

The Psychosomatic Impact of Childhood Trauma and Female Agency in Everything Good Will Come by Sefi Atta

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التأثير النفسي الجسدي لصدّات الطفولة وفاعلية المرأة

في رواية "كل ما هو جيد سيأتي" للكاتبة صفي عطا

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على الطبيعة المركبة للصدمة، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على التجارب النسائية في رواية "كل شيء جيد سيأتي" لسيفي عطا. تتناول الدراسة الآثار النفسية الجسدية لسوء معاملة الأطفال على الشخصيات النسائية، مع التركيز على كيفية تأثير الصدمة على كل من الصحة العاطفية والجسدية. تسلط الرواية الضوء على التأثير الدائم لسوء معاملة الأطفال، وخاصة العنف الجنسي، وتوضح كيف تظهر الصدمة ليس فقط نفسياً بل جسدياً أيضاً. وبينما يهيمن الحدث الصادم للعنف الجنسي على السرد، فإن هذا التحليل يبحث في تعقيدات التعافي وتكوين الهوية والقدرة الأنثوية على التصرف كما هو موضح في النص. سيتم تطبيق وجهات نظر جوديث بتلر النسوية لفهم كيفية مواجهة الشخصيات النسائية لصدّاتهما في بيئات اجتماعية مقيدة. أما الجانب النفسي سيتم تطبيق وجهات نظر سيغموند فرويد وكاثي كاروث، بالإضافة إلى أعمال جوديث هيرمان حول الصدمات والتعافي، لتحليل الأبعاد النفسية للذاكرة والشفاء..

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة، إساءة معاملة الأطفال، الهوية، جوديث بتلر، كاثي كاروث.

Abstract

This study aims to illuminate the multi-layered nature of trauma, with a particular focus on female experiences in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. It examines the psychosomatic effects of childhood abuse on female characters, emphasizing how trauma affects both emotional and physical well-being. The novel highlights the permanent impact of childhood abuse, particularly sexual violence, and demonstrates how trauma manifests not only psychologically but also physically. While the traumatic event of sexual violence dominates the narrative, this analysis investigates the complexities of recovery, identity formation, and female agency as depicted in the text. Judith Butler's feminist perspectives will be applied to comprehend how female characters confront their trauma within socially restraining environments. Additionally, insights from Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth, along with Judith

Herman's work on trauma and recovery, are applied to analyze the psychological dimensions of memory and healing.

Key terms: Trauma, childhood abuse, identity, Judith Butler, agency, female, Cathy Caruth.

1-Introduction:

Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is a deeply traumatic experience that has long-lasting effects on survivors, affecting their psychological, emotional, and even physical health. The damage caused by CSA often develops far beyond the immediate emotional impact, leading to complex and long-term consequences that can persist throughout adulthood. Trauma caused by CSA is not a singular event, but a series of psychological and physical reactions that unfold over time. Trauma theory offers a useful framework to understand how CSA affects a person's physical and psychological health. Although the multi-layered dimensions of trauma have been examined by various scholars, the foundational contributions of Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth remain essential to contemporary studies. Both theorists claim that the traumatic incident remains inaccessible to intentional recollection. This causes a disorienting effect on the individual because he/she endeavors to comprehend the event that was not consciously encountered. According to Luckhurst, the traumatic memory constitutes a present-absent phenomenon that persistently haunts individuals who have experienced trauma. (Luckhurst,2008, p. 81). Consequently, the past determinedly resists temporal progression, making the individual re-experiencing the event. The recollection of violent memories is so powerful that it leaves the victim susceptible to dissociative disorders and various psychological problems.

Trauma theory explains those events that cannot be completely comprehended that result an inexpressible shocking experience. Such events continue in the victim's life as unclear memories, hallucinations, repressed thoughts. The individual can never attain complete recovery from these emotional upheavals of the past, he remains trapped in a deceptive reality. The individual who has suffered trauma reexperience the psychological pain of their past through their bodily behaviors in the contemporary moment. This phenomenon of delayed bodily action interweaves the first place of the trauma with the adult's retrospective contemplation, where the traumatized subject struggles to grasp the past without engaging with the present, and equally, cannot fully engage with the present without a full understanding of the past. Shoshana Felman asserts that trauma survivors engage not only with memories, but with an unresolved event from their past (the actions they undertook and those they failed to undertake) which possesses no closure. Therefore, continuing its existence into the present in every dimension of the survivors' consciousness (Felman ,1992, p. 69).

Victims may believe they are to blame for the trauma they suffer from, thinking their actions, or lack of actions, led to the event. For example, soldiers who survive while others die in battle usually struggle with survivor's guilt, feeling they somehow

should have been able to save others or that they did not deserve to survive. This same feeling can occur in women who have been sexually assaulted. They may feel ashamed or guilty, believing they did something to bring the abuse upon themselves or that their failure to resist or report it means they are somehow complicit in what happened to them. Gabriele Schwab emphasizes how these feelings of guilt and shame can make victims silent and even more difficult for them to heal (Ibid.). The phenomenon that is particularly noteworthy in the context of trauma is that not only the individual who has endured a traumatic event may experience psychological distress, but also those individuals who have been mere witnesses to such trauma. Sigmund Freud considers both as victims, he posited that the witnessing or undergoing of an event, leads to mental imbalance. Many trauma survivors, especially those who have experienced sexual abuse prefer not to talk about their experiences. This silence is closely related to feelings of guilt and shame. According to Schwab, these emotions can be so overwhelming that they prevent victims from revealing what they experienced (2017 ,p.59).

Judith Herman explains that trauma breaks a person's sense of trust in others and the world around them (1998,p.145). When the abuse occurs during childhood, it can cruelly disrupt the child's sense of safety and attachment, often resulting in lasting emotional scars. Van der Kolk notes that childhood trauma can change brain development, impacting a person's ability to regulate their emotions, trust others, and form healthy relationships (2014,p.56). The emotional harm of childhood sexual abuse often shows up in many forms, including hopelessness, anxiety, eating disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorders. Survivors may also suppress memories or experience dissociation as a way to deal with trauma. These challenges often extend into adulthood, with survivors struggling with low self-esteem and difficulty forming close relationships (Briere & Scott, 2015, p. 78). Over time, these emotional symptoms can evolve, continuing to affect the survivor's daily life and mental health in some cases.

The effects of childhood sexual assault (CSA) do not just stay in the mind, they may also lead to serious physical health issues. Research has shown that those who experience childhood abuse are more likely to develop chronic illnesses, face substance abuse problems, and even experience suicidal thoughts (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 246). This mind-body connection highlights how trauma can have widespread consequences that extend beyond the emotional and mental realms. Healing from CSA requires more than just addressing the immediate symptoms; it also involves confronting the deep-rooted trauma that can affect a person for a lifetime. Trauma-informed care is essential in helping survivors heal, focusing on building trust, safety, and empowerment. Herman emphasizes the importance of fostering supportive relationships and helping survivors rebuild a cohesive narrative of their lives (1992, p. 140). If a child ,after undergoing a moment of trauma during one of these phases in development ,did not

correctly process the trauma, then he would repress his trauma into the recesses of his unconscious (Leys, 2000, p. 4).

Freud underestimated the seriousness of sexual abuse, believing that the act of abuse could be an imaginary and unconscious desire in childhood growth for him the child is not emotionally or physically prepared for intercourse (Freud,1905, p.31). However, in recent years, a considerable amount of data has accrued suggesting that child sexual abuse is more frequent than previously thought. According to large-scale studies done with nonclinical populations, the probability of sexual assault before adolescence is about 1 in 4 for females (Kinsey, et al., 1953; Russell, 1984). This statistic causes Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson to reject Freud's ideas, as Freud reflects a patriarchal mindset antagonistic towards females (Masson,1985, p.184). Adrienne Rich has further noted that females have long been perceived as irrational, with their lived experiences dismissed in a community that only validates male perspectives (Rich,1977, p.112).

From the feminist perspective Judith Butler in her “**Theory of Performativity**” claims that sexual violence disrupts the autonomy of the female body, turning it from a subject of agency into an object of domination, severing the connection between the individual and their physical identity (Butler, 1990, p. 25).

This research investigates the impact of the aftershocks of early traumatic experiences suffered by the female characters in Sefi Atta's novel *Everything Good Will Come*, and how these experiences shape their sense of self, agency, and empowerment as they confront personal, familial, and societal challenges. Furthermore, Atta's portrayal of female agency will be analyzed within the context of trauma and resilience, in terms of cultural and gendered perspectives.

2- Psychosomatic Effects of Trauma:

The term "psychosomatic" refers to the intricate relationship between mental processes and physiological states, where emotional or psychological conditions can affect physical health outcomes. For instance, factors such as stress, anxiety, depression, or historical traumatic experiences may manifest as physical symptoms, despite the absence of any recognizable illness. For example, an individual experiencing emotional distress may report symptoms such as headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, or chronic pain as blood pressure and cancer, though he does not suffer from any disease (Pennebaker & Susman,1988, p.323). The concept of psychosomatic emphasizes the notion that our emotional and psychological health can be a serious reason behind some physical health problems.

Childhood trauma, which can be physical or emotional abuse, or witnessing violence, disrupts the natural growth and development of both the brain and the body. For instance, trauma can change brain structures like the hippocampus and amygdala, which are essential for managing emotions and forming memories (Van der Kolk, 2014). These changes make it difficult for trauma survivors to manage stress and

emotions, and can affect their ability to build healthy relationships later in life. Beyond the emotional consequences, trauma can also cause physical health problems, with many survivors developing long-lasting conditions such as autoimmune disorders, heart disease, and ongoing pain (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 247).

Psychosomatic effects happen because the body often reflects emotional pain in physical ways. For example, someone who has experienced trauma may suffer from symptoms like gastrointestinal problems losing or having weight as the female characters in Atta's novel. These symptoms may not have a direct physical cause but serve as a sign of emotional pain that the person may not fully recognize or be able to express. Caruth describes trauma as an injury that harm the body (2016, p. 4). Studies show that people who were exposed to childhood trauma are more susceptible to experience chronic illnesses as adults (Shin et al., 2006, p. 481). Healing from trauma requires addressing both the emotional and physical aspects; emotional wounds are often deeply rooted in the body and can affect overall health.

The literary realm is considered a rich field for investigating the complex dynamics between what is considered significant and what is regarded as insignificant. (Scarry, 1985, p.3). Trauma concept establishes a foundational framework for a cross-cultural narrative, as it causes empathy and compassion towards individuals who have endured suffering, suggesting that the language surrounding trauma, along with the silence innate in its repetitive manifestation of pain, needs a new treatment for both listening and reading (Caruth, 1996, p. 9).

3-Psychosomatic Impact of Childhood Trauma on Female Characters:

Sefi Atta is a Nigerian author and playwright. She has written novels, short stories, and plays, often delving into the struggles women facing the patriarchal societal structures, political challenges, and personal trauma. Atta's novel, *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), childhood trauma plays a significant role in shaping the lives and identities of the female characters Enitan and Sheri, particularly through psychosomatic effects. These effects reveal the complicated relationship between mind and body, where psychological pain manifests physically, often with long-term consequences. Atta uses her female characters to illustrate how early trauma, like sexual assault, abuse, and societal pressures, leads to the development of psychological and physical symptoms that disrupt their lives in the future.

Sheri is a good-looking eleven-year-old girl with a mixed racial background (her father is Nigerian and her mother is British). Enitan is Sheri's friend, she criticizes her for not conforming to the habits and the tradition of an African lady. For Enitan, this has been a reason for her rape by three adolescent males at a party. The story begins when Sheri convinces Enitan to join a party in the local park arranged by a boy called Doula. During the party Sheri dances and shares alcohol with Doula and other boys. Enitan notices Sheri's intimate friendships with the males and immediately begins to question their physical relationships. **"I watched her play wrestle with the portly boy**

after their dance. He grabbed her waist and the other two laughed as she struggled. If she preferred boys, she was free to. She would eventually learn” (Atta,2004, p.60). This scene of apparently innocent flirting behavior contradicts a far more disturbing reality and foreshadows the horrific attack by the three boys. Three intoxicated boys attacked Sheri in the back of a car. It is the misogynistic rooted patriarchal thoughts in the mind of the three boys that encourage Doula and other boys to commit such a brutal act.

Enitan has panicked when she sees her friend not able to move, filled with blood and semen. She takes her home to clean the physical evidence of the rape, Enitan says that “**She looked tiny. Tiny. There were red dots at the top of her back, pale lines along her lower back where fingers had tugged her skin. She hugged herself as I ran warm water into a bucket** (Atta ,pp.63 -64). Enitan carefully cleans her friend’s body as if it were a sacred ritual of baptism. This moment may seem as a transformation and reshaping of two female identities, which are no longer like their former selves. The memory of the body covered with blood and semen cannot be erased. Shoshana and Laub assert on the same impact of both calling them as “participant and a coowner” of the traumatic incident. (Shoshana & Laub, 1991, p.204). The images of the sexual abuse keep recurring and flashing in the mind of both children reminding them of their guilt and shame for going to the party. The girls suffering is not only because they cannot stop remembering, but also because they are afraid of forgetting the event. The unforgotten state can be defense mechanism that makes the females more aware of themselves and their bodies in the future.

Enitan is unable to accept or comprehend the assault, blaming Sheri of being the direct reason for her own rape. She smokes marijuana, she goes to the car with the three boys, according to Enitan Sheri has given them the chance to explode their beastly desires . Atta, has dealt with the sexual assaults in her novel, as something expected to happen in a society, where girls like Enitan and Sheri are subjected to patriarchal restrictions that deny them the same liberties as their male counterparts.

Enitan has suffered nightmares where fishermen come inside her room, and Sheri with a horrible face as if she is in masquerade trying to bang into her arms and she falls out of bed crying and not able to breathe easily (Atta, p. 65). Her trauma reappears as dreams, while Sheri’s trauma appears as memories. These dreams and memories in one way or another remind people of their painful, harsh experience.

The author is not pleading compassion for Enitan and Sheri, but condemning the rapists. The rape is a part of a bigger story of systematic violence that has been normalized.

Bordo argues that females are just victims for what is called a hyper-sexualised media condition; she claims that this system contributes to the violence against young girls and women, creating an environment of impunity (2020, p.3). By constructing a scenario in which the attack takes place in the "safety" of a public park in a wealthy

neighborhood, Atta further elucidates the concept of violence as rooted in poverty or among marginalized populations. The rapists are not strangers to Enitan and Sheri. Enitan has met Doula before at school activities; they know each other. Susan Bordo claims that girls are far more likely to be sexually assaulted by people they know who are close to them like family members or friends, not strangers. Very few such events happen with males they do not know. The rapists exploit their near relationship and ignorance of the female sexual experience to commit their crime. (Bordo, 2020, p. xxx) Rape may occur not only because of the rapist's sexual desire, but also as a manifestation of his desire to show dominance over his victims, using the act of violation as a mechanism to subjugate females to his will. (Jordan, 2005, p. 6). When mouths fail to express pain, the bodies will find other ways to communicate it, through trembling, collapse, or a quiet withdrawal into themselves. The scars on Sheri's skin and the red spots on her back all reveal the crime that happened in a society that believed in the superiority of males over females. Enitan uses the term "tiny" to explain Sheri's condition, according to Butler, the female body seems to be a passive medium to reflect cultural meanings (2004, p. 12). After the assault, the once innocent and healthy friendship between the two girls was replaced by shame, silence, and distrust.

The trauma they endure is not just restricted to their emotional state but is reflected in bodily manifestations. Both girls suffer from eating disorders. It becomes one of the crucial psychosomatic effects of their childhood trauma and a reflection of the serious psychological scars caused by the assault, emphasizing the powerful connection between mental and physical health in the aftermath of trauma. There are two types of eating disorders: "bulimia nervosa" and "anorexia nervosa." Both disorders serve as protective strategies against the difficult circumstances or psychological problems, such as anxiety and depression.

Sheri suffers from the first kind. She experiences a sense of relief or relaxation at first, but later shame and isolation. A person with this kind of disorder eats excessive amounts of food in a short period of time, even if they are not hungry. Eating is followed by behavior like vomiting (Dingemans et al., 2007, p. 301). Sheri starts eating too much food during her last meeting with Enitan. The latter has been astonished that Sheri could eat so much because she has not eaten since the incident. After eating, Sheri vomits everywhere. This particular incident evokes within Enitan a memory of the traumatic incident during the process of cleaning Sheri's body. Such an experience causes a mixture of fear and disgust in Enitan.

Enitan, on the other hand, suffers from the second eating disorder called "anorexia nervosa"; By refusing to eat, she might feel as though she is having some control over her body. It can also be a way to manage the feelings of anger and worthlessness. In this sense, stopping eating food or intentionally damaging her body becomes a misguided attempt to regain control or "take revenge" on a part of herself that has been traumatized.

It is important to mention that eating disorders such as “anorexia” or “bulimia” are not about vanity or a desire for thinness, but rather complex responses to psychological distress and a desperate attempt to deal with overwhelming emotions and thoughts. Both disorders reflect a problem with femininity because those conditions appear as a reaction to the rape incident. For Sheri this behavior has two assumptions: the first is self-flagellation, as she has been responsible of what happens to herself. The second assumption is an escape mechanism from reality. Eating becomes a source of relief and an escape from the haunting memories she has experienced, making her disguise herself.

While, in Enitan’s case, the denial of appetite and denial of hunger reflects female’s hatred and shame of her body, also it can be seen as a desire to purify herself. Bordo claims that “anorexia nervosa” is an eating disorder where girls attempt to deny their femininity (Bordo, 2020,p.281). Desires culturally are always linked with the metaphor of a female appetite.

Sheri and Enitan represent contradictory, multiple cultural identities. Both of them believe in idealistic interpretations of both ‘African’ and ‘Western’ standards of beauty. Enitan, before the rape, wishes to gain weight (p. 46), believing that a fat female would be more desirable by males, she says that women in their country are praised for having a big body. But this wish has been changed by Enitan after her traumatic experience. Sheri wishes to be admired by males but in a different standard. Sheri thought that females with less weight are more attractive than those who are fat. After the rape, they have denied their bodies and all the beauty standards one day they believed in, according to Bordo it is defense against the femininity (Bordo,p.281).

For Sheri’s family, her sudden increased appetite for food is not seen as a problem at all, because they consider eating as a sign of good health. Her stepmothers are all fat; they consider fatness as a stander of beauty. They enjoy having weight and show their worries about foreign ladies who cry on television because they were overweight (p. 246).

The female fat body is linked with fertility which means Sheri’s condition is not something serious to be worried about. That explains the silent reaction of Sheri’s family to her new eating habits after the sexual assault.

Sheri’s trauma continues when she realizes she is pregnant. She attempts a self-induced abortion with a metal clothes hanger. Sheri knows just enough about reproduction and sexuality to be able to end the pregnancy, but she needs medical assistance. She has hesitated to speak with her stepmothers or grandmother about the sexual abuse or the pregnancy, Nigerians pre-marital sex and single parenthood are cultural and religious taboos. Atta deliberately takes the reader back to the girls’ childhood to show how their innocence has been disrupted by the adult norms. Sheri makes a decision to tell her grandmother who is called Ahuja, she is powerful woman, who takes punitive actions against the boys who rape Sheri. Ahuja forces the boys’

families to apologize to Sheri while they lay on the ground. The grandmother becomes a supporter of Sheri's recovery from her traumatic experience.

Sheri's grandmother motivates her granddaughter by publicly denouncing the injustices that she suffers which allows her to bring back her confidence to rebuild her life again in the same community where assault has occurred. Sheri chooses to face her trauma by behaving naturally and enjoying with other people. On the contrary, Enitan's family who never assists their daughter to overcome her trauma, they become a source of insecurity, and she confesses a wish to flee.

Enitan marriage to Niyi Franco activates the rape memories because of his sexual demands. She becomes obsessed with cleaning herself after every sexual encounter with her husband, yet she lacks the power to speak about it. According to Schwab, the traumatic memories can occur unconsciously by indirect experiences for the trauma, such as a particular act or even a sound, smell, or words. (2010, p15). Enitan has tried to tell her husband about the rape event but she has failed. According to Judith Herman, trauma damages the victim's capacity to trust new relationship, moreover she says that the traumatized person is torn between denying and proclaiming the traumatic occurrences (1992, p.145) Enitan's anxiety and fear extend to her daughter Yimika , as she was terrified that her daughter might suffer from the same fate of Sheri if she gets divorced the reason; that makes her refuse the divorce. **“Another told me I would never see Yimika again; that she would grow up, like Sheri, without a mother”** (Atta , p.307).

4- Female Agency and Recovery:

Trauma strips the traumatized person of a feeling of agency and controls their reality. Therefore, the essential principle of recovery is to bring back agency and control to the victim who has survived (Herman, 1992, p.145). Recovery is a slow and frequently non-linear process. It takes time because healing involves emotional, psychological, and physical problems. Recovery begins when the person starts to confront and process the trauma, which is neither easy nor painful. The individual may experience a variety of emotions such as fear, sorrow, anger, guilt, and shame during this time. Herman proposed three levels for recovery, the first level is rebuilding their sense of safety. The second level is confronting their experience. The third is sharing their experience and feelings with others. (1992, p.145)

Enitan and Sheri decide to overcome their traumas. Sheri becomes a beauty queen taking care of herself again and starting a new life, while Enitan becomes a lawyer devotes her life defending other females who struggle against the patriarchal domination; her father has been one of those men. She brings back her mother's rights from him. Women's resistance and survival capacities have been essential in challenging common stereotypes of women as helpless victims with no agency. However, the women in the novel show that such ideas are insufficient to reflect diversity and the complexity of women's responses to rape attacks. Enitan's decision

indicates her inner power, an ability to resist and a will to survive. According to Harman when ,the traumatized realizes that traumatic syndromes are an expected response ,and she is not alone, only then she can recover (p.146).

She does not only stand with other women to seek their freedom, but also, she helps them recover from their traumas. According to Butler the traumatic pain of other people needs a strong will to inter the victim's domain. In other words, decreasing women's traumatic experience needs a sacrificial effort (2004,131). Enitan possesses such a strong will that she assists her mother in reestablishing fresh ties with her environment.

Atta's female characters confront the limitations imposed on them by society and fight for the right to define their own lives despite the overwhelming pain and difficulties. They show incredible strength and resilience. The females strive to regain their agency, working through their trauma and finding ways to push back against the challenges they face, gradually regaining their power through personal progress and support from others. Healing is portrayed as a journey toward self-realization, where agency is repaired through both inner determination and external support.

Atta tries not to portray her female characters as victims; instead, she presents them as complex characters who show their power in different circumstances, even when confronted with difficult obstacles. The theme of psychosomatic trauma also plays an important role in her work, as she reveals how past traumatic experiences manifest in both the psychological and physical features of her characters' lives. Through her portrayal of trauma and recovery, Atta makes clear the long-term effects of childhood abuse on females' identities and self-sufficiency.

Atta's writing is known for its realism, and accessibility. Her writings examine the intersection of gender, trauma, and societal expectations. She provides a nuanced insight into women's experiences, particularly in Nigeria; she gives voice to the complexities of female agency and resilience. Atta has become a vital voice in African literature, she offers new and different understandings of the challenges females face in societies where cultural and political pressures are often overwhelming.

Finally, it can be said that female trauma as a consequence of sexual violence has had a heavy impact in the psychoanalysis studies. However, these studies have focused more on male experiences, as there was a perception that women's traumatic experiences were fabricated rather than real.

5- Judith Butler's Perspective on the Effects of Sexual Abuse on the Female Body:

Judith Butler, a well-known theorist in gender studies. She has played an important role in shaping our understanding of gender, power and identity. In her work, *Gender Trouble*, she claims that gender is not an innate characteristic but rather something that is performed through levels of societal expectations and standards. She introduces the concept of "performative acts," asserting that identity is created through actions and behaviors that correspond with cultural standards (Butler, 1990, 25). This

theory offers an important framework for investigating how trauma, particularly sexual abuse, can affect or challenge the gender roles that females are expected to play and how their bodies respond to such disruptions.

In Sefi Atta's *selected* novel, sexual abuse serves as a central theme that deeply affects the female characters. The novel demonstrates how the experiences of sexual violence challenge their understanding of themselves and their roles in society, particularly for Sheri and Enitan. Both characters confront the trauma of sexual violence, which changes their relationship with their bodies and their identities as women.

According to Butler, violence disrupts and interferes with the performative acts that form gender identity; she defines violence as one of the worst actions humans can take against one another (2003, p.5). It exposes how fragile individuals are and how easily their lives can be damaged or destroyed by someone else's actions (ibid.). When violence happens, individuals lose their sense of safety and stability, becoming traumatized.

Trauma does not only harm females who have experienced abuse psychologically but physically, as it challenges the cultural norms of femininity, which frequently emphasize purity, passivity, and obedience. Butler claims that the body becomes a center of violence that does not conform to the gender roles females are expected to do (1990, p. 45). Therefore, sexual assault marks the body in ways that disrupt the conventional understanding of womanhood and femininity.

In the novel, Sheri's struggle with an eating disorder, particularly anorexia nervosa, is an example of how trauma reveals itself physically. Butler's theories help explain how Sheri's disorder may be a response to the sexual abuse she suffered. Butler argues that eating disorders can serve as a way for the abused body to regain some sense of control, especially when it feels disconnected from the societal expectations of femininity (1990, p. 57). By restricting her food intake, Sheri attempts to assert control over a body that has been violated, though this is a destructive and maladaptive coping mechanism.

Enitan, another key character in the novel, also grapples with the consequences of sexual violence, which forces her to confront her identity and societal expectations of femininity. Her body, once viewed as innocent, is now marked by trauma, which creates a dissonance with the idealized image of womanhood. Enitan's silence about her abuse further reflects how societal pressures often silence the voices of female victims of sexual violence. According to Butler, this silence is not just an individual choice but is shaped by the social structures that marginalize and dismiss the experiences of women (1990, p. 69).

Butler's concept of "grievable lives" is also relevant when considering the social consequences of sexual abuse in *Everything Good Will Come*. Butler (2004, p. 6) suggests that certain lives are seen as less worthy of grief, and female victims of sexual

violence often fall into this category. This societal disregard of women's trauma further silences their pain and marginalizes their voices. The inability of the female characters to speak about their abuse and the lack of recognition of their suffering reflect the larger societal tendency to ignore the pain of females.

Women experience the world through their bodies, in both positive and negative ways. When a woman's body is strong, it gives her the power to act and make choices (agency), but at the same time, her body can also make her feel vulnerable or limited (Butler, 2003, p.4). A woman's body does not fully belong to her alone it's formed by social norms and the world around her. From the moment she's raised in, her body is influenced by the people and society she raises up in. It carries the "imprint" of others, reflecting the norms and pressures of her environment. (ibid., p.5)

Many people believe that grief and pain are private experiences that leave us feeling isolated. According to Butler, setting those feelings aside means missing something vital. Being helpless and weak remind us of our shared humanity. It is a state that can push us to rethink, and find better ways to live and connect with others. Butler argues that when we do not take the time to grieve, it can lead to impulsive, even violent actions, causing more harm to ourselves (2004, p. 4). It is likely to say that grief is not the end, it is a starting point, a chance to learn and grow from what we have been through.

Sheri, after the accident, ignored her grief and isolated herself, this act makes her impulsive and self-destructive. She reflects Butler's idea that ignoring grief can push people toward harmful behavior. Sheri's story serves as a reminder that failing to address pain and grief can trap someone in a cycle of vulnerability, without offering a path to recovery or connection with others. Taking time to grieve helped her to connect with others, including her grandmother, who supported and helped her face her trauma.

Enitan, however, learns to take time for grief instead of pushing it aside. She finds strength and deeper connections with those around her that helps her to navigate the complicated relationship with her mother and marriage. She did not ignore her pain, she uses it to understand herself and her place in the world. Enitan's journey aligns with Butler's belief that grief, when acknowledged, can help us rethink our relationships and build a sense of shared humanity.

In conclusion, Butler provides an insightful lens through which to examine the effects of violence on the female body, gender identity, social acceptance, and personal agency in *Everything Good Will Come*. Her ideas about gender performativity and the body's role in societal norms help explain how sexual violence disrupts and harms the female body and challenges conventional gender roles. Sheri and Enitan, like many of the characters, struggle with their traumas while trying to fit into the roles society demands of them.

Conclusion

Trauma occurs as a central topic in many literary works because it allows writers to give voice to victims and offenders of the repression, as well as to express their own personal experience of this harsh period. There are several literary works that explore the topic of trauma and its transforming legacy. This makes the reader think why authors write works that are cruel, often to uncover the darkest aspects of humanity. It is not out of a desire to delight us with traumatic details, but rather to demonstrate the possibility of surviving the worst that humans can do to one another.

Atta powerfully digs deep into the complex relationship between childhood trauma and the strength of female agency. Through her portrayal of the main female characters, Atta highlights how childhood sexual abuse affects every part of their lives mentally, physically, and emotionally. This study has explored how these characters deal with the psychological scars of their past, from their emotional struggles to the physical symptoms of trauma, shedding light on the long-term impact of such experiences. It becomes clear how the violence these characters experience impacts their present lives in both visible and hidden ways.

In the end, this research emphasizes the importance of understanding trauma as an intersecting process rather than just a single event. The psychosomatic effects of childhood abuse, as depicted in Atta's novel, stress the need for complete, long-term care and support for victims. The novel offers a significant message about how individuals, especially women, face the challenges of healing to assert their agency and take control of their lives.

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