

REFLECTION OF WAR CASUALTIES AND ITS AFTERMATH IN SEFI ATTA'S *EVERYTHING GOOD WILL COME*

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**Abstract**

The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) stands as a somber elegy to the fracture of postcolonial nationhood, where the cadence of political discord dissolved into a dirge of human suffering. The aftermath lingered like an unresolved stanza in Nigeria's national narrative. Beyond the immediate toll, the war etched enduring scars upon the collective psyche—intergenerational grief, fractured ethnic allegiances, and a muted silence around memory that shaped postwar reconciliation. The purpose of this study is to portray the casualties of war and the sorrowful experiences they had, as portrayed by Sefi Atta in the novel *Everything Good Will Come*.

**Keywords:** Trauma, Postcolonial, Suffering, War, Scars, Nigeria

**Introduction**

African fiction is a reflection of the prevalent issues that are eating the bone marrow of the contemporary African society. It is literary works written by Africans in English language for everyone in the society to correct their mistakes or other social errors. Through fiction many African writers have approached the issue of war. And from the historical perspective some African countries have engaged in one event of war or the other and the literary writers of these countries have used the conflict as source of materials for creative literature. The literary writers of these countries have tried to fictionalize this event to portray their feelings and to serve as a reference document for the future generations.

It has been suggested that in contemporary fiction, "time and art may by default have become the only effective means to digest the poison of the past and to slowly heal from within the damage that has been done" (Hawley 16).

The Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967- 1970 now resides in the mind of its survivors and those who heard and read about it. The war which started from July 6th 1967 and ended in January 15th 1970 left an indelible mark in the lives of the Biafrans. It was based on the events of this war that aspects of Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* were written. Though a lot have been said about Nigerian war yet its consequences linger.

In Eddie Iroh's *Toads of War*, he pictured the consequences of war on the new republic of Biafra as a result of fighting for freedom, men left wife and children for dear state, others busy jumping from one woman to another, all in the name Rising Sun (Biafra). Eddie portrays it in this way:

In Biafra, gonorrhoea has become as common as the common cold . . . Bizarre country. Everyone to his calling. Many foolish, wretched, barefooted ones are busy obeying orders and pumping hot lead into the enemy. The sensible ones, the big ones, occupy themselves more pleasurably pumping fluid into women, I strongly believe that sometime, somewhere, during this war, our brains migrated from our skulls to our groins. Thus a few are fighting. While others are fucking. Fighting for freedom. Fucking for virginity. All in the name of rising sun. But I have a grave premonition that the sun may be setting even though it is still midday (106).

As a result of this act, our young girls lose their virginity, some contracted different kinds of diseases, pregnancy everywhere. Some died in the process of delivery or in aborting it when they heard that their husband has died in war front, because no one will take care of them and the children. So in a nutshell, consequences are a reflection of someone's action.

This work is viewed through psychoanalytic criticism of traumatic events. Trauma studies embody methods and techniques of psychoanalytic criticism of traumatic events and their effect on the individual or cultural group. Trauma is the physical or emotional damage, wound, or shock caused to the body or mind through violence with long lasting effect. As an offshoot of psychoanalysis, it relies on Sigmund Freud's theory of trauma that deals with an extreme experience that cannot be verbalized and destabilises meaning. Freud introduces "traumatic neuroses" to describe the nature of severe shock that occurs after a mechanical or railway collision that is life threatening. He observes in 1920 that the aftermath of the world War on the casualties of the war "has been responsible for an immense number of such maladies" (9).

### Reflections of Casualties in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

Atta unlike other scholars on war literature proved herself a child narrator. The techniques she adopted in her work, tells she did not experience the war. The little insight she had on war was what she learnt from radio bulletins and his relatives. She confirms this when she says "... I would listen to radio bulletins on how our troops were faring against the Biafrans. I would hear a slogan: to keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done. My father would ask me to hide under my bed whenever we had bomb raid alert (13). This vividly narrates that Sefi Atta lived far from the War setting and did not have firsthand information on war. Nevertheless, her writing does not focus on the Nigeria Biafra war, though she discussed its effects but majorly anchored on post war events. It is important to note that the focus of this discourse is not to discuss who witnessed the war or not but to discover the extent of individual writer's style on the Nigeria postcolonial happenings. These texts as discovered by the study elaborated those casualties' individual persons experienced as a result of social vices and political rivalries etc.

Sefi Atta, a Nigeria female writer demonstrated her childhood experience in the Nigeria Biafra war events and other political issues in the country. To her, the protracted three years bloody conflict created a lot of casualties to humanity. Other political, family and individual issues she explored also caused lives to that. Her story which began in 1971 exposes her readers to Enitan, a child narrator who tells the story. Therefore, it is important to note that causality in this novel began when Enitan the narrator tells her childish experience on the events that followed the Western region elections. She learnt the casualties that followed election from her father, Sunny and her two uncles; Alex and Fatai. According to her over the aforementioned relatives, she said: "Sometimes they frightened me with their stories of Western Nigeria (which my father called the Wild West), where people threw car tires over other people and sent them on fire because they belonged to different political factions". (13)

The stories which frightened Enitan were the events that happened in Western Nigeria which exposed greater number of people into casualties. Therefore, the casualties on the above extract are those people who were burnt alive with tires. Similarly, the narrator tells her readers the deaths of Tafawa Belewa and Major Kaduna Nzeogwu. She says: "I knew that our first Prime Minister was killed by a Major General, that the Major General was soon killed..." (13). Here, Sefi Atta is commenting on the deaths of the Prime Minister who became a casualty of 15th January 1966 coup. This coup was led by a major General who also fell to casualty of the war that came after the coup.

The death of Uncle Alex is a casualty which the narrator's father, Sunny suffered. Reporting on the above death, the narrator tells of her father. "Sometimes I heard him talking about Uncle Alex; how he'd known beforehand there was going to be a civil war; how he'd joined the Biafrans and died fighting for them even though he hated guns" (14). Uncle Alex foresaw the war but did not see his death in the same. He fought with the Biafrans, and his death while fighting a war simply makes him a casualty of the Nigeria-Biafra war events. Nevertheless, the family members over his death experienced causality for losing such a lovely uncle. Enitan the narrator seems to suffered the pain most. The extent of her bereave made her says that: "I love my Uncle Alex; thought that if I had to marry a man, it would be a man like him, an artist, who cared too much or not at all" (14). This simply collaborates now the little Enitan suffers the pain of losing her lovely uncle.

Nevertheless, the new military government who have taken over power through coup caused casualties to the poor masses. The experience of a driver explicit this. The narrator tells:

A driver pulled over too late. Half soldiers jumped down from the truck and dragged him out of his car. They started slapping him. The driver's hands went up to plead for mercy. They flogged him with horsewhips and left him there, whimpering by the door of his car (72).

The military leadership in Nigeria according to the narrator exposed most individual lives to casualties. Even those military who have forced themselves into power met the same fate. To give account of this casualty the novel reads: "We had two military governments since the summer of 1975. The first ended with the assassination of our head of state..." (79) The head of state who is assassinated becomes casualty of the 1975 Military leadership in Nigeria. Furthermore, the new military government that came with the promise to wage war against indiscipline made government workers and individuals experienced casualties. In other to discipline law offenders, the novel tells: "Then the reports started coming in: floggings for jumping bus queues; squats for government workers who came late to work..." (82). Both the workers who are forced to squat for late coming and the passengers who are flogged for jumping bus queues are all casualties of war against indiscipline. Other ugly experiences which individual masses experienced as a result of bad leadership is what peter Mukoro and uncle Fatai stated in their dissensions which read: "Trying to avoid potholes... Running from armed robbers. Teachers not showing up for class. Cannot afford transportation. Hospital staff selling supplies on the black market?... (128). This exposed people to casualties which made Enitan said: "Military men led us into a black hole" (142).

In a similar vein, the sufferings which the military government caused to individual citizens made Sunny Taiwo, Enitan's father says: "No light, no water, people dying all over the place, before their time, from one sickness or the other" (110-111). Lack of Water and Power supply made most people in urban areas experienced casualties. This is what bad leadership could cause to citizens and for most of these citizens to survive from such leadership, they damage government properties and sell them for their living. The quotation below narrates another casualty as the novel records. "The bridge was smoother than most Lagos routes, which had crevices, but there were no street-lights and some of the still barriers had been broken by thieves who melted them down to make forks and knives" (111). The broken steel barriers by the thieves becomes the casualty of bad leadership.

The novelist further tells her readers how Enitan experienced casualty following her parents' separation. The writer says:

My parents separated while I was in school in England. My father delivered the news to me and I remember feeling like I'd mistakenly swallowed a worm in a glass of water; I wanted to throw up. I wondered if the trouble I'd caused hadn't divided them further my father explained that my mother would take his duplex in another suburb of Lagos, and she would live in one unit while collecting rent from the next (79).

Enitan has been experiencing trauma from her parents' quarrels right from her childhood. Their separation in her adulthood made her casualty to divorce. While in London as a law student, she experienced pain over losing her virginity to her boyfriends, she tells:

...The first person to tell me my virginity belonged to me was the boy who took it... My boyfriends, a first-year pharmacy student at London University, assured me that it was mine to give to him. In those brief seconds between owing and giving up my virginity, he licked the walls of my mouth clean. After I thought he pierced my bowels, I burst into tears (77).

The tears which Enitan made simply explicit what she suffers over the incident. She cries losing her innocent and purity of her early womanhood. This must destroy her virtue as a young lady therefore, it is clear to understand that two things make Enitan a casualty to the above explained event. One, she becomes casualty losing her virginity to her boyfriend. Secondly, she falls casualty to deceit. Two years after her graduation, she experienced another casualty from a failed relationship. The ugly experience is what she tells her readers below: "This time, I was recovered from a failed relationship, having discovered the boy I'd been dating half the year was dating someone else. It was out of respect for me that he lied to me..." (80)

The disappointment and heart broke that came out of this inflicted casualty to Enitan. The only thing Enitan suffers here is trauma and pains for losing a boyfriend. A similar incident occurs during her youth service when she lost Mike Obi her NYSC Camp boyfriend to another girl. The event takes place when she visited Mike and found a girl lying on his sofa. "With Mike Obi, Enitan experienced another casualty to deceit as she said referring to Mike: I remembered how I'd called him a liar when I first met him" (154). Enitan felt destroyed over Mike's cheating. The extent of the pain she suffers following the disappointment made her destroyed Obatala, a portrait of a Yoruba gods whom all things white is believed to belong to him. The casualty is what the narrator stated, thus.

I heeded straight for obatala, grabbed her, seemingly by the ear and dragged her out. Mike was standing at the foot of the stairs. He was staring at me as if I held a gun in my hands. I raised obatala high above my head, smashed obatala over the barrister, heard her beads pitter-patter down the stairs. Mike clamped his hands over his head. I placed the broken board on the ground, and waked down stairs (155).

The casualty in the above quoted incident is the expensive portrait of obatala that was destroyed. Mike himself experienced casualty for losing such a mosaic that took him eight months to create. A mindful reader would not forget that when Mike and Enitan newly met themselves on camp they shared their experiences on casualties of war. Following their discussions on was Enitan says:

It was terrible that we'd had different experiences of the Civil War. In university, I finally acknowledged the holocaust that was Biafra, through memoirs and history books, and pictures of limbless people; children with their stomachs bloated from kwashiorkor and their rib cages as thin as leaf veins. Their parents were mostly dead. Executed. Machete. Blown up. Beheaded. There were accounts of blood- drinking, flesh-eating, atrocities of human spirit that only a civil war could generate ... (89).

This sums up the casualties of the civil war which Enitan got insight through memories, pictures and history books that depict diverse experiences of casualties in war. At a time in the novel, Enitan meets her childhood friend, Sheri. During one of her visits to Sheri, she learnt what Sheri suffered over her father's death. Sheri says: "When my father died who remembered me? Chief Bakare done die, god bless his family. We didn't even know where

our next meal was coming from, and no one cared. Not even my uncle, who took all his money” (104). What Sheri suffers from her uncle who took all his father’s wealth without careering for her living makes her and her siblings casualties to their father’s death. The extent at what she suffers in the hands of her uncle is what she stated, thus; “Uncle comes to the house, complaining that we are misusing his property. He wants to take the house from us, I’m sure... He took everything else under native law as my father’s rightful heir (138). Sheri does not only suffers casualty from her father’s death, she also experienced it following the native law that nearly made her lost her father’s property to her uncle through intimidation.

In the novel, Enitan visited her mother. In her visit following her mother’s statements, a critical reader would observe that Enitan’s mother suffers casualty both from Enitan and her father. The old woman pours out her sufferings as she says to Enitan:

Who asked you to come with your trouble? Not one minute’s peace did you give me as a child now you want to criticize me. Asking me why I won’t stand next to him in a photograph. Why should I stand next to him? For any reason? The man gave me nothing. Nothing, for all his education, he’s as typical as they come. And I may not have paid your school fees, but remember I gave birth to you. Just remember that...(97).

The above statements carefully narrate Enitan mother’s plight which made her a casualty to bad marriage. Bad marriages especially polygamous exposed women to casualty. The experiences Enitan parent’s mothers had in their marriages explicit the idea which Enitan confirms:

My parent’s mothers were both in polygamous marriages. My mother’s was a trader. She saved money for her children’s education under her mattress. One day my grandfather took the money she’d been saving and used it pay the dowry for a second wife. My grandmother died broken-hearted for the money. My mother herself had never gotten over the shock... My father’s mother was a junior wife. The two senior wives would deny my father food, hoping that if he were skinny enough, he would amount to nothing (150-151).

The above quotation depicts Enitan’s grandmothers’ casualties. With this, it can be rightly pointed out that women suffer casualties in hands of their husbands. This is what Enitan’s mother tries to make Enitan understand but Enitan fails to understand her plight in her marriage not until she discovers that her father secretly has a son from another woman. Enitan confirms her assumption when she said;

Do you know a Debayo Taiwo ... My father placed his brief case down. Yes. Is he your son? He straightened up. Yes he said. Debayo was his son, four years younger than me. He lived in Ibadan. So did his mother. No, they were never married. He was in medical school there, finished last year. He was born a year after my brother died (151).

Enitan suffers pains over betrayal of trust and lying from her father. She further narrates how the incident inflicted casualty in her. She tells;

My head felt like a shaken jar. Each time I opened it up, I did not know which emotion to pull out. It wasn’t uncommon for married men, especially of his generation, to have children outside. But this? Lying for years? I recalled how he punished me for lying as a child how he would not forgive me for sneaking out with Sheri (151).

The overall view tells what Enitan suffers from her father. This no doubt made her a casualty to both her father’s lying and the punishments she received from him for lying as a child. The casualty which Enitan’s mother suffers from her father made grievances dig hole inside her. This Enitan says. “Grievances had set in her bones like cement and it was difficult to be around her” (95). This is what casualty could lead to someone. To highlight how deep grievances has made Enitan’s mother a casualty she says. My mother calculated dates, situations, betrayals ...” (95). To explain this idea, Enitan further added; “she could recall what my father said ten years ago...” (96). Readers should note from these points that Enitan’s mother suffers casualty. Therefore her attitude towards recalling past events, incidents and situations with dates made her exposed herself to more casualty. Again, a critical reader who understand the sufferings of Enitan’s mother would have the insight that the extent of casualty she suffers made her devoted herself to her religion. This and no other reason made Taiwo her husband refused to put her property in her name as he gives his reasons for such act saying. “If I put the property in her name, she will probably give it to that church of hers” (111). This is another act by Enitan’s father that made her mother experienced casualty. It is important to note that the way Enitan’s father has denied Enitan’s mother her right might cause her suffer pains. Enitan experienced a similar thing when she complain. “Though he does not pay me enough and it pains me that I can’t have a place of my own” (118). Considering what Enitan has complained about her father show cases an idea that she suffers motional pains over her father’s stinginess. To express the extent of this suffering she bitterly tells her audience. “He was a different person in the office... I’d also discovered

just how stingy he was. He had not increased lunch allowances in over five years and I really wasn't surprised. I couldn't ever remember having much pocket money to spend... he did not pay well" (122). Readers should understand an irony which the narrator critically explores. Enitan's father, Mr. Taiwo who has no patience in criticizing the military leaders for causing the poor masses suffer also caused her own daughter and his junior legal staff to suffer pains over his high handedness. To express this further Enitan reveals thus. "The power had always been in my father's hands (153).

Explaining the above view through symbolism, Taiwo and the military leaders are caught in the same web of inflicting casualty to those under them. When Enitan could not endure her father's overbearing that caused her depressions, she traced her abandoned mother who told her what her son Enitan's brother suffered before his death, she said. "When your brother was born... imagine the pain for a child? He would scream and scream and we couldn't touch him. I couldn't touch my son. For what? For a man who would not be kept. Going out all the time, as if my son didn't exist, as if I didn't exist" (172). The sorrowful story recounted by Enitan's mother tells what the little child experienced before his death. Enitan experienced more casualties after marriage as she says.

I got pregnant and shortly had a miscarriage. I was at work when I felt the contraction. By the time I arrived home, it was too late, I'd passed a blood clot. I cried until I soaked my pillow. Nothing is worse than the loss of a child, even the child is never born: I got pregnant again. This time, the baby grew out of my womb and could have killed me.. (185).

Enitan experienced casualties losing two pregnancies. The 1993 election according to the narrator caused casualties to the individual masses. At this point while narrating how bad leadership could inflict casualty to the citizens, who are protesting for good governance, she tells. "There were organized protests, which ended in gesture, and deaths" (188) The deaths which take place for the cause of fighting for good and healthy governance is what Enitan and her father criticized. Enitan says "These days, my father was going as far as to ask the military regime to step down. I too, wanted them out, especially after they gunned down protesters during the political unrest. But there were thousands of other ways people were being killed in my country" (189).

Other ways people were being killed in the novel in their attempt to defend their will during election the narrator affirms that the result of the general election was considered to be the will of the people as "some brave people caught bullets in their chests defending this will" (292). One can clearly observe that people meet casualty in the novel fighting to defend their will for good leadership. Seffi Atta uses the above view to ridicule the national leadership that cause casualty to the peaceful citizens. Carelessness of reckless driving also exposed a character in the novel to a severer casualty as narrator tells of Sheri's experience saying. "Shier recounted how she'd seen a man knocked down by a car the week before. The driver who hit the man drove off for fear of being mobbed. Four passers-by carried the man off the street, one for each limb. They were shouting and the man himself was shouting, from pain" (205). With act of wickedness, individuals inflict casualties to other individual persons. A bitter experience of such casualty is found in newspaper Enitan reads. The paper records. "A woman has been murdered by her house boy. He left her body indoors and used her car for taxi services" (288). Through newspapers, Enitan observes several incidents that expose lives to casualties. Other sorrowful incidents that made individuals involved suffer pains is what the newspaper shows as Enitan says. "I turned the page and a man had thrown acid into his lover's face... the story of a child hawker who had been molested. She had difficulty expressing herself during the court case, and untied her wrapper to show where the man had touched her (211). The lady whose lover poured acid and girl who was molested are all casualties to those ugly incidents they met.

Enitan in the Novel found herself in prison during a conference Grace Ameh invited her. In the prison with Grace Ameh a journalist, she met a troublesome prisoner called mother of Prisons. Her long time stay in prisons made her a casualty that she talks out of her senses. Despite her psychological imbalance, she remembers how she becomes casualty over her husband's death as the novelist writes her story: "Monday morning; she said, my husband dies. Tuesday morning, they shave my head and say I must stay in a room. Alone. Naked. I can't touch my children. Twins, Twins. I had for that wretched family"(264). Mother of Prisons cried and was consoled by other prisoners, and then she continued her ordeal: "They say I can't see my twins. Instead they give me the water they used to bath my husband's corpse, to drink, to prove I did not put a hex on him... I say I'm ... not going to drink it. they say I killed him" (264). What makes mother of prisons a casualty to above event is what she suffers over her husband's death. She further suffers casualty over a man who wanted to molest her and that what brought her into prison. She tells of the man: "The fool touched my breast, I slapped his face. He pushed me to the ground... I grabbed a stone, whacked his head. I couldn't stop whacking. He was shouting, Help! Help! Before I knew it, he died there on top of me. The police came and carried me to prison..." (265). The dead man is the casualty to the above event. His death caused mother of prisons suffers in the cell. Her sufferings is what the narrator tells below: "Her hair was in patches. Sores has eaten into the corners of her mouth. She was shaking

like an old woman” (273). While she was recounting her sufferings, Enitan began to suffer pains over her pregnancy. This ugly incident is what she tells:

The back of my neck tightened, bile rose from my stomach and singed my throat. I'd gotten up too fast. What's going? Mother of prisons asked. My mouth opened again, involuntarily. I crouched between two bodies, held my sides.

...She is miscarrying, mother of prisons said. Help her... The women rose in varying stages of alertness. They circled me, the sick and the mad with their sores and ring worm and tuberculosis (272).

The women who circled Enitan for help are all casualties to prison. The most painful casualty Enitan saw in prison is a woman with cancer. Her condition inflicted Enitan more casualty, the narrator says “worse things were happening here, worse than I could imagine. One woman was rotting away” (272). The woman's cancer is terminal as mother of prisons expressed: “The womb is rotten now. We are chocking on her smell” (274) this explains how some prisoners could cause casualty to their prison mates. The overall ideas discussed the pains, sufferings and sorrows prisoners experienced in prisons. Another casualty Enitan experienced after being released out of prison is the death of her mother. And the writer recounts that:

A week later we buried my mother, in Ikoyi cemetery next to an angle with broken wings... it was where my brother was buried... for two days after my mother's funeral, I stopped eating. On the third day Niyi accompanied me to my pre-natal check-up and at the end of it, the doctor told us, I don't like what I'm seeing. This baby isn't growing properly. Enitan hasn't been eating ... she lost her appetite, Niyi said ... can't her mother cook her something nice? (309)

The last statement made by the doctor caused Enitan the pains of losing her mother as she repaid the doctor. “My mother is dead”. (309) It is important to let the readers know what caused the death of Enitan's mother. Enitan tells this:

My mother had been dead a day going through her medicines later; I discovered a batch which appeared to have been re-dated. I did not know where she'd purchased them, or how long they had expired. I imagined she'd bought them because they were cheaper (308).

It is quite clear and understandable that Enitan's mother becomes casualty of fake, expired and cheap drugs.

Again, the novelist does not fail to tell her readers about some of the African leaders who became casualties over military coup. Enitan tells Grace Ameh on her visit: “Coup after coup... especially on the west coast of Africa. 1963, Sylvanus Olympio of Togo, killed. 1966, Tafawa Balewa, our first prime Minister, killed the same year, kwame Nkrumah of Ghana” (289). The above quotation vividly x-rays these African leaders as casualties to bad government that took power with force. The narrator with all around narrative skills prove herself an omniscient narrator that takes control in her literary universe by exposing her readers the casualty that takes place in the Niger Delta Area as a result of oil spillage, she says. “Oil spills, barren farmland, villages burned down. They don't pray for rain anymore. When it rains, it shrivels their plants” (290). The above ecological destructions experienced by the people of Niger Delta made them and their environments casualties to oil spillage and devastation. To fight against hardship and corruption that inflicted casualties to people of Niger Delta over oil, these subjugated Niger Deltas experienced heavy casualty by losing their elite and activists who were hang by the federal military leaders of the nation. This casualty is captured following Enitan's reports that run thus:

...Our country was an international uproar over the hanging of nine environmental activists from the Niger Delta, including the writer ken Sarowiwa. Green peace, friends of the Earth, Amnesty International were protesting their murders” (324)

The deaths of the nine environmental activists become great casualties the entire people of Niger Deltas suffered. They are casualties having lost their nine heroes and still suffering environmental destructions which oil meted against them. To end this, every character explained with ugly, bitter, painful and sorrowful incidents and events in this chapter are casualties to the novel following their individual experiences that caused them deaths, destruction and pains.

### **Conclusion**

This work reflects on the war and its aftermath, political instability, bad governance, and poor leadership. It also portrays the pain and death associated with war. Sefi Atta narrates the deaths of the Prime Minister and Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi, and she also captures the coups that occurred after the war and their consequences. Through the plot, one can see that she depicts gruesome events that caused death, sickness, hunger, and other forms of oppression that made Nigerians casualties of both the war and the postwar social crisis. Sefi Atta further gives insight into the frustrations people suffered.

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