repressed in the unconscious mind as a kind of defense mechanism adopted by “people who have experienced adversities” (Papadopoulos, 2021, p.36).

Adversities refer to malicious or violent treatment of people in a degrading way. It applies to Doro and Anyanwu who are true victims of discrimination and deprivation. They appear traumatic when they are intimidated by the atrocious treatment of the foreigners. As previously argued, Anyanwu suffers from food deprivation, and she could hardly survive as a result of this deprivation. The psychoanalytic attributes of uncertainty and nervousness are evident indicators of inhibited trauma. That is, the traumatic individuals gradually become unable to control their body expressions or manifestations of trauma repressed in their unconscious mind; and such repressed expressions “gradually become more visible and more dramatically apparent” (Felman, 2002, p.2). Doro, and other native people, try to keep Anyanwu from any psychic effect. This is because she becomes nervous and uncertain about her existence as a human being. Her life is less perfect than the white foreigners. She contemplates the different kinds of food afforded to the foreigners; and she is completely deprived of it: “it kept her from staring too much at the white

woman, kept her from concentrating on her own nervousness and uncertainty in the new surroundings, kept her attention on the soup, thick with meat and vegetables, and the roast deer flesh—venison, the white woman had called it—and a huge fowl—a turkey” (p.75). In this sense, uncertainty and nervousness are temporary psychic disorders; and they obvious reactions against negative experiences and events since trauma appears in the “process of transforming the subjective oral narrative into a written literary piece that survived the horrific and verbalizing effect of what was once the unspeakable” (Leal et al., 2021, p.23).

Doro and Anyanwu suffer from this deprivation. It appears on their behaviors and reactions towards their social surroundings. Other than food deprivation, they suffer from fake accusation. They are accused of vandalism and setting fire in public utilities. The African people are victims of these accusations because they are treated as the weak class of the society and they do not have strong grounds to defend themselves against any false charge. Therefore, Doro’s and Anyanwu’s African compatriots are sentenced to death by execution: “someone had been setting fires and the whites decided it must be the blacks. On little or no evidence, thirty-one blacks were killed—thirteen of

them burned at the stake. Doro was beginning to worry about this upriver town. Of all his English colonial settlements, only in this one did his blacks not have the protection of powerful white owners” (p.96). This experience left its detrimental impact upon Doro’s and Anyanwu’s psyches. They try to get rid of it, but they fail as they keep remembering and repeating it. They fall victims of their memory presented in the plot because writers “present trauma, and how those instances take shape in narrative and discursive forms” (Peters and Richards, 2021, p.61). At the beginning, Doro and Anyanwu go through inhibition process, but their experience gets out of their repressed negative feelings and emotion. As a result, they come into the surface as trauma characterized by recalling and repeating negative experiences and events.

Butler connects Doro’s and Anyanwu’s trauma with their personal experience where could not have any psychic outlet of it. In the first place, their trauma is triggered by memory and repetition of the events and experiences inhibited in their unconscious mind. Anyanwu, for example, keeps repeating some words related to her dressing norms, food, and ways of the life that drastically differ from the American people: “Anyanwu repeated the words to herself, reassured that they had become part of her vocabulary. New words, new

ways, new foods, new clothing . . .” (p.75). This quote offers an obtrusive example of how repetition plays a crucial factor in triggering back negative events. Anyanwu is a victim of previous experience that was initially inhibited in her unconscious mind. Yet, it appears back on her behavior, through words; especially in the form of repetition. Moreover, this repetition is sustained by memory that makes her in a constant contact with her previous experience. As a result, she become more depressed and anxious than ever due to the devastating living changes. Hence, the psychoanalytic characteristics of trauma are in tight psychic connection with the past events.

The concept of trauma, in this sense, relates to a severe and aversive reaction experiences. These experiences are repressed in individuals’ unconscious mind when they do not feel that they are obliged to confront them. They believe that they are able to withstand its massive harmful influence upon their behaviors. However, they could not bear with their repressed feelings and emotions for long time. As a reactionary defense mechanism, they revisit these represses experiences by recalling them on specific occasions as a way of “repudiation and restrictions” (Freud, 1920, p.227). In essence, these occasions resemble the same events or experiences of the past. As a result, they get

psychically disordered since psychoanalysis puts forth the inhibition as a defense mechanism, but it is debilitated by the re-occurrence of memory and repetitions. The re-occurrence of such events through memory is deemed dangerous as “trauma, as a psychoanalytic concept, is motivated by a particularly harmful experience. Traumatic individuals try to inhabit this experience for the sake of relieving comfort because they are exhausted by the continual recollections connected with it” (Sasa and Abu Jweid, 2022, p. 948). Trauma, here, is a product of psychic accumulation of pernicious memories that might lead to abnormal behaviors or reactions.

Inhibition and negative events, consequently, are the authentic causes of trauma triggered back by memory and repetitions. Anyanwu radically changes and she becomes traumatic once she receives colonial suppression at the hands of American foreigners though he shares the same destiny with other compatriots, like Doro. She remembers her oppression when she and other compatriot women are forced to marry. This marriage separated them from each other, which cause their psychic distress: “‘even so.’ Anyanwu stared up at the solemn young woman, remembering that lovely, fearful courting. They had been as fearful of marrying as they had been of losing each other. ‘She thought at first

that there could be no children, and that saddened her because she had always wanted children” (p.146). This experience does not happen all at once. It is recalled back by Anyanwu when she contemplates her depressed life among the African-Americans.

Psychoanalysis comprises the duality of inhibition and negative events within the scope of the unconscious mind. Traumatic individuals, by time, do not find any escape from their inhibited psychic wounds; and they begin to develop strong desire to be alleviated from their psychic pain. Buy they are shocked when they face the same experience or situation. Doro, for example, tries to be free of any kind of suppression. As a reaction, he escapes from his traumatic experience through becoming harsh and oppressive. As a consequence, this suppression appears on his behaviors as a vicious man inflicting negative treatment upon other people, including Anyanwu because Doro “knew what punishment he might have to inflict, what madman he might have to subdue, what stupid, stubborn politician, businessman, planter, or other fool he might have to remove? Also, wearing a black body in country where blacks were under constant obligation to prove they had rights to even limited freedom was a hindrance” (p.177). In this case, Doro exemplifies the

impossibility of getting rid of traumatic experience as it is inhibited in his unconscious mind.

Doro's and Anyanwu's trauma, therefore, is caused by the previous events that made them weak and inferior. To overcome this inferiority, they try to be strong and independent. Nevertheless, they are haunted and overwhelmed by the reminiscences and residuals of that experience; and they feel that they are socially restricted. As a rule of thumb, trauma indicates this restriction via "deterioration in social norms" (Theisen-Womersley, 2021, p.147). In the long run, Doro's and Anyanwu's trauma goes through three concomitant stages. First, it originates in a negative events and personal experiences. Second, it goes through psychic inhibition in their unconscious mind. Third, it appears again on their behaviors and reactions when it is triggered back by memory and repetition of those events and experiences.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study approached trauma in Butler's *Wild Seed*. The discussion of trauma relied on the psychic traits of the characters that suffer from different problems making them severely traumatized. The analysis of these characters polarized the way by which Butler meticulously depicts their internal sufferings.

Therefore, the study highlighted a textual and contextual interpretation of the characters' behaviors and reactions to their social milieus. Furthermore, it pursued the narrative descriptions of trauma and how it transforms into strange physical demeanors representing the inhibited negative feelings of traumatized characters. In the main, the study pinpointed the inherent psychic impetus of trauma developed by the main characters.

The essential impetus of trauma was identified through the discussion of the characters' personal experiences, memories, and events. Consequently, the study has three interrelated contributions. First, it tackled trauma as a detrimental psychic disorder appearing on the mentality and thoughts of the characters' behaviors. Such behaviors are further via the depressed psychic conditions of the characters that are rarely approached through psychoanalytic lens. Being so, the future researches might offer in-depth interpretation of trauma by elaborating other related psychic disorders which could be considered as products of lugubrious traumatic feelings. These feelings could also be a subject to psychoanalytic interpretation of the internal repressed negative feelings and how they appear on the characters conscious behaviors.

Second, the study of the characters' reactions contributes to the analysis of the understanding of the authentic causes of trauma. In this regard, the analysis of interpersonal relationships could be explicated by dealing with the influence of some characters on the other characters' feelings and behaviors. As such, trauma might be explored as a product of other people's negative effect upon traumatic individual. Third, the discussion of trauma contributes to the perception of psychic inhibitions. Hence, these inhibitions are kinds of defense mechanism adopted by traumatic individuals in order to escape their harsh and oppressive reality. In this respect, the negative events and personal experiences could be intensively approached by means of scrutinizing trauma development throughout different stages of the characters' lives.

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