

Lost between Uncanniness and Trauma: The Psychological Journey of Afghan Children into the Unknown in Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner*

ضائعون بين الغرابة والفاجرة : رحلة أطفال أفغان النفسية نحو المجهول في

المعيل لإليس ديورا

Perdus entre l'Etrangeté et le Traumatisme : Le Voyage Psychologique des Enfants Afghans vers l'Inconnu dans *The Breadwinner* d'Ellis Deborah

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Introduction

In a world that is shaped by unceasing political upheavals and persecutions, traumatized people are affected by overwhelming events commanding them into an inner world of fear. Their psyches appear broken into shattered episodic scenes holding historical lies and echoing disturbing truth from within. Thus, the need to examine the damaged psyche becomes urgent so that the haunting presence of insidious monsters help alleviate psychological pain. The traumatic experience of war is indeed one reason, amongst many, which pivots on notions of fragmented thoughts that are firmly loaded with feelings of terror, anxiety, unfamiliarity and discomfort. Under such turmoil, traumatized children in conflict zones find themselves in front of the unfamiliar milieu where the 'Powers of Horror' (Kristiva, 1982) challenge their resilient instinct of survival. Afghan children, as a case in point, appear caught in the uncanny because of the consecutive traumatic losses they endure: the loss of their relatives, childhood, rights and, above all, existence in the shadow of the Taliban autocratic regime.

Undoubtedly, a wealth of research has been carried out on the concept of uncanny and the theory of trauma. On many occasions, previous studies tackled them separately through investigating the peculiar psychosis from clinical angularity. They argue that a worrying proportion of generations are up to now agonized by legacies of trauma and uncanny feelings due to wars, conflicts and genocides. However, because of these shameful historical accidents, they tend to limit their scope of research to either male soldiers or female double oppression experiences. Furthermore, they deduce that the uncanny arousal occurs at a later stage in one's development of life, adulthood in particular. To make a

long story short, they often relate the uncanny to the awakening of unknown feelings of unresolved bygone memories that were once recorded during childhood.

In response, the present paper extends the population of the study by adding children category to fill in the gap that has surprisingly been left deficient. It proposes the possibility of extracting the simultaneous double experience of uncanny and trauma at an early stage shortly after trauma exposure. In this regard, the paper takes Afghan female children as a case study by means of deconstructing their broken psyches and unbalanced feelings. It is possible, I argue, to include children, in general, and Afghans, in particular, in the process of diagnosing symptoms of uncanniness hand in hand with the traumatic atmosphere they are, physically and mentally, exposed at. It is necessary then to cast some light on the coinciding conundrum of the uncanny and trauma to fortify their validity which, in turn, reinforces the intended results. On this account, the paper's core aim is to see how the psyche of children in contact zones is haunted by uncanny feelings due to intense traumatic episodes they witness, such as blood, death, loss and separation in addition to other forms of psychological wounds. It also endeavours to append a typology of uncanny that is blended with trauma reception and may be used as a theoretical tool towards traumatized children in conflict zones.

It is important to note that the paper's reliance on female characters in the discussion part comes haphazardly and unintentionally. Through this paper, I have no intention to categorise female children as those who may suffer more because it is impossible to quantify the amount of trauma and uncanny they go through compared to that of males. These cases can be treated on an individual basis only. As a result, the twin experience of uncanny and trauma is genderless, hence why one shall digest the absence of gender bias –Feminist approach– throughout the study.

1. Uncanny and Trauma: Establishing a Psychological Nexus

Before providing an in-depth analysis of the novel under study, it is of a pivotal importance to reflect on what is between and beyond uncanny and trauma, an attempt to limit and contextualize the research problem so that confusions from other angles are avoided. In fact, the distinguished terms uncanny and trauma may signal interchangeability, for they are deftly intertwined in providing “a means by which the unknown can be encountered, by focusing its lens on hidden or unconscious aspects of experience” (Charles & O’loughlin, 2014, p. 33). In accordance with the quote, psychoanalysis renders the uncanny, which

is referred as the 'unknown', possible to be known. It can be spotted from the dark angle of incidents where traumatic events are robustly implanted and similarly unknown. Thus, uncanny and trauma appear identical.

A distinction should however be made between trauma and uncanny in order to demarcate the paper's broad horizons. Both concepts are, in fact, elusive in the sense that they deal with entombed feelings through voicing the unspeakable. This may symbolize especially not a simple construct but an intimate affinity with a difficulty to dissociate them. Yet, one has to reconsider not only pathological distancing but the sufferer's disruptive idiosyncrasy as well. Unlike uncanny which seeks to adjust, update and familiarize the mind with obsolete feelings, trauma requires much 'acting out' and 'working through' processes of healing.

The uncanny is initially confronted by the German philosopher, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling who defines it as "the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden, but has to come to light" (Botting & Townshed, 2004, p. 184). For Schelling, the uncanny is found everywhere. It appears as an intruder to the mind that is mystically concealed, yet often pushed to be revealed and released at an unexpected time. The notion of the uncanny is posteriorly conceptualized by dint of the 'father of psychoanalysis', Sigmund Freud, in his prominent essay : *Das Unheimliche* (Uncanny) which dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Henceforth, it received appreciation in literature, psychology, language and gender studies, in addition to other fields.

From a Freudian perspective, the uncanny is "in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression." (Freud, 1919, p. 13). Freud's approach of the uncanny revolves basically around a usual sense rather than a strange one. It falls on the binary opposition of alien/familiar and new/old-established. The usual which turns into unusual because of different reasons, namely traumatic experiences. Hence, it suggests the awakening of archaic sensus to the mind that simply needs a moment to recognize it again. The needed moment is what makes the uncanny emerge steadily. For, the mind's process of recognizing the unrecognizable, yet originally recognizable can take either a fraction of a second or ages. The more time it takes the more complicated the psychological condition becomes. In short, it takes the 'unexpected guest' encounter suggesting both wanted and unwanted curiosity to the delicate mind's formula.

Freud further explains the ambiguity of the uncanny which is most of the time blended with undesirable emotions. In his words, the uncanny "belongs

to all that is terrible –to all that arouses dread and creeping horror ; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread.” (1919, p. 1). What Freud draws upon in this quote is the idea that the uncanny pertains to what evokes ‘horror’, however not all that stimulates horror to the mind could be uncanny. Based on this fundamental conceptualization, I contend that most of what seems uncanny to us may not provoke fear but gradual comfort providing that we consciously accept it and cope living with it. What is of importance to this article is basically what I consider the arousal of uncanny feelings synchronously with trauma encounter.

The uncanny is certainly not trauma and *vice versa*. Trauma is, in my view, a window into uncanny dwelling. While the door of uncanny is hardly locked, its windows can erratically be broken. Even though the uncanny may look like part of trauma, it is not. It is, in lieu, a vague segment that embraces trauma instead. Cathy Caruth states, “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event. And thus the traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted, simply, as a distortion of reality” (Caruth, 1995, pp. 4-5) which leads us to go beyond the unsolved problem. Trauma is, to this effect, nourished by uncanny confrontation to create a sense of integral connection.

It is important to acknowledge that the paper’s rationale contributes to Dayton Henderson’s prominent article : *Reading Trauma as an Extension of the Uncanny in Hofmannsthal’s “Reitergeschichte”*. In his article, Henderson contends that trauma is part and parcel of uncanny offering kind of serial process. He discerned the close relationship between uncanny and trauma in association to war neurosis deducing that the former does not exist apart from the latter. Henderson, however, does not trace the divergence between trauma and uncanny. He, additionally, concentrates on the apparent repression of childhood memories during the traumatized later development in life.

The relationship between uncanny and trauma is a reciprocal one given that the former influences the latter and vice-versa. It is hard to know where to begin examining their manifestation, be it jointly or severally. It is believed that to begin scrutinizing psychological scars requires creating ex nihilo because unhealed wounds are fussy to cure. Although this may definitely seem to be a paradox, I unreservedly refute the idea that uncanny and trauma are solely concerned with childhood past memories, neglecting the exact time they inflicted the mind (i.e. their occurrence during the present time). The uncanny arousal does not necessarily operate with repressive memories of childhood experiences ; it is rather productive in that it produces trauma and makes the traumatized desire

to construct resilience from within psychic anarchy. It is, after all, a journey of self-rediscovery, self-rehabilitation and self-recognition amidst inner struggle. Thus, it would not be enough to wait until the traumatized develops clashing psychological factors. This would basically result in an experience of fragmented continuity in their lives which renders the situation complicated because past, present and future are relative and cyclic. In a nutshell, one should consider striking while the iron is hot so that further complexities are prevented.

It is true that with the power of memory, along with remembrance, one can never be detached from traumatic memories ; yet accustoming the mind to unusual facets is needed. Memory resides with trauma within uncanny dwelling. Everyone possesses a retentive memory where all bygone events, most absurdly agonizing ones, are firmly recorded in the subconscious part of the brain. Even those who suffer from Amnesia are not to be excluded since they may be triggered by trauma manifestations regardless of their malady. These can come in the form of dreams, nightmares, daydreams or flashbacks which are, to a great extent, what consolidates the function/dysfunction of memory. In this vein, trauma must be part and parcel of everyone's life. That is why uncanny and trauma are blended inside the faculty of memory. Based on this confusion, the paper proposes a new way of looking at the convergence of uncanny and trauma through which they can be comprehended and further refined from traumatic memories.

The complex convergence between trauma and uncanny invites us to explore how the relationship is injected in literature scholarship. In what follows, I shall, to a lesser degree, cast some light on the characteristics of modern literature as an epitome of psyche fragmentation. Afterwards, I will provide an in-depth analysis on the representation of uncanny and trauma 'extension' in Deborah Ellis's *The Breadwinner* (2000).

2. Forging Trauma and Uncanny in Modern Literature

Trauma and uncanny become some of the fundamental axes of the psychoanalysis elusive realm. They gradually create an incentive scientific milieu in literature where new literary output is forged. The latter signals artistic metamorphosis reflecting a sense of alienation, paranoia, uncertainty and destabilization that are the outcomes of traumatic disasters, namely war, colonization, revolutions and epidemics. It is in this context that a new human psyche is constructed, pivoting on a significant plurality of surfaces. A new human psyche that is "both psychologically deep and multi-layered, fragmentary, floating on sensation and consciousness, fed by their random thoughts and their half-conscious dream worlds" (Bradbury, 2001, p. 159), as well as deconstructed selves.

Accordingly, the quote illustrates the great extent to which the twentieth century is the epitome of broken psyche and conflicting feelings.

Modern literature, moreover, devotes much attention to subjectivity as a way in which writers problematize the aftermaths of overwhelming events the world went through. They appear to inject a certain artistic discourse that holds expressive voices. In fact, “twentieth-century art has gone more inward, has tended to explore, even to celebrate subjectivity; it has explored new recesses of feeling, entered the stream of consciousness, spawned schools of art rightly called ‘expressionist’ ” (Taylor, 1989, p. 456). To this effect, subjectivity is a vehicle for modern writers to voice uncanny feelings through their narratives so that resistance to inner mayhem and resilience construction against it becomes operative. Expressing one’s feelings, I argue, would probably make the mind sane, for it copes with psychological scars and helps reduce internal crisis. Nevertheless, silence is, in one way or another, another favourable option to consider in the healing process.

In the same fashion, the aesthetic level of modern narratives is built on a nonlinear ground, mirroring the disequilibrium of 20th century’s way of life. The narratives further incarnate the radical fragmentation of societies, institutions and individuals’ minds at a post-war period. In this regard, W. B Yeats’ prominent poem *The Second Coming* (1919) is the embodiment of modern fiction, reflecting chaotic social changes. In his words,

Things fall apart ; the centre cannot hold ;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned ;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity (Finneran, 1989, p. 187)

Yeats’s poem offers a profound vision into twentieth century reality. It is characterized with shattered feelings. As a reader, one may feel the poet’s dependence on the use of an unstructured flow of ideas. There appears to be no harmony between verses. This is probably due to the nonlinearity in the writing mode which emerged during that period of time. The thematic level, for its part, recalls despair, uncertainty and chaos. The central aim of producing literature in that period is, on the one hand, to voice the impact of shocking events the world witnessed through unmasking entombed history. On the other hand, it endeavours to mend traumatized souls from the inner struggles so that upcoming generations overcome those oodles of disturbing past memories. Thus,

uncanny arousal is blended with trauma revelation haunting modern literary works.

The twentieth century symbolizes the era of apocalypse as the Great War (WWI) marked social shambles, insecurity and destabilization leaving people in constant torment, especially mental ones. The rate of war neurosis escalates with the coming of wounded soldiers from battlefields back to their homes. It is within the context of 'the returning veterans' (Shephard, 2001, p. 329) and the traumatized women, whose husbands are killed in battlefields, that writers constitute a specific juncture of the 'war novel'. The attitudes they adopt towards psychological sufferings is quintessential ranging from projecting social decadence to the representation of shattered selves. In this regard, a prominent modernist asserts,

war seemed to abstract and empty life itself, creating a landscape of violence and uncertainty in which the human figure was no longer a constant, the individual self no longer connected naturally with the universe, the word no longer attached to the thing. Culture now seemed a bundle of fragments, history no longer moved progressively, but cyclically (Bradbury, 2001, p. 147)

In light of this, the repercussions of the Great War followed by the stock market crash, World War 2, in addition to other calamities, result in a shift in literary production. Thus, psychological remnants of war are of central importance in modern and postmodern literature echoing traumatic memories and uncanny feelings of repression.

3. Reflections on the Junction of Trauma and Uncanny in Ellis' *The Breadwinner*

A reflective literary example, probably not the best but the nearest to the paper's central aim which portrays a journey of psychological instability by stressing the impact of trauma and uncanny, is Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner*. Even though the novel is woven in a way that prioritizes the theme of resilience construction addressing children readership, the dilemma of being haunted by uncanny feelings is implicitly mirrored through Parvana, the protagonist. The latter appears not only traumatized by living under Taliban cruelty but also controlled by disturbing feelings; her mind is fragmented by overwhelming episodic incidents she endured. Thus, it is important to fathom the extent to which the convergence of uncanny and trauma dominates the novel.

Ellis's *The Breadwinner* revolves essentially around the bitter life under the Taliban regime through stressing the inferior position of Afghan female chil-

dren. The narrative tracks the violation of children's rights and leans mainly on the psychological struggle children endure. It adopts Bildungsroman mode of narrative that is followed by three sequels through which the protagonist shows a significant development, focusing on the psychological growth in particular. The novel is inspired by a real event depicting the development of the psychological impact of war on Afghan female children and their journey into the unknown. It introduces how innocent children respond to the eerie atmosphere of war. Thus, readers are cajoled with sympathy, which makes them embrace fictional characters towards the mystery of the uncanny. According to Freud, in order to write or to read about haunting, you have to necessary become haunted (1919). In this respect, Ellis Deborah seems to shape her narrative by means of psychological effects in order to "become part of the struggle" (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 76) with the aim of directing universal efforts towards the plight of children living in contact zones.

In one of her interviews, Ellis was asked whether her protagonist, Parvana, is based on a real person. She reveals, "I met a lot of people in the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, including folks who were related to kids who had [disguised the fact that they were girls]. The characters are composites." (Q&A with Ellis Deborah, 2012). This reveal may lead us to take into account the concept of testimony which is a major tool in trauma theory. On this account, Ellis is positioned at, borrowing Dori Laub's idea, "the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others" (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 75) This makes her try to heal through narrating fiction narratives because "fiction is able to represent what 'cannot be represented by conventional historical, cultural and autobiographical narratives.'" (Kelly, 2009, p. 48), of course with the help of characters, images, events and symbols.

Throughout the development of the novel, Ellis dislocates the plot of her narrative in different spaces in Kabul. These places are always portrayed as destabilized spots where gallows of fear loom over the characters, suggesting immediate arousal of uncomfortable feelings. It is customary for both fiction and nonfiction novelists to take the readers into hidden places where deep feelings are produced. In this regard, Ellis offers some incidents where uncanny implicitly occupies a fundamental discussion part. In this part, the focus will fall on the uncanny of place. Additionally, particular attention is attributed to its implicit bound with ancestors. One may find it crucial to note that the analysis will fall solely on the tenth chapter of *The Breadwinner* by discussing one of the incidents where trauma and uncanny are jointly manifested as an extraneous fragment to children's minds.

In the opening of chapter ten, Ellis starts describing the bad weather on the day Parvana and Shauzia went for “Bones. They were going to dig up bones” (Ellis, 2000, p. 94). The characters are placed in a cruel milieu which gives rise to psychological unrest. The writer delves further into the demolished city where scattered bones forge Kabul’s land. The following imagery used by Ellis holds a panoramic picture of deconstructed buildings that are beyond ordinary. It suggests oddity of the place which, in its turn, awakens dormant feelings of fear. Here is how the chapter begins :

The sky was dark with clouds. They [Parvana and Shauzia] walked for almost an hour, down streets. Parvana didn’t recognize, until they came to one of the areas of Kabul most heavily destroyed by rockets. There wasn’t a single intact building in the whole area, just piles of bricks, dust and rubble. Bombs had fallen on the cemetery, too. The explosions had shaken up the graves in the ground. Here and there, white bones of the long-dead stuck up out of the rusty-brown earth. (Ellis, 2000, pp. 94-95)

From a readers view, the author’s description of the weather is symbolic. It already signals the coming of frightening events. The description of the weather is, in fact, one of the core elements in literature where writers convey either relish or inquietude to the readers. Parvana and Shauzia appear to take the road to the unknown where horror awaits. Wandering children in Afghanistan are portrayed as blind migrant birds ; they nest where there is neither warmth nor safety but coldness and terror. Ellis seems to remind the readers how Afghans are at the heart of a fatal atmosphere because of the constant conflict.

The passage further invites the reader to a dreadful scene denoting the extent to which recognizable space can recall unstructured memories. Parvana appears lost in the middle of haunted alleys. The metamorphosis of Kabul’s streets makes her mind unable to identity the odd place she found herself in. Yet, being in front of destructed buildings and a dissociated cemetery is instantly associated with Kabul’s usual becoming, a bone-shattered land. The struggle of detecting familiar places leads to the creation of a certain desire to understand uncanny dislocation. Therefore, the city embodies the ghost of war that is arisen by the Taliban regime to haunt people’s minds.

Equally important is the bird’s-eye view Ellis offers on the transformation of Kabul’s architecture through stressing the outcomes of bombing. Even though Parvana is only eleven years old, born during war period where falling buildings in ruins is customary, “It hurt her to hear stories of old Kabul before the bombing. She didn’t want to think about everything the bombs had taken

away” (Ellis, 2000, p. 23). This quote stresses the distorted image of belonging that is mysteriously stamped in Parvana’s mind through the agency of storytelling. The latter is alluded implicitly, and opens psychological scars of endless conflict. Whenever Parvana is told about Kabul in peacetime, her feelings are elicited promptly. In this regard, storytelling is interpreted as a “vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life-lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions or insights” (Serrat, 2010, p. 1). As if, a new memory is created to Parvana recalling peacetime, rejecting the present wartime and creating a break in continuity. While trauma initiates mysterious psychic gaps, the uncanny performs memories recollection, and therefore the psychological struggle perpetuates.

The destroyed city of Kabul is, to a great extent, strange from the ordinary it was. It becomes an alien town, so remote from its usual environment before the Taliban took control of the country ; and this justifies why Afghans are being caught between trauma of war and uncanny of unfamiliar place. The place therefore functions as a mechanism which operates uncanny feelings and facilitates the continuity of trauma.

In the same fashion, the idea of place and its relation to the concept of uncanny is employed by Ellis to report the Taliban’s repression of both the man-dead or alive- and the land. This can accurately be exemplified through the following comparison that is symbolically made by Parvana’s old sister, Nooria. The latter remembers, “Kabul had once been beautiful” (Ellis, 2000, p. 22). Now, she sadly bemoans the way in which the beautiful Kabul becomes but sufficient to cause death ; it “has more land mines than flowers” (Ellis, 2000, p. 98). This comparison symbolizes Kabul’s deteriorated metamorphosis into a dead land. There is not even glimmers of life left in Kabul. Flowers can neither grow nor survive amidst mines’ implantation. Just as mines replaced flowers, death is replaced by life. Under these dichotomies, *The Breadwinner* echoes not only trauma induction but uncanny emanation as well. Nooria’s psyche is broken ; it comprises *déjà vu* episodes that are becoming part and parcel routine. Accordingly, the ghost of the Taliban regime, which made Kabul’s land either dead or dreadful, reinforces the awakening of uncanniness. Hence, the Taliban regime is the incarnation of both uncanny awakening and trauma infliction.

The genesis of the uncanny therefore cannot be limited to external supernatural powers, such as phantoms and monsters, but political regimes as well which, in their turn, engender both external and internal powers. This is only apparent to those who endure trauma of war. The internal power, which takes individuals into the unknown, is in all cases puzzling, and its ambiguous feeling

remains but an unheard voice. The external power, on the other hand, helps but to worsen psychic damage as it embodies the atrocity of the Taliban regime that tries to obliterate hope through the burial of traumatic history.

Furthermore, Ellis locates Parvana and Shauzia in a more specific place which invites us to a more specific uncanny incident, “the slight breeze carried a rotting stench to where Parvana and Shauzia were standing, on the edge of cemetery’s older section” (Ellis, 2000, p. 95). The road into the unknown the girls took entails being on the verge of something that would elicit uncomfortable feelings. The moment they stepped in, an unpleasant perfume embraces them, suggesting a burial ground setting. One may wonder why children would excavate bones from the soil. Is it not an uncanny venture in itself ? This is indeed a fundamental question which requires fundamental answer. Simply, yet shockingly, the retrieved bones are commercialized in Afghanistan ; they are sold and used for profit-oriented business. For example, they can be grinded with other items to feed animals, an essential substance in the process of soap-making and, most of the time, a cooking oil, to mention but a few utilizations.

The cemetery incident also suggests an allegory. It is intentionally tackled by the writer to denounce two facts. The first one revolves around the violation of children’s rights in Afghanistan. According to articles 31, 32 and 38 from the Universal Declaration of Children’s rights, children have the right to relax, play and to join in a wide range of leisure activities. In addition, the government should protect them from work that is dangerous or that might harm their physical and psychological health (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). Children in war zones should then receive special protection, which is clearly not the case in Afghanistan. The second fact suggests the utmost dehumanization of Afghan people, their bones are being sold and children are illegally hired in the field. To this end, basic rights are stripped from traumatized children intensifying their trauma as well as multiplying their uncanny feelings.

Another crucial point comes to strengthen the overlap of uncanny and trauma : the point of questioning the uncertainty and going beyond the certainty. Ellis ironically attributed a paradoxical position to Parvana and her friend Shauzia by endowing them with different perceptions. While Parvana appears helpless to indulge herself in a dreadful milieu, “She hadn’t been able to tell her mother about going bone-digging” (Ellis, 2000, p. 94), Shauzia is portrayed as a someone who does not prioritize affection : she is silent and undemonstrative. Her feelings are not elicited but kept dormant, which may tighten trauma

manifestation. In one of an illustrative incidents, Ellis casts some light on their dissimilar attitudes towards the bone broker. Parvana begins conversation,

Who's that ?

That's the bone broker. He buys the bones from us.

What does he do with them ?

He sells them to someone else.

Why would anyone want to buy bones ?

What do we care, as long as we get paid. (Ellis, 2000, p. 94)

The dialogue indicates a clash between knowing, not knowing and the fear to question the disturbing unknown. A clash between certainty and uncertainty : the traumatic certainty of digging bones to survive juxtaposed with the uncertainty of bones' purposes. These binary oppositions work successfully in connection with the fragmented psyche. On the one hand, Shauzia appears totally careless about the bone broker as long as this brings her capital. Her mind seems blurred by materialistic needs. These renders Shauzia to create distorted images. On the other hand, Parvana is inquisitive about all that has relation to the bones, namely the buying and the selling process, which makes her set uncanny feelings free. Hence, what triggers Parvana's questioning about the ambiguity of 'the bone broker' is what may help her deconstructed psyche to construct knowledge. Shauzia is curious, too, yet in a different way, a bizarre way. Her eccentric responding to all that is relative to bones may denote unspeakable feelings of uncanny. Silence is, then, another alternative to hid traumatic memories.

By far the biggest problem for Parvana is the inability to build a fence against fear amid the inner chaos. That is why conflicting feelings seem to frequent her mind persistently. An ambivalent behaviour emerges between leaving the traumatic place (cemetery) and staying unwillingly for the sake of breadwinner performance. In this vein, Parvana's mind appears divided into two thoughts : submission or rebellion. To submit to conflict atrocities or to rebel against the disturbing fear and rescue her family from starvation regardless of the circumstances she is put under. She knows that being in a devastated cemetery will open the door to the unknown. Yet, under such uncertainty, Parvana professes, "I am not sure this is a good idea" (Ellis, 2000, p. 94). In a moment of fear, Parvana recognizes the danger of digging up bones ; yet she prefers to drown herself in the deep end of horror. Therefore, forced decisions would most assuredly keep pace with the train of asymmetrical thoughts. What an irksome journey into the unknown Afghan children go through !

Fear is only fear : an emotion. It comes where there is no knowledge in the sense that if a person knows why something is happening, it does not scare him anymore. Building a fence against that fear, then, is Parvana's choice to creating a resilient self. Therefore, the fixation on what triggers trepidation causes Parvana sort of traumatic domination ; it is a very uncanny sort of trauma. Fear is tied to the psyche, and uncanny and trauma have deep psychological basics. The reason why we are afraid, or we cannot familiarise ourselves with what evokes fear, is because of the intricacy to untangle uncanny and trauma that is partly buried in the subconscious mind.

Indeed, fear functions as an important gimmick during the uncanny arousal. It is a *fabrique* in which uncanniness is manifested, engendering an undefinable state of disorder. For Tad Williams, "fear goes where it is invited" (Williams, 1990, p. 150). What I meant by considering Williams's quote is to position fear between expectation and acceptance ; thereby one has to fight the feeling of fear in the first place, and not what evokes it. Williams's approach to fear brought no relief though. The situation often remains unmanageable. The longer it remains troublesome, the more ground there is for deep perplexity. It certainly requires courage to face the dread but it is out of this courage that resilience is built. Substantially, it is that fear which puts the individual at the heart of being mentally disordered rather than the experience of war, or any other overwhelming experience itself.

What renders Parvana's fragmented psyche deepen the experience of uncanny wherein trauma indwells is that the extracted bones, sometimes, may not be dried yet but rather fresh. Even though "the bombs had done much of the work for them [where] many bones were barely covered by dirt and were easy to get at" (Ellis, 2000, p. 96), it unexpectedly happens to pull a fresh corpse from the bombarded graveyards. Upon this matter, Ellis draws to us an uncanny image through Parvana who questions, "What if...what if there's still a body there ? ' I mean, what if it's not bones yet ?" (Ellis, 2000, p. 95). This again reflects Parvana's hesitation to face what elicits fear or to allow her subconscious mind being submerged by it. The scene further denotes that resisting clashing feelings generates the construction of resilience. Consequently, uncanny and trauma are not feelings dilated, they are imaginations conflated.

One more interesting part in the intersection between uncanny and trauma is probably the dominance of minor feelings over major physical needs. It is axiomatic to human beings, along with other species, to stimulate reaction to urgent action through conveying a message in the form of electrical waves to the mind so that the body responds reflexively. The transmission of the mes-

sage, during such neurological operation, may sometimes have perturbations. Scientifically speaking, it is defined as ‘Nerve Impulse’ and it deals with the nervous system. The latter, on odd occasions, can temporarily fail to operate vis-à-vis humans’ primary needs. To illustrate, it is customary to human beings as to animals to eat when feeling hungry. The mind sends a message to which the body responds. Yet, this message, while in uncanny dwelling, cannot receive immediate response.

This is demonstrated in the novel through Parvana who, despite getting extremely hungry, “couldn’t bear to eat in the middle of the field of bones.” (Ellis, 2000, p. 104). I took this short, yet significant passage to mean that Parvana’s faculty of nerve impulse is working regardless the terrifying place she is placed in. It is obvious that she has a feeling of hunger and therefore her mind can still alarm the body to take action by sending hunger sensations. However, the transmission of signals is interrupted due to the predominance of feelings over urgent demands. The incapability of fulfilling Parvana’s needs to eat is not being turned off but rather controlled by uncanny feelings. A strange sensation overwhelms both her body and her mind. This can result in what I call frozen neurosis. The latter is a belated call to action which implies the fleeting paralysis of nerve impulse faculty facing uncanny arousal. Hence, trauma and uncanny are stimuli to hinder the nerve impulse faculty.

Another point that is equally important when examining uncanny and trauma is the resurrection of the past through making a call with ancestors, in other words, the concept of ‘return to the past’ which is basically concerned with the awakening of memories. That is to say, one has to go back to the past in order to understand the present so that s/he knows how to shape his/her future. In this respect, Ingo Lambrecht states, “Healing such ruptures of meaning requires healing transgressions of tapu or taboo. This means working through personal, political, and ecological connections with other beings, such as ancestors and the land.” (Charles & O’loughlin, 2014, p. 67). Accordingly, the notion of revisiting the past with all its ‘taboos’ helps the traumatized people to control their uncanny feelings and to trigger the recollection of traumatic memories process. By doing so, they can have a stable present and find meaning to their ignorance of the disturbing past. For, “our knowledge of the past remains unintegrated with our feelings about it. In this very important and fundamental way, we are unknowing.” (Charles & O’loughlin, 2014, p. 21). Therefore, the traumatic past has to be resurrected in order to release the mind from the chains of uncanny feelings.

There is a semblance of idea, in the novel under study, which reflects on the notion of resurrecting the unresolved past through referring to the ancestors. This is projected through Parvana's mother, Fatima. After she knows what her daughter was doing (bone digging), she declared : "So this is what we've become in Afghanistan (...) we dig up the bones of our ancestors in order to feed our families." (Ellis, 2000, p. 103). In order to survive, Fatima highlights the nexus drawn between (dead) ancestors and traumatized livings in terms of digging up for the buried past to elucidate the continuity of life suggesting a thirst for knowledge. In other words, she recognizes the attachment of the foggy present to the unsettled past. This has a relation with Ingo's argument on the 'wairua' (sacred) which is simply a process of psyche restoration. The latter, in his words, "requires explicit acknowledgement of ancestors, and the incorporation of uncanny, occult, and anomalous experiences, as well as altered states of consciousness"(Charles & O'loughlin, 2014, p. 13). It is, then, important to restore the torn apart linkage between ancestors and descendants (i.e. past and present) in order to be healed gradually. Ellis's reference to ancestors is crystal clear : she wants to voice the unspoken part of history.

The skull, again, symbolizes not only trauma but rather the apparent presence of past generations, ancestors. Indeed, it is traumatic for a child to be in a dreadful cemetery where there is only dispersed bones on the surface and hidden mines beneath. Yet, this engenders a restorative power of constructing a resilient self. Parvana shows a unique acknowledgment to the skull by associating it with a higher post. She declared, "he will be like our boss, watching us to make sure we do it right" (Ellis, 2000, p. 97). What Ellis draws upon in this quote is the idea that the skull, being the emblem of the past, imposed itself to either put an end to the transmission of trauma, which is unreachable, or help alleviate pain through unmasking inhumed history. Keeping the same line with Ingo's approach, the reason why Parvana unconsciously charges the 'boss' position to the skull is that "the body sacred has to be remembered and newly reconstituted, in other words, re-membered" (Charles & O'loughlin, 2014, p. 67). The reconstitution of the skull therefore implies the repairing of a broken past.

Parvana, however, appears to plug herself in a continuous struggle that enriches her trauma. While the skull is strange, dreadful and real, it is part of the history that cannot be kept hidden so that trauma stops growing intensively with uncanny provocation. There is a significant attempt in which Parvana tries to reconcile herself to the thought of assimilation. Taking the previous quote from another angle, she clearly adopts an assimilationist approach towards the skull by making it monitor her while working. This, I argue, turns Parvana into a

submissive object by drowning her in the dark ocean of the past. Consequently, she falls on uncanny effects because of her ignorance of the unspoken past. The result can further be understood in the variable behaviour of Parvana with the skull that is tackled in the coming paragraphs.

There is something essential about uncanny embedded in Ellis's *The Breadwinner*. Following Parvana's assimilationist approach, a sudden shift from uncomfortable to comfortable feelings is depicted stressing the continual mystery of the skull perception. In a dialogue between Parvana and Shauzia, the skull becomes a familiar object which helps bring happiness to their minds. Parvana asserts, "Of course it's grinning. He's glad to be out in the sunshine after being in the dark ground for so long. Aren't you glad, Mr. Skull ? She made the skull nod. 'See ? I told you.'" Prop him up on the gravestone. He'll be our mascot" (Ellis, 2000, p. 97) As readers, we are obliquely transported to uncanny vicissitudes : the fear of the traumatic skull fades with Parvana's comfort. It is a compelling escape from the psychological unrest Ellis harnesses in order to emphasize the elusive convergence of trauma and uncanny. Parvana is obviously content with the skull as she is able to communicate expressively with it. She shortly turns to befriend the skull even though it previously implanted fear.

Moreover, considering the skull as a 'mascot' amidst an uncanny place symbolizes hope for a better future regardless of the traumatic past and present. This can be nothing but a mirage of distorted images. Alternatively, the quote indicates the momentousness of delving deep into muted past events. By exposing the skull to the sunshine, Ellis endeavours to revive dead history. Hence, history has to be revealed and released from not only the shallow present but rather the depth of the past. To this end, it is a process of repairing the damaged psyche from historical accidents as well as testing resilience and resistance constructions.

Under such psychological disequilibrium, one may find it absurd to believe in time machine. It is even more absurd to question the possibility of traveling back to the past. With the psychological operation of uncanny and trauma, however, time can instantaneously be rewound to not only watch what the traumatized went through but to feel exactly what s/he felt in the middle of the abrupt cataclysm. This is projected through Parvana who appears lost in a daydream, "finally, she stuck her whole head under the tap, hoping the cold water would wash the images of what she had done all day out of her head. But every time she closed her eyes, she saw Mr, Skull and his companions lined up on the gravestones, grinning at her" (Ellis, 2000, p. 101). The emergence of daydreams is common in trauma studies : a sign of post-traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD). In this vein, daydreams seem to be after effects of unresolved trauma which emerges from Parvana's imagination. It is an uncanny creation for her to deliberate traumatic memories. A mysterious signature is stamped on her mind always recalling uncomfortable memories. Hence, the experience of trauma employs traumatic memory of a repetitive past.

Time, to this effect, establishes a profound connection with memory ; they appear identical, for they often foreground a disoriented glimpse of uncanny images to the mind. By the time of psychological turmoil, memory is assuredly disturbed. This is demonstrated through Parvana whose thoughts of both time and memory uncertainties lurk in her subconscious. These thoughts of uncertainties are reflections of recognition and misrecognition, especially "during the heavy bombing of Kabul, they [Parvana and her family] changed homes many times to try to find a safe place. Parvana would wake up in the middle of the night and not remember where she was." (Ellis, 2000, p. 38) The quote denotes memory disturbance in relation to time confusion. Even though the fixity of memory is undetermined, it may be broken during a state of uncanny hyper arousal. Hence, a clash between certainty and uncertainty emanates as an outcome of memory ephemeral dysfunction and time confusion. Parvana's constant dislocation from one home to another provokes perplexity between past and present which, in turn, invokes traumatic memories of bombing. She does not evoke them ; they befall her just like ghosts, no one summons them and they may appear to her. The incident, in short, shows how sunk in thoughts Parvana is in the night time and how traumatized by what she witnessed in the daytime she becomes.

In all uncanny incidents the article tackled, it is a plea Ellis made to echo not only mental or physical torments children in conflict zones went through but rather the liberation of traumatic fixations through testing the traumatized ability to construct self-resilience. All that Parvana desires is actually to transcend the fragmented continuity of her life which is, at a certain period, marked by internal unrests. Thus, a quest to construct resilience is evoked in the subconscious mind. Moreover, the implicit search for ordinary from within oddity pressures Parvana to raise an existentialist thought through which she calls (human) existence into question. She declares, "I just want to be an ordinary kid again, (...) I want to sit in a classroom and go home and eat food that someone else has worked for. I want my father to be around. I just want a normal, boring life." (Ellis, 2000, p. 113). The haunt of traumatic repression is clearly what drives Parvana to a cyclic journey into the unknown.

Conclusion

It is difficult to form a conclusive reasoning at a disturbing phase of uncanniness, for the uncanny is by nature a fussy disturbance that entails unceasing growth of the unknown. It is even more difficult to examine the uncanny hand in hand with trauma as well as stress their deep-rooted alliance. They are just ephemeral feelings ; yet their captivation is haphazardly enduring. Amidst the everlasting agony, one may question whether the haunt of traumatic repression can bring uncanny to a halt in front of the process of collecting those fragmented remnants of traumatic memories. The uncanny, by all means, embraces trauma.

Through her novel, *The Breadwinner*, Ellis suggests that Afghan children are deeply caught in psychological malaise : lost between trauma manifestation and uncanny arousal. She uses her protagonist Parvana as the epitome of traumatized resilient to voice the unspoken psychic anguish. It is possible, under war impact, to cope with uncanny feelings and adaptation of traumatic episodes. Given the fact that the accumulation of internal wounds causes Parvana to sink in the darkness of despair - a traumatizing experience. In a moment of melancholy, however, Parvana's psychological disturbance has a significant impact on her resilience construction process. She could survive in spite of inner damage. Yet, whether her resilience will last unbroken until the end of her life or not is put into question due to the vicissitudes of trauma and uncanny convergence. Hence, the paper comes to an end with an undefinitive conclusion that requires more delving into the unknown tracking the development of those traumatized children in contact zones.

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Abstract

Keeping in mind the inextricable intersection between uncanny and trauma, the present paper endeavours to explore how the activist writer Deborah Ellis provides an evocative image of psychic damage that is experienced by children in conflict zones through her novel *The Breadwinner* (2000). The latter stresses the twofold turmoil of uncanniness and trauma as a disturbing impediment in front of those children throughout the development of their lives. It further examines the extent to which drawing bound with ancestors help repairing the broken psyche from traumatic memories by revealing entombed history as well as releasing uncanny feelings. Based on psychoanalyst approach, the study leans on prominent theorists and critics such as Sigmund Freud, Michael O'Loughlin and Marlyn Charles, to name but a few. The paper concludes that Afghan children's journey into the unknown leads to the construction of resilience from within psychic anarchy.

Keywords

Children, Conflict zones, Feelings, Uncanny, Unknown, Resilience, Trauma

Résumé

En considérant l'intersection inextricable entre l'étrangeté et le traumatisme, le présent article tente d'explorer comment l'écrivaine activiste Deborah Ellis offre, à travers son roman *The Breadwinner* (2000), une image évocatrice des dégâts psychiques que les enfants subissent dans les zones de conflit. Ce roman illustre la double tourmente de l'étrangeté et du traumatisme comme un obstacle troublant face aux enfants tout au long de leur vie. Il examine, en outre, les mesures dans lesquelles, établir un lien avec le passé peut aider à réparer la psyché fragmentée des souvenirs traumatisants en révélant l'histoire enterrée et en libérant des sentiments d'étrangeté. En appuyant sur approche psychanalyste, l'étude est basée sur des idées d'éminents théoriciens tels que Sigmund Freud et des critiques rationnelles émises par des experts en psychologie comme Michael O'Loughlin et Marlyn Charles, pour n'en citer que quelques-uns. L'article conclut que le voyage des enfants afghans vers l'inconnu mène à la construction d'une résilience au milieu d'une anarchie psychique.

Mots-clés

Enfants, Zone de conflit, Sentiments, Etrangeté, Inconnu, Résilience, Traumatisme

المخلص

نظراً للتداخل المعقد بين الغرابة والفاجعة، يهدف هذا المقال إلى البحث عن كيفية تقديم صورة مثيرة للضرر النفسي الذي يعاني منه الأطفال في مناطق الصراع من خلال رواية العائل (٢٠٠٠) لإليس ديبوراه. يضغط هذا الأخير على الاضطراب المزدوج بين الغرابة والصدمة كعائق مقلق أمام أطفال أفغانستان طوال تطور حياتهم. علاوة على ذلك، يسعى المقال لدراسة المدى البعيد وراء الإتصال بالماضي من خلال التواصل مع الأسلاف بغية إصلاح الحالة النفسية المتضررة تجاه الذكريات الصادمة بهدف الكشف عن التاريخ المدفون وتحرير النفس من مشاعر الغرابة. استناداً على التحليل النفسي، تركز الدراسة على أفكار بعض النقاد البارزين مثل سيغموند فرويد، مايكل أولوغلين ومارلين تشارلز. يستنتج المقال، في الأخير، أن رحلة أطفال أفغانستان إلى المجهول تؤدي إلى بناء المرونة بغض النظر عن الفوضى النفسية.

مفتاحية

الأطفال، مناطق الصراع، المشاعر، الغرابة، المجهول، المرونة، الفاجعة