

# Exploring the Divergent Women in Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference*

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**Abstract-** This article explores Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* which talks about Deola Bello. The novel encapsulates the power of a female character through this central character. It brings out the progression of this character in each and every stage of her life. Deola Bello leads a dual life in London who works for an International Charity and also holds the position of an interpreter of Africans for Europeans. She also realises the impact of American culture on her society. She takes up the challenges and presents herself boldly to her environment.

**Key Words:** Identity, Self Empowerment, Assertiveness, Gender, Migration, Multiculturalism

Sefi Atta was born in January 1964, a Nigerian American novelist, playwright, screenwriter and short story writer. Her plays have been performed all over the world. Many plays have been broadcasted by BBC and translated into many Indian languages. She has received many honours and won Noma Award in 2009 and Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa in 2006. She has written many novels. *A Bit of Difference* was published in 2013. This novel makes us to understand how globalisation has affected and still is affecting the Post Colonial Africans in general and also the African women who live abroad trying to reconcile their identities in this new global era. A strong American cultural presence is seen and felt throughout the novel.

Women frequently find themselves objectified and reduced to emotional creatures in a world influenced by patriarchal rules. But now is the moment to reject these misconceptions and embrace the wild woman archetype, which is a potent representation of empowerment and honesty. This paper delves into the process of liberating the inner wild woman, confronting patriarchal conditioning, and cultivating a community that values, respects, and accepts women for who they are.

In Nigerian culture, men are regarded as so powerful that depending on a woman for financial support or any other kind of help is seen as a sign of weakness.

*A Bit of Difference* talks about the protagonist, Deola Bello, a Nigerian expatriate, leading a dual life in London. She leaves to take up a post in Nigeria after declining to continue the family's banking enterprise. When she goes home to celebrate her father's fifth death anniversary, she examines herself in detail and also, she notices how American culture seems to have taken precedence when she is at church, 'Colourful hats, head ties, and caps block her vision.' ( ) This is when Deola realises the impact of American culture on her society.

The book is broken up into six parts: 'Reorientation', 'Actually', 'Foreign Capitals', 'The Business of Humanitarianism', 'Sidestep', and 'For Good'. These chapters represent the narrator's daily life between flashback stories.

The novel's opening describes a picture of an African woman in the desert with the words "I am powerful" (1). She takes an official business flight to Atlanta at the start of the novel. Her lived experiences in London as an international student and worker for several organizations, along with her journey to Atlanta, further compound her dissatisfaction with her immigration status. Deola makes an individual formal visit to her hometowns of Lagos and Abuja, Nigeria, to keep an eye on the investments made by "foreign capitals" in Nigerian non-governmental organizations. Her subsequent pregnancy and her unintentional sexual experience with Wale Adeniran occur around the same time as the vacation. This encourages her to 'side-step', 'come home', a decision that is confirmed 'for good' at the book's conclusion.

Deola Bello serves as the Director of Internal audit at LINK, a non-profit international charity foundation and also works as an interpreter of Africans for the Europeans. Through her, the book offers glimpses into

the complexities of how Africa is portrayed in the modern, globalized world, as well as the diaspora's way of life and the anxieties of modern African life, such as racial prejudice, HIV/AIDS, corrupt practices, unhappy, wealthy Nigerian families, and fears specific to ethnicity and religion. The story, which is rich in life, follows Deola on her 'homecoming' journey while addressing a number of topics pertaining to the life of an African immigrant in the city, such as how the West misrepresents or misrepresents Africa.

Atta depicts the lives of three characters: Bandele, the writer, the son of a wealthy politician in Nigeria; Deola, the daughter of a wealthy Nigerian banker; and Subu, the daughter of a wealthy but devout family. These characters are all caught up in the 'ambivalent' immigrant life, facing subtly discriminatory and racist attitudes. Their minds are constantly switching between the mother and the places of immigration. Deola and Subu are modern Nigerian women who are happy to be in multiple relationships without showing any commitment to a single man, instead of pursuing marriage. Since Subu lives in their lavish apartment, she charges her parents' phone bills (27). She may be wealthy, but society sees her independence as a mark against her character.

Kate Meade holds a master's degree in international relations, enjoys travelling, and dedicates her life to charitable causes. She also actively works to raise awareness about malaria prevention for children and donates her spare time to support women whose spouses have died of AIDS (5).

Although her mother works for UNESCO, Deola's cousin Ndidi is employed at a UN office in Rome. She is married to an Italian guy and they have twin girls. But she doesn't even have time to talk on the phone any more. The friend of Deola, Subu, receives training from a consulting firm and joins an investment bank as a vice president. The person who takes up the 'voiceover work' is Tessa Muir, also known as Tessa the Thespian, who is Deola's roommate at Somerset Boarding School (40).

Rather than expose herself to ridicule as a woman who came from "the African women's perspective," Deola has opted to say nothing. (10). Deola gets upset when she finds out that lesbian couple Anne and Alison are thinking about becoming pregnant artificially. Perhaps her concern is that she might have to go through that procedure too if she continues to be single for an extended period of time. She is afraid, though, that

Anne, in her anthropological interest, will minimize the African woman's perspective, so she is reluctant to express her opinions.

Even after Deola becomes well-known at the Trust Bank, she still faces criticism similar to this, as her mother still wishes for her to return 'home for good'. Despite what her mother says, Deola thinks that marriage is "as banal and unsatisfying as her career" (40). Atta sums up Deola's repulsive views on marriage well when she states, 'Deola has been capricious in her relationships as well as her career.' Deola ignores the idea of getting married for being labelled as a home wrecker.

Deola has a boyfriend, Tosan. When he can't find job, she helps him out financially and lets her partner know what she doesn't like about him. She forbids him from smoking on her land, and she makes him wait in line when he goes to the bar. Tosan goes to Pub on his own, but he also needed company. He talked a lot, too much (38). Mostly they fight for money. But Deola starts suspecting him and it leaves her with a misplaced distrust. Deola was able come out of this relationship since she has got many boyfriends. Moreover, she doesn't want to get involved in marriage and commit herself to a great responsibility.

The only other male character in the book that supports equality for women is Deola's half-brother, Brother Dotun. Despite his father's success, he witnesses his mother's efforts to /forge her identity and is denied parental attention. When it comes to gender discrimination in his family, Brother Dotun becomes a figure of a devoted father and husband.

Deola thinks of her old friend Fatima, who was a forward-thinking Muslim in Kaduna. She is known as a cool Hausa chick because she drinks beer and smoke cigarettes in private. Deola and Fatima are classmates at Queen's College. Deola is surprised to hear that she agreed to an arranged marriage. But her marriage didn't last long. Fatima has a daughter by him and she moves out of her husband. She starts practicing law and becomes an advocate for underage Northern girls who are forced into arrange marriages. The girls whom she represents are the teen age girls. (122)

Deola 'treats God and men with the same attitude.' Deola can trust her sometimes and not at other times; yet, her mother at home is often reminding her that her biological clock is running out. In addition to Subu, two other people she knows in London are Bandele, a young writer she knew back in Lagos, and Tessa, a

boarding school friend who is getting married and is one of the most intriguing and well-written characters in the novel. Initially Deola's family is introduced in the novel when she goes to Nigeria for a work trip. Her brother Lanre, who is currently a bank director, her younger sister Jaiye, a doctor who is trapped in an unhappy marriage, and her domineering mother, the family matriarch, round out the group. In addition, there are half-brothers and half-sisters, aunts, and cousins.

Deola meets Wale in Nigeria, a wealthy widower who reminds her of Jane Austen, a novelist she reads often. The trip to Nigeria changes her life. She has a brief sexual encounter with a Hotel owner Wale and becomes pregnant. Her life in London didn't give her happiness and satisfaction. So she decides to move to her native and live the rest of her life for her own satisfaction and for her child. Though there are frequent allusions to Jane Austen, *A Bit of Difference* is not about young women on the lookout for romance. Like Emma in Austen's Emma, Deola is so dominant that the novel is essentially about her and her ideas, particularly regarding family, race, Nigeria, literature, and music.

For colonial subjects, breaking free from the dominant way of thinking and envisioning or seeing 'the self' in freedom has never been an easy task. One of Atta's greatest writing qualities is her ability to create characters. The author also conveys her message on the mistreatment of married and single women as well as the pressure placed on them to be married and start families. Even the smallest characters have backstories and distinct personalities that the reader remembers. Instead of following a storyline, the book moves forward through anecdotes, flashbacks, observations, and side remarks.

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