

CHAPTER - V

BITS OF DIFFERENCE

Atta's third and the latest novel *A Bit of Difference* is published in 2012. Like her other novels the plot of the novel is centered around one major 'herstory' of a Nigerian upper class expatriate of 21st century. Deola is a non-resident Nigerian living in London from her teens and has graduated from the London School of Economics. She is now working as the director of internal audit of LINK, an NGO that works for Africa and other underdeveloped 'third world' countries. It is through her that the novel provides glimpses of the complexity embedded in the portrayal of Africa in the contemporary globalized world along with the life of diaspora and the fears of modern African life - HIV, corruption, unhappy rich Nigerian families, racial prejudices and ethnic and religious apprehensions etc. Low on drama but rich in life, the narrative leads to Deola's 'homecoming,' and discusses along the way many issues related to the African immigrant subject's life in the metropolis including misrepresentation of Africa by the West. Coming to England as a 14year old girl, Atta brings in her own experiences of 'what it was to be a foreigner and to deal with others' perceptions of Africans' in this novel as the novelist herself reveals in her interview by Amy Boaz. Atta, in her subtle and suave interview to Publishers Weekly states that the novel is not purposely written to 'challenge Western perceptions of Africa' but 'might' by 'writing honestly' contest the misconceptions about Africa.

Atta's novels portray the gradual evolution of the personality of two or more protagonists whose problems are identical but whose responses vary as portrayed through the lives of Enitan/Sheri, Tolani/Rose/Arike in Chapters III and IV respectively. Likewise, in this novel too, Atta portrays the lives of Deola, the daughter of a rich Nigerian banker, Subu the daughter of an elite but religious family and the writer character Bandele the son of a rich politician of Nigeria who are caught up in 'ambivalent' immigrant life experiencing subtle

forms of racial prejudice and discrimination. Their thoughts always oscillate between the mother and immigrant lands. However, their responses show a sharp contrast: Deola - leading lonely existence in London grows dissatisfied and eventually decides upon 'home coming.' Subu decides to continue her life as immigrant being lulled by the ostentatious religious fervor combined with successful professional and autonomous personal life. Bandele, being a gay and an expatriate, 'is out of control' and lacks 'subtlety and civility' but never thinks of 'a return' to mother land (Interview). Thus the novel narrates the immigrant lives of the trio through the easy and insightful voice of Deola. Like in her other novels, the perspective in dealing with the expatriate lives of these characters is also womanist. In fact, the womanist perspective is more pronounced as it attempts to contest the 'misrepresentation' of Africa and its women by the West. Also, the realistic portrayal doesn't spare the elite sections of Nigeria for their corrupt and leisurely life at the cost of fellow citizens.

The novel is divided into six chapters - "Reorientation," "Actually", "Foreign Capitals", "The Business of Humanitarianism", "Sidestep" and "For Good" which correspond to the day to day life of the narrator interspersed with the narratives of flash back. Adeola Deola Bello, the daughter of Sam Bello and Remi, 39 year old, single, expatriate in London, feels alienated and dissatisfied with the immigrant life. Even after many years of lived experience in England, Nigeria remains her 'home'. After her graduation from LSE (London School of Economics) she returns home for a while and works as an accounts officer in her father's Trust Bank. However, unable to comply with the surrounding work atmosphere in the bank, she flies back to London. The novel begins with her flight to Atlanta on official business. Her lived experience in London as an expatriate student and as an employee in different organizations, and her trip to Atlanta

intensifies her discomfiture with her immigrant status. Deola goes on a personalized official visit to her home town Lagos and Abuja in Nigeria to monitor the investments of 'foreign capitals' among the Nigerian NGOs. The trip coincides with her accidental sexual encounter with Wale Adeniran and eventual pregnancy. This stimulates her decision of 'side-step' i.e. 'home coming' which is affirmed 'for good' at the end of the novel.

The novel opens with Deola's observation of a photograph of an African woman with desert terrain behind her at the arrivals in the Atlanta airport. Her hair is covered with yellow scarf and she might be Sudanese or Ethiopian. The photograph, with the caption: "I Am Powerful" is 'illuminated and magnified' grabbing the attention of passengers and must have been an advertisement of a charity whose name Deola misses to see (1). Deola observes that the caption written underneath the image "I am powerful" (1) is paradoxical if not mocking at the real state of woma(e)n and the nation(s) as either of them are indeed not powerful. The photograph is not only a sign of powerlessness but also strengthens the stereotyped image of Africa as a backward continent that needs to be supported. Further, the photograph compels her to evoke the truth that one can never come across such "... posters with the prime minister at Number Ten and the president in the Oval Office with the same caption underneath . . ." (1). The real powerful ones don't need any proclamation. The photograph and the 'truth' behind it set the tone for the rest of the narrative.

She was received at the airport by Anne Hirsch - the white woman Director of International affairs of LINK at Atlanta. Deola comes to U.S. to study how the Atlanta office has managed to launch the Africa Beat program, a HIV awareness campaign which the London office will be launching in a few months. While discussing the launch, Anne refers to Dara, the hip-hop singer, who will be the spokesperson for London Africa Beat. Given his

tendency to drop H's Anne mistakes him for French West African and Deola has to correct her that he is a Yoruba Nigerian. She tells her that Dara in Yoruba means 'beautiful child' (5). Anne then says that the name is appropriate to him as he *is* very beautiful (5. italics retained from the text). Deola is surprised as she knows no Nigerian who considers him beautiful. On the other hand he is considered a 'bush boy', not to mention his questionable English (5). Indeed, her country men are 'angry' for his acceptance and popularity overseas 'for the very traits that embarrass them' (5). Anne is surprised to know that Deola is a Nigerian, as she assumes her to be British. When Anne tells her that she thought her to be British, Deola replies, stressing, 'Me? No' (5. capitals retained from the text). Telling her she is a Nigerian, Deola wishes to say that 'she doesn't have a British passport, that she swore allegiance to the Queen to get one and would probably have got down on her knees at the home office and begged had her application been denied (5). When Anne asks if she sees herself a Nigerian, she replies, without any hesitation 'Absolutely' (5). Because:

she has never had any doubts about her identity, though other people have. She has yet to encounter an adequate description of her status overseas. Resident alien is the closest. She definitely does not see herself as British. Perhaps she is a Nigerian expatriate in London. (5)

Anne however questions her if she will ever go back to Nigeria after getting used to living in the England. Having lived in the West for a considerable time, Deola is aware of the subtle and patronizing racism but the 'intrusive' question about going back to Nigeria is something she even asks herself 'whenever she can't decide if what she really needs is a change in location, rather than a new job (6). She replies Anne firmly that she will return to Nigeria 'eventually' (6). The rest of the narrative shows how Deola 'eventually' decides on

homecoming and the ambivalent state of her fellow expatriates and also the misrepresentation of Africa in the West.

Besides the intrusive question about going home, Deola resents Anne's representation of Africa as synonymous with hunger and starvation. Anne's 'rectitude' whether factual or not, discourages Deola not to let out the actual truth either of the continent's or its women's negative stereotyping. She even remains silent about her growing urge to nest (10). Deola's silence is to avoid being ridiculed for her womanly urge of 'motherhood' as an offshoot of 'the African women's perspective.' (10) When Anne and Alison, living in a lesbian relationship are planning pregnancy, Deola gets annoyed to hear about artificial insemination. She is perhaps afraid that she too may have to adopt that procedure if she remains single for long. But she is reluctant to discuss her opinion fearing that Anne, with her anthropological curiosity might belittle the African woman's perspective. It is clear from Deola's fear, to speak frankly that the African womanist perspective about motherhood is at odds with the individualistic traits of western feminism. Deola's urge for motherhood in the natural process is in danger of being ridiculed and hence she remains silent on it. However empowered they might be, the subalterns find themselves always incapable of speaking! Yet, she musters herself and says adoption can also be an option, 'wondering if this is appropriate (10). But Anne says that at the end of the day adoption may not work out. She puts it very subtly which does indicate undertones of racial prejudice:

You get on a plane and go to a country that is war-torn or struggling with an epidemic and see so many orphans, so many of them. But at the end of the day, you have to have the humility to say to yourself, 'May be I am not the person to raise

this kid. Maybe America is not the place to raise him or her.' You have to ask yourself these questions. (10)

In Atlanta, Deola wonders why America alone is labeled as a racist country and England is exempted from that. Expecting that 'people in England are more-open minded' Anne says that all one needs is to 'reorient' oneself to live in America. But Deola understands, and in the later chapter points out that except for certain external differences the attitudes of both the nations are similar towards Africa.

Deola reaches London after spending a few days in Atlanta. In her return flight to London she confronts an incident - the flight attendant lets in an American who breaks the line ahead of her. This reminds her of another situation she witnessed a month ago in Delhi airport - an American passenger grabbed an Indian who was edging to the line and brought him back into the line disciplining him like a child. And after a while, the same American steps back to let another American into the line who was complaining loudly that he will be missing the flight. These incidents though appear trivial are fraught with subtle but clear forms of racial arrogance. Though she tries to brush them away as mere incidents of oversight and may not amount to discrimination, she knew that 'it wasn't that straightforward' (13). She remembers her previous night conversation with Anne which remained one sided. As a transnational woman, Deola often confronts the 'dilemma' - the result of being an immigrant living in the interstice.

Travelling home in London by tube, she "identifies the languages that people on cell phones are speaking. There's French, Igbo and Portuguese. London is like the Tower of Babel . . ." and yet she "prefers it to the London she moved to in the eighties . . ." (13). As

an immigrant subject Deola is sensitive to the demographic transformation taking place in London from the eighties when she first came to England as a student. She observes on the streets of London, immigrants from Africa, Pakistani teenagers, Romanian mothers, East European children and Islamic clerics, all chicks of the empire who have come home to roost in the metropolis. The narrative here rightly confirms what Bhabha calls 'redefinition' of the idea of nation/alism in postmodern condition:

The very concept of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities – *as the grounds of cultural comparativism* – are in a profound process of redefinition.
 (Bhabha 7, italics in original)

However, Deola observes that there is resentment among the natives towards the immigrants who are leading gangs and fighting for their rights. But the 'English' preoccupied with guilt could not contradict them. At this juncture, she also remembers how Nigerians are also no less guilty in treating outsiders. She states:

Nigerians can never be that sorry for their transgressions, so sorry that they can't say to immigrants, "Carry your trouble and go." Nigerians made beggars out of child refugees from Niger and impregnated their mothers. Nigerians kicked out Ghanaians when Ghanaians became too efficient, taking over jobs Nigerians couldn't do, and named a laundry bag after the mass exodus: the Ghana Must Go bag. Nigerians aren't even sorry about the civil war. They are still blaming that on the British. (13)

The narrative points out the omniscient nature of discrimination and exploitation prevalent both in the 'Nation and the Empire.' Deola's critique of her own countrymen's violence

against immigrants proves once again what Bhabha rightly said “that the very idea of a pure, ‘ethnically cleansed’ national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex inter-weavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood (7). Deola is critical that the Empire is still reveling in scrutinizing the master rather than looking inwards for its shattered existence.

Further, the chapter reveals the alienated life of Deola in London city. Being in London she always feels comfortable to find black hair salon, Halal butchers, West Indian shop (that sells yams, plantain and cherry peppers - the staple food of Nigerians), African Textile shops and finally Nigerians. The sight of things related to Africa/Nigeria gives her a kind of belongingness and comfort. The reason for the immigrant’s comfort when they see or visit such shops selling products of homeland in the alien land is brought out very well by Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani in their book *Transnationalisms – Scapes, Scales and Scopes*:

Such shops have become a veritable switchboard of nostalgic exchanges between diasporic communities and the homelands from which they hail. Whether among the Indian, Ghanaian, or Trinidadian community, a visit to the local ethnic supermarket is not solely for the purchase of goods and products from the homeland. Rather, it is also significantly about the exchange of news from home, gossip about the local community, lamentation about the recalcitrance of children, and the general renewal of the sense of participating in another culture that is richer and more complex than the one that they happen to be sojourners in. (2)

In office, Deola recollects her past, her family, and feels irritated whenever her colleagues could not pronounce her name correctly. As she gradually finds herself out of place

in England, ennui sets in - "A wave of tiredness threatens her" as she has to "play up her English accent" (15). She needs to keep her appearance "... speaking phonetics, as Nigerians call it - so that people might not assume she lacks intelligence" (15). "Speaking phonetics," the narrative makes a scathing attack, "is instinctive now, but only performers enjoy mimicking. Performers and apes"(15). Her formal life is mechanical and monotonous; she is in a way frustrated and resents assimilation but keeps up her appearance. She could not identify herself with the West's war in the middle east and makes sarcastic remarks: "I can't bear to listen to their views on this stupid war and I hate the way they keep saying 'I rack' and 'I ran'. At least try and get the name right if you're going to bomb another country to smithereens" (16). She recollects that while working in London she lacked the enthusiasm she used to have in her student life. Now Deola's life is surrounded by an air of dissatisfaction, her exposure to different cultures and the lived experience of the immigrant life weighs her down as it exposed her to the superficial truths of life. While going through the files of Women in Need - the NGO that supports widows, she notices that women of her age are becoming widows in her mother land.

Later she meets Subu her Nigerian friend who comes to visit her in the weekend. Subu is a vice-president of an investment bank and travels widely. Both of them are trained in the same accountancy firm but Subu started off in a management consultancy and soon overtook Deola professionally. She was very business savvy and the first to buy a flat. However, Subu is intensely religious, a born again woman. She is the member of the American Pentecostal Church in London which is 'democratic' to encourage its members to be a pastor as well as a capitalist. For Subu, God is absolute, and hence she believes that angels have wings and Heaven and Hell are physical locations (21). Called by her colleagues as "Shoe Boo", as if she were a puppy or a computer game, she used to tell them that unless they accept Christ as savior

they will end up in Hell. After she gave her life to Christ she acquired an authoritative air as if 'she became Christ's wife on that day' (21). She even gave up make up after being born again but is not seen without hair weave (21). Interestingly, Subu has a penchant for latest gadgetry like digital cameras and surround sound systems. Deola wonders how she is able to cope as an investment banker and a born again Christian. Though they are friends they differ drastically in their attitudes and priorities. Deola could not accept Subu's justification of war on the basis of religion and hence they had a heated exchange over the bombing of Baghdad. And unlike Deola, she is member of the Nigerian crowd living in London and gets invited through her church family to various occasions. However, Subu avoids going home to Nigeria. She asks her mother to come over to England when she invites her for Christmas. She says, "Naija? Naija is too tough. No water, no light. Armed robbers all over the place and people demanding money" (25). She refers to Nigeria as home but never goes back (25). She has a British passport and intends to stay here. Subu's response to the spread of AIDS in Nigeria is similar to the white people. She says that people in Nigeria 'should just abstain' (25). Deola is angry and resists from raising her eyes (25). Deola knows that Subu, the devout, 'had more lovers in her church family than she has ever had dates in her secular circles (25). Indeed, 'Subu's ex-boyfriend was a deacon and Deola was curious to know what he'd done wrong, since he was so Christianly (25). Deola even mocks at Subu's stand when she used to say that 'she'd reported him to God' and she has now decided 'she was going to be a virgin'(25).

This part of the novel reveals how Deola contradicts her friend on issues of religion, hypocrisy and social living. It reveals her understanding of religion and existence of God/s as she is born to a Christian mother and Muslim father. Her remarks about God and his responsibility towards human beings is combined with humor and irony. Subu's proclamation

that she left the decision of her investment on a flat in Shanghai in God's hands irritates Deola to wonder, "Doesn't He have more important things to worry about than a speculative property investment in Shanghai?" (22). Deola's upbringing in a family where two faiths coexisted, influence her not to remain steadfast as well as monotheistic in her faith. In addition to this "...she dabbled in transcendental meditation and Quaker prayer meetings. She would have joined the Church of Scientology just to see what they had to offer if they hadn't asked her to fill out a questionnaire" (23). With varied experiences she had in different denominations, Deola felt that she should avoid some churches as part of a moral obligation as the practices of some churches appeared immoral to her. The paradox prevailing in the religion and its followers compels her to conclude, "... perhaps God doesn't give a hoot about hypocrisy or squandering of tithes. Perhaps all He really does care about is that He is loved, honored and obeyed" (23). These lines hint at Deola's skepticism about religion and the way people see God. Subu's repeated utterance of the word 'God' in their conversation irritates Deola: "God again, . . . Is this a habit, an affectation or a fear of life? Whatever it is, it releases a puerile desire in her to upstage Subu by declaring she is a nonbeliever (24).

Their conversation then moves to Dara, the hip-hop singer and spokesperson to LINK. Subu is critical of Dara for claiming to be an 'area boy' and telling lies about his background (26). Deola knows that Dara never claimed to be an 'area boy'¹ but said he was a 'street child.' Subu like a typical expatriate resents the over-hyped image of Dara and that the *oyinbos* don't seem to be able to see through him (26). Deola who judges the West better says that perhaps the *oyinbos* 'don't want to' see through him (26). They wanted only a distorted and

1. Area boys are loosely organized gangs of street children and teenagers, composed mostly of males, who roamed the streets of Lagos – Wikipedia.

stereotyped image of Africa and Dara is only playing upto it. Deola's thoughts about foreign NGOs and the criticism leveled against them by Africans/Nigerians is worth quoting here:

Most Nigerians she knows abuse celebrities involved in African charities. They accuse them of looking for attention or knighthoods. If they talk about the plight of Africa, they are sanctimonious. If they adopt African children, they are closet child molesters. She has heard all the arguments: Charities portray Africans as starving and diseased. Western countries ought to give Africa trade and debt relief, not aid. The drug companies should reduce the cost of their medications. The churches ought to shut the hell up with their message of abstinence and start distributing condoms. Africa T-shirts are just designer wear for the socially conscious. (26-27)

These lines reveal the varied opinion the native people nurture regarding the charities and their aid. However, Deola believes that the NGOs are getting funds from churches and pharmaceutical companies. Deola contemplates that even though her experiences may also be negated, "Africa does suffer, unduly, unnecessarily" and being an African at times she has to cope up with the embarrassment about how Africans are portrayed (27). Deola's conversation with Subu is inhibited as they could not talk to express their minds and when they depart Deola feels relieved to notice that she did not enter the contagious phase of melancholy that hovers around Subu. Their discussion concludes with Subu, stating that "We're fine, we're here" (27). She is happy that she left Nigeria for good.

After Subu's departure Deola gives a frank but factual account of the lives of Nigerian student community in London along with her own short lived love affairs. It appears that she

could not pair up with youngsters who are still patriarchal in their thinking and treatment of women. Among all the boyfriends Deola had, her affair with Tosan lasts for a while as he is a man with artistic sensibility who "enjoyed a rundown, dirty, smelly, moldy English public house" (28) to watch classics like *Hamlet* and *Burn This*, listened to francophone African music and is an admirer of Kundera's novels. However he is too talkative to bear and when she could not spare time for him immersed in her studies he looked around to flirt and they departed. When Deola comes to know that he is sleeping with a woman who is her acquaintance, being sensible she exclaims "... it wasn't proper to talk about the treachery of women" and relieved herself by eating "lot of jellybeans and play(ed)ing sad Sade songs" (28). At the age of thirty nine being a spinster actually she laments that she could not be adventurous to settle down in married life. At this age she can't anticipate any "... chance meetings in bars or sex with strangers. Within the social network to which she belongs, love is so contained, so predictable and marriage might be as banal and unsatisfying as her career" (29).

Further in the novel Deola gets a call from her 'grumpy' writer friend Bandele, who has published his first novel *Sidestep*. Though both of them are Nigerian expats in London there is a vast difference in the lives of these two friends. Deola's disciplined, straightforward and decisive life stands in contrast to Bandele's impulsive, and confused life. For months together she doesn't hear from him. He either bombards her with phone calls or avoids her calls. Now he calls her to inform that he was shortlisted for an African writer's prize for his second novel 'Foreign Capitals'. He is supposed to make a reading in the African Centre at Covent Garden and requests her to join him 'after' the reading. He doesn't want her to join the reading as he thinks it will be 'tedious' (30). Moreover, 'readings made him nervous and he didn't want to be associated with African writers (30). He is especially

critical of his fellow Nigerian intellectuals, who are capable of debating Derrida and Foucault , ‘but unable to contain their primal urges to clan up and wage wars’ (30).

Deola’s brother Lanre and Bandele’s elder brother Seyi were friends. Indeed, Deola had a crush on Seyi when they were all students in a school in Lagos. Her brother and Seyi used to smoke and play squash at Ikoyi Club. They used to booze a lot and one day Seyi and Lanre get involved in an accident where Seyi gets killed. Bandele, as brother of Seyi, was just an acquaintance with good public school English. He was sent to Harrow, in England and ‘sounded completely English’ (32). Educated in England he had that typical scorn for his fellow countrymen who couldn’t speak English well. Deola never thought they will become friends later on. She met him in the final year of their university in U.K. Tosan, her boy friend at that time was sure that Bandele was gay.

Deola meets Bandele at the bookshop almost after the reading session. He signs a few books and rushes out with Deola. He is relieved coming out of the bookshop. He is vexed with the ‘inane’ discussion ‘about being marginalized and pigeonholed’ and is unable to tolerate certain questions from a writer who writes ‘postcolonial crap’ (34). Bandele who has heard too much of it ‘the postcolonial crap’ has this to say:

They should give it a rest, the whole lot of them. Africa should be called the Sob Continent the way they carry on. It’s all gloom and doom from them, and the women are worse, all that false angst. (34)

Bandele resents being tagged a black writer because he sees himself as a writer with experiences similar to that of ‘aristocratic English because his grandfather was knighted by the Queen’ (36). He says that he never likes ‘going to these black things’ (events) as they

'degenerate into pity parties (35). For him it is only class but not racism that exists in England. It has been noted in postcolonial critical scholarship that 'third world' international writers, from Africa, Caribbean or South Asia who are part of British multicultural population are often bracketed as writers who represent only minority ethnic interests. As Susheila Nasta notes:

Nevertheless, despite the wide-ranging and often cross cultural concerns of many of these writers, the literary establishment in Britain has persistently tended either to package those from mixed cultural or migrant postcolonial backgrounds into the convenient pockets of separate national traditions or alternatively to stitch them together according to racial derivation of country of origin, regardless of specific histories or individual preoccupations. Consequently, the so called 'colonial', 'Commonwealth' or 'postcolonial' links of these writers are heightened and the often significant differences between them subsumed by a reviewing practice that misleadingly levels out important contextual issues of history, politics, generation or location. (2)

Sefi Atta is also expressing the same view that writers from 'third world' countries living in Euro-America are bundled into categories based on their racial or ethnic origin. Bandele's frustration as a writer comes due to this bundling. It is not just the dominant British literary establishment that 'packages' these writers into ethnic and racial categories, even the immigrant population are also demanding the writers to highlight their 'marginalization,' which for Bandele is very frustrating. In an interview with J W McCormack, Sefi Atta replies to his question if the writer character, Bandele, speaks her:

Yes, rather than write about my own literary frustrations, I wrote about Bandele's because it was more fun. He is out of control, and I find his lack of subtlety and civility hilarious. I don't know a Nigerian writer like him, but I know a few Nigerians like him who went to boarding schools in England when they were young and struggled with their identities. Deola doesn't struggle with her identity, but she distances herself whenever she senses it is being threatened. Bandele, on the other hand, expands. He becomes the overblown English gent. Because of him, Deola realizes her aloofness is a cop-out.

While narrating the meeting of the two friends, the novel reveals the insightful nature that Deola has developed regarding 'the state of ambivalence' in which the Nigerian London diaspora are mired in. She states "Every Nigerian she knows abroad is to some degree broken" (38). Deola unlike other Nigerians who ridicule Bandele for his neurotic condition, wherein he blames his parents, sisters, friends and all Nigerians, tries to extend a friendly support to relieve him of the stress and endeavors to analyze his predicament. She sympathetically considers, "His ridicule of Nigerians is hard to take ... the sort of self-loathing that only an English public school can impart on a young, impressionable foreign mind" (38). Deola, though a diaspora, aspires to abstain from the self loathing, ambivalent and neurotic diasporic life. Unlike her friends, Subu and Bandele who metamorphosed to be a religious fanatic and psychological neurotic respectively, Deola incessantly engages herself in the pursuit of a 'middle path' accepting the un/realities of racial/class/gender discriminations surrounding her immigrant life. She maintains a remarkable detachment with all the immigrant discrepancies to confront the blackness of her skin, stereotyping of her race and re-orientalizing the whole continent in the globalized world.

Deola's meeting with Bandele recalls her childhood memories in which she traces the noticeable differences between the school in Lagos and Somerset, her friendship with Tessa, a white British woman and the instances of subtle racial discrimination in the native and alien land. At the age of eight, she recognizes that her race is a matter of consideration in her primary school while attending ballet classes in Nigeria. In a class filled with varied races, the white teacher used to pass on remarks mingled with subtle racial discrimination and stereotyping of black girls for having wide backs (47). Deola as a girl, after her admission in the English Boarding School in Somerset remains in constant comparison between the native and foreign institutions, students and behaviors. She notices "... every boarding school had the same sorry array of international students and had seen them at their loneliest, sobbing over a mean comment someone had made. All of them were leveled by their desire to go home" (47). At the age of fourteen, Deola confronts one such embarrassing situation when her roommate - a blonde girl from Connecticut laughs at her while she is combing her hair with an Afro pick. Further, Deola recollects how the career counselor in the London boarding school points out that "Africans were not intelligent enough to go to university" (46) and the Drama teacher compels her to sing "Bingo bango bongo we belong back in the jungle" (46). Even at LSE, Deola remembers how one or the other lecturer would comment on the current state of political affairs in Nigeria. "Shame about the coup in Nigeria" they would comment giving her the impression that they are 'snickering behind her back' (63). She knows that Nigeria has failed to govern itself properly since independence. It is only a few elite people who are exploiting the oil wealth of the nation and yet they fail to uplift the nation. She remarks: They have access to the best Nigeria can offer, the best education and professional training the world over. Yet they can't get the country to function, or even preserve their little havens like Ikoyi, which

keeps on deteriorating (63). Like a typical expat she shares the general angst among the expatriates about the failed nation which has led many of them out of the mother land.

Deola's interaction with Tessa reveals that she is realistic and does not entertain fantasies about interracial love and marriage. Educated, employed and residing in the West, Deola is clear about her identity and is very particular to marry a man with shared history. Even in her youth she is very specific in choosing her companions to date and is very 'nationalistic about love' (45). "Her men must taste and smell as if they were raised on the same diet and make the same tonal sounds. Similarity on all fronts is essential" (44). She always aspires not to become a 'misfit' inside a family by marrying some white man nor did she want to swap her skin with Tessa, who she believes may not 'consider it a fair exchange' (46). Unlike Fanon's black woman who is eager to sleep with a white man to 'whiten her race,' Deola accepts the 'blackness' of her skin and never intends to escape from the reality of her life as well as her race. Deola, unlike the other Nigerians living in London actually endeavours to affirm her identity as a black diaspora woman. In this regard she stands antithetical to the successful hip-hop star Dara who after the fame he earned with the release of his debut album could declare that England is his 'ome' (49). Watching Dara on television Deola thinks that England has changed much, from her student days. 'Black' culture, is everywhere now in England. However, Deola is not satisfied with the prejudice associated with blackness and hence "turns off her television mistaking her boredom and sense of unbelonging for an uncontrollable urge to sleep" (50).

Deola's official visit to Lagos is planned to coincide with her father's fifth memorial service and it turns instrumental in her future life and decisions. She arrives in Lagos airport where the escalator doesn't work and the luggage is delayed. Unlike the hushed tones in

England, she hears passengers shouting over their cell phones. Yet, Deola cherished her homecomings for these loud voices. Travelling by car to reach home along with her mother who comes to receive her, Deola observes that the city is ‘shrinking’ or getting ‘more crowded’ (53). Like all ‘third’ world cities, the roads in Lagos are full of ‘potholes’ and the streets ‘waterlogged’ (53). Deola notices that there is a significant transformation in the overall landscape of the Lagos city where the “... anonymous streets and unclaimed plots ...” in her child hood have become “... cramped and commercial ...” places (55). However, she is surprised to notice that in spite of the growth of industries and commerce there is deterioration in the overall progress of the nation and the differences of class in the society are getting sharper day by day. Deola contemplates that class differences generate and perpetuate because of the political turmoil going on in the country with the failure of civilian governments and the repeated coups in the nation. There is an air of resignation that Deola notices among her family members too. Deola visualizes the shattered nation through the words of her mother who speaks in a tone of smugness, “Nothing works ... We thank God if we’re able to get from A to B” (53). Her family lives in Ikoyi, which is an affluent neighborhood of Lagos where the ‘oil boomers’ who are either diaspora like her (designated as "Aways" in the native land) or the Ikoyi crowd -the wealthiest community living in Ikoyi² - keep flying in and out even during times of economic recession.

2. It was developed by the British as a residential cantonment for the expatriate British and still contains large colonial residences built before independence. Deola’s parents house still retains colonial features including a chalet and boys’ quarters (55).

Deola is critical of this wealthy class, including her own family, who in her view lack the skill. She considers there is no necessity to show resentment and contempt or awe for their status as even after having "... access to the best Nigeria can offer, the best education and professional training the world over ... they can't get the country to function, or even preserve their little havens, like Ikoyi which keeps on deteriorating." (63) Deola ironically points out that their elitism is superficial without any intellectual or patriotic commitments to the nation and hence they often criticize the motherland and keep flying in and out for education, family holidays and shopping. Deola in spite of the apprehensive presumptions about the deteriorating economical conditions in the motherland strongly affirms "... there is money in the oil industry despite the grand larceny that goes on. There is money in the telecommunications and banking industries ... in the churches and non-governmental organizations ... for those who own their own professional practices ... who do not care to go through the normal apprenticeships or be burdened with public accountability, there are political positions in the Third Republic" (63). However, people are still mired in poverty and are stifling in it day after day. Deola notices beggars on the streets as they drive into Ikoyi. But the narrative notes ironically that for this expatriate coming from London they (beggars) will "become peripheral once she becomes habituated" (54).

During her short stay in the mother land Deola besides contemplating on the issues of national importance keeps observing the transforming familial and marital relationships through the lives of her sister Jaiye and cousin Ivie. Deola notices that her sister is pampered by her patriarchal and bohemian husband –Funsho. Jaiye gets costly gifts like Mercedes car from her husband but she remains unhappy emotionally in her married life with a flirting husband who stays in South Africa and plans to get settled there. Jaiye studied medicine in Lagos University

Teaching Hospital and unlike Deola she never left the mother land. Hence, antithetical to Deola's keen scrutinizing and introspective nature, Jaiye, elitist in her attitude, nurtures a kind of self esteem combined with arrogance. Overtaken by these superiority feelings she snubs the ideas of racial discrimination, victimization and subjugation as issues of inferiority in one's personality. Both her brother and sister rebuff the talk about race and racism as they haven't spent much time abroad. Moreover, their jobs and businesses in other African nations and the affluent circles they move in doesn't remind them much about color unlike Deola, who is now branded "the negritude sister" (57). The family calls her a radical for raising the issues of race. Deola too was once like them when she was at LSE and was surrounded by other Nigerian students. It was only after she stayed there for a living did she change:

Despite their academic competence, they were so averse to seeing themselves as subjugated or victimized in any way that to say race had any relevance to them was an admission too lowly to contemplate. In fact, if anyone was in the habit of bringing up racial issues, Deola might have accused them of having an inferiority complex. It wasn't until she started earning a living in England that she began to reassess her experiences there. (57)

But in her own country "she is virtually color free and she hopes to remain that way" (57). However inconvenient it is, the mother country is reassuring to her.

Representing the affluent, educated Nigerian upper class women, Jaiye remains fashionable and keeps listening to hip-hop and rap music of 50 Cent³ even in the presence of her children. Life in the mother land, though caught up in the political and economic

³ '50 Cent' is the stage name of Curtis James Jackson

turmoil, do offer a comfortable and respectable life for upper class women like Jaiye who are born into riches and never encounter discrimination in any forms than the gendered inequalities within the family life. But Deola knows that Jaiye was more practical than her in choosing to live in Nigeria and settle down. Being a Jane Austen fan she considers herself a sensible sister. Indeed, when moving to the hotel in Lagos, she picks up Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* from the shelf of leather-bound books of her father. But Deola, unlike the Austen heroines, is "capricious in her relationships as well as her career" and there are no more worse situations for her than "being stuck in a job or marriage" (61).

Deola's account of her paternal cousin Ivie's life represents the lives of elite Nigerian women who exhibits a sort of freedom in navigating their independent lives while getting to terms with the rampant polygamy in the society. Ivie is a beautiful woman but she could not become a mother. The man she loves is trapped and compelled to marry another woman (his ex-lover whom he forsakes after finding out that she maintains a sugar daddy) who gives birth to triplets as she deceives him by puncturing the condom. However, Ivie keeps living with that man as he provides her. In her interaction with Ivie, Deola understands that in her motherland, man woman relationships, especially in government circles are like Nollywood scripts.

Deola's contemplation on the vital issues of motherland transforms the novel to a national narrative. Indeed, even though it does contain the story line with hardly any major events, it reads more like a postcolonial theoretical text. Synthesizing the private and public, Deola takes up many issues concerning the image of Nigeria/Africa in her leisurely conversation with her brother Lanre. They talk about the recent Summit Bank crash which reveals the embezzlement of public money. Lanre tells her that the "directors were using the bank vault as their personal stash for cash" (65). Deola then cogitates upon the nature of

rampant corruption and rightly reiterates, "You cannot complain about corruption in Nigeria ... You dare not. Members of your family are corrupt, some of your best friends are corrupt. The only people who claim they are not corrupt have not had an opportunity to be corrupt, which is why they complain. They feel cheated in the midst of all the corruption around them" (65). Here the novel unfolds the adamantine shackles of corruption that kept the nation and its citizens pinned down with no prospects of release. Deola too had her own anxious moments when she worked in her father's Trust Bank where the bank's clients included corrupt politicians and dictators. Disturbed with the prospects of having such clients she would question her father, "But isn't he . . . one of the biggest thieves in Nigeria?" And her father would answer, "This is business. There is no such thing as clean money" (65). Deola wonders if anybody follows laws in Nigeria and rightly concludes that "they are optional" (65). Deola's views confirm that either corrupted or not, all Nigerians are becoming victims of this evil system and any effort to reform the society from within has become illusory.

As Deola's trip to Lagos is official she checks into a boutique hotel owned by an attractive middle aged man called Wale Adeniran. She was attracted to him from the moment she saw him (70). However, she gets about her work of visiting the NGOs and prepares a report to her London office. She visits an NGO that deals with malaria and decides to recommend it. That night too she meets Adeniran in the hotel and they come to know each other. Wale Adeniran is a computer hardware supplier, single, with a fourteen year old daughter. He is a widower whose wife died in child birth. He lives in Abuja but owns the boutique hotel in Lagos. Both seem to share the same concerns about the nation, particularly, corruption. When she asks if corruption is really as bad as people say it is, he replies: "You know how bad people say it is? Multiply that by a hundred" (79). They depart

with Adeniran asking her to call him when she goes to Abuja the next day. However, Deola tries to enquire more about the man with her cousin, Ivie. As for Ivie, a man, single and a widower, with good property doesn't exist in Lagos. There can be scores of single woman but certainly not a man. She even doubts his sexual orientation. The narrative here speaks of the negative attitude about gays in Nigeria: ". . . even the most decadent and perverted Nigerian vilify them, while those who are more open-minded worry about their proliferation as if they were an infestation of mosquitoes" (81). In a world where man woman relationships are reduced to cat and mouse game, a man, widower and still single is unimaginable. She suspects if he has killed his wife:

He might have killed her. Seriously, there have been cases like that. They give their wives rat poison . . . You meet a single man in Lagos and it's best you check with Interpol. The worst part is that they are not like our fathers. At least our fathers tried to take care of their families. These ones don't care. As for women, they've gone nuclear. If you can't provide, they will find someone on the side who can. It's true! Alternative energy sources!" (82)

Ivie doesn't stop there. She has much to say about single woman too: She says:

. . . Single women party in Nigeria. They may pray to get married and to have children, but they don't sit around waiting for God to deliver them. They share men. They don't deceive themselves as married women do. (83)

The above quotes underline the deterioration of man woman relationships, especially among upper classes and how each suspects the other. In the context of rampant practice of polygamy the generational difference is also brought out. Even though Ivie's

opinion about men and women is discouraging and can be treated as gossip, Deola knows that rich Nigerians are caught up in the luxuries of a consumerist world. While the country and its roads are in dismal condition the rich move in latest BMW cars. Assuming that people of Nigeria or doing good business with lot of money circulating around, Deola was shocked to see the condition of roads (where only army tanker could survive the potholes). But Ivie was categorical that the money is not earned/circulated because of doing good business. She says: "There is no real business here. All we have is oil money circulating in our economy. The whole banking sector is running on laundered money. The whole of Nigeria is" (85). The narrative is in a way pointing out the easy money available for a few people through exploitation of the country's rich oil resources while the rest of the population live in poverty. The same theme is also taken up in Atta's short story "News from Home".

That night Deola recollects the circumstances leading to her leaving her father's Trust Bank to join accountancy firm in London. She couldn't accept to live in her parents' house at twenty-two, but at the same time she could not afford to live in Lagos in a decent flat with her salary. Like Enitan in *Every Thing Good Will Come*, she either has to "find a sugar daddy or hustle for a government contract which would probably not be awarded without a sexual favour" (88). This was not the Nigeria where her parents made their career. After graduating in the metropolitan centers they were usually provided a job with housing and car allowances. But things have deteriorated, thanks to the rising inflation she has to live off her parents to live in Nigeria. Her decision to leave was criticized both within the family circles and by her colleagues who made it good after she left with increased salaries to make up the inflation. She was found fault for seeking 'independence'. Of course "she held on to her independence there, even as her independence began to look more like loneliness" (88).

Indeed her father was more accurate when he told her that she can ‘never rise to the top as an African overseas unless you (she) do exactly as you’re told’ (89). Here Deola thinks about her father who had a very humble beginning and worked hard to establish a bank:

His family was farm folk. He grew up with a hoe in his hand. He bragged about how he would walk miles to get to school, wearing hand-me-down plimsolls and carrying books on his head. He had two khaki uniforms to his name. When he washed one, he wore the other. His parents couldn’t read or write but they managed to send him to Durham University. He left for England in a cargo ship. (88)

After returning, he worked for a while in United African Company and later established his own bank. But the opportunities that came her father’s way are now not so easy to get. Due to political, economic, ethnic and religious turmoil the promising young country was pushed into chaos. In spite of all that people still cling to ethnicities which Deola dislikes. In her next assignment at Abuja, she gets angry with the president of the NGO for asking her ethnicity. She wanted to tell “*I consider myself Nigerian. United in the face of this epidemic*” (91). Obsession over ethnicity is the new epidemic according to Deola that is ruining the country. The womanist perspective that Nigeria is one nation is very clear here. She observes that the non-governmental organization WIN (Widows in Need) that she has come to inspect and report is not above desk. She could understand that there is misrepresentation of purpose and misdirection of funds and hence decides not to recommend it. Mrs. Nwachukwu the president of the organization is not only arrogant but appears to be misappropriating the funds. However, the Vice-president of the organization, Elizabeth Okeke who is earnest in her mission impresses on her the need for microfinance

which will empower the widows whose husbands died of AIDS. The issue of AIDS in Africa upsets Deola, especially when it was projected that it originated in Africa. She says:

Depopulation might go unnoticed. She has heard Nigerians say that the rates of infection are higher wherever Westerners flock to in Africa: the port cities and the countries with cooler climates. Nigerians were furious with the press reports that said the virus originated in Africa, livid when the reports said the virus was traced to monkeys. Who did they think Africans were? Dirty perverts? Didn't they know that to piss off an African, all a person needed to do was mention any species of ape or make any kind of animal reference? (93)

That night she calls Wale and discusses that issue with him and feels bad that she has to report that 'Nigerians are fraudulent' even though she likes the idea of Elizabeth about microfinance, where women can support their own business. Even though she doesn't endorse Mrs. Nwachukwu the president of the organization's idea about funding her for AIDS education in her report, she does support Mrs. Elizabeth Okeke's microfinance proposal after she reaches London. Wale of course agrees with her that such fraudulent organizations had to be discouraged. That night Deola indulges in sex with Wale. But the one-night stand misfires when Wale's condom gives off leading to panic. To prevent the impending pregnancy Deola even takes progestin pills the next morning. She is also apprehensive of AIDS and decides to get tested in London. She comes back home to Ikoyi from Abuja for her father's five year memorial. She locks herself up in her room that night and deeply regrets for what has happened after taking the second dose of the pill. The next morning she wakes up relieved from the after affects of the pill when preparations are going on for her father's memorial. She comes downstairs and returns the *Pride and Prejudice* to

her father's bookshelf. The postcolonial daughter of Africa understands that the gentle feminine story of manners is now 'irrelevant' to her: "Austen women did not have one-night stands. Austen women did not take the morning-after pill. Austen women took to their beds when they were heartbroken or down with colds" (103).

She joins her family's preparations for her father's fifth memorial the following day which happened to be Sunday. The memorial is a grand affair with friends, relatives and other guests from Lagos. Deola, meets all of them and seems to be happy to be with them. She closely observes each of the families including her sister and brother and the social rules of the colonial masters that still stick on to them. Being an expatriate living in the West Deola is sensitive to the habits of her fellow Nigerians aping the west. Commenting on Alero's family, who speaks 'phonetics' she says:

Alero's family was the sort that gave Ikoyi a bad name. They were *oyinbo* to the core. Ikoyi people were not that *oyinbo*. It was too much work. They did not believe *oyinbos* were worth emulating anyway; they only put on *oyinbo* airs to make other Nigerians feel inferior, shifting loyalties to cultures as easily as they changed clothes, unlike Alero's family, who took things too seriously. (111)

After the church service, the family along with a hundred guests returns home for the feast. Deola's mother's friends, some from the elite and some from her mother's nursing and childhood days gather for the feast over wine. Deola makes an interesting study of these women who have varied histories to narrate. Even though she resents their questions about her marriage and settlement she does enjoy their company. She however finds her own brother and sister's family life muddled in suspicions. She finds her brother Larne texting secretly while

his wife Eno is running after him and Jaiye's husband spends most of the time in South Africa. Perhaps these are some of the reasons for Deola to remain single. She meets Ivie her cousin with whom she confided her relationship and one-night stand with wale. When Ivie suggests that Deola should trap the man into marriage, she laughs and says that "She would rather be alone for the rest of her life than resort to trapping any man into marriage" (125). The same evening Deola leaves for London leaving her mother with a full house of guests. On her way to the airport she checks her incoming calls and messages for Wale, but finds none.

After reaching London, Deola speaks to Kate about the organizations she visits. While she recommends the first organization led by Dr. Sokoya, Deola submits that WIN is not well organized as there isn't coordination of purpose between the president Rita Nwachukwu and Elizabeth. Even though she knows that Rita Nwachukwu's purpose is not above board, she doesn't want to bring up the allegations of corruption against fellow Nigerians before foreigners. However, Rita bypasses Deola and contacts Kate directly when she is still in Nigeria. Kate doesn't seem to care for Deola's suggestion about Elizabeth's proposal of microfinance, which she earnestly believes will empower African women. That evening while returning home she is reminded of her colleague Pam's baby and the thoughts of babies reminds her of HIV test. She browses through Internet and identifies a clinic which she thinks will be safer. The thought of the tests make her tense and she is almost in tears when she takes the appointment for same-day testing (133). The following Wednesday she reaches the clinic and fakes her name and date of birth. Except for a couple of people all the people in the clinic are black. The consulting doctor is an Indian, Dr. Srinivasan. She is highly tensed and is almost trembling while she gives blood for testing. She breaks into a psalm praying that she will be a different person if tested negative (135).

Deola, even though doesn't believe in God in the mundane religious sense, suddenly breaks into prayer. The narrative brings out graphically her consciousness in a stream that is filled with momentary fear and self-pity in an italicized paragraph:

Please, don't let me be HIV positive. I will be a different person if I leave this place with a negative result. I will, I will, I will change. I will be good to my family and friends. I will counsel them. I will counsel everyone I can. Use me as a conduit. Use me, use me, use me. I will obey Your will. I will be respectful to my mother. Do You want to kill the poor woman? Is that what You want? Well, You will. You will, then You will be sorry. All right, I bow down to You as Your humble servant, then I said I submit myself to You! What more do You want? Why won't You believe me? How do You expect me to trust You, if you won't trust me? Yes, yes, I have let You down, but that is because Your commandments are too strict. Yes, they are. Yes, they are. (136)

Of course, she tests negative but she has to wait for a week for the result of other tests. While returning she ruminates over the fears of people. Each one had their own fear. If London is in grip of fear of terrorism, people in Lagos, are “afraid of death by armed robberies, car crashes and sickness” and they are “terrified of bankruptcy – financial and the other kind that leads to a permanent loss of hope (137). However, she concludes that HIV is the ‘greatest terror of all’ as it transmits, takes over cells and mutates (137). The next morning she calls Wale and informs him that she tested negative and that “we” (they) are safe (138). Even though she feels intimate with him over phone she decides that this will be the last time she calls him. However, to her surprise, throughout the day she is reminded of him – “a tone of voice, a colleague's fresh white shirt or an accidental touch” (139). She of course, ‘mistakes her preoccupation with him for desperation’ (139).

To overcome this feeling, and also to ask them to get HIV tested, she decides to call her friends Subu and Bandele. She first calls Bandele, the expat writer, who informs her that he lost the prize to a novel that depicts the murder of a Nigerian writer in exile. Deola then takes a dig at African novels. She says, “African novels are too exotic for her. Reading them, she often feels they are meant for Western readers, who are most likely to be impressed” (139). It is interesting to note that while diasporic writers are often criticized for pandering to the prurient tastes of the West, here the expatriate writer is finding fault with the African novels as ‘exotic’ and ‘meant’ for Western readers. Bandele’s complaint was that the writer who won was chosen for the prize ‘as he needed it more’ (140). He wonders if the prize is given for literary contest or charity? Even though he sounded jealous it is the first time that this British immigrant understands that ‘race matters’ and the more ‘naïve’ he pretends to be the more he can ‘capitalize on patronage’ (140). Deola, (given her work experience in organizations) even though she never worked in the publishing industry understands that people “would never tolerate a supercilious upstart African like him. An African who doesn’t even have the common decency to entertain them with stories about how awful his country is (141). Through this statement it appears that Sefi Atta is not only contesting the influential Western publishing industry but also the reading public in the West which always expects exotic or depressing tales about Africa. Indeed, it is widely accepted that the publishing industry in the West acts as a guiding if not a mentoring factor to produce ‘publishable’ forms of writing for the third world writers. Writers of Indian diaspora, publishing in the West, like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (*Arranged Marriage*) are often found entertaining the West with the cultural curiosities of India, like arranged marriages. It is as if that unless they write something ‘awful’ about their culture/country that they will not get published. If they write on everyday themes

like ‘love’, which Bandele did, they are considered ‘trivial’ (141). As an African he should be an “‘African’ writer” . . . “trying to fit into the African literature scene and you either exploit what is going on or you don’t” (142). But Deola obsessed with her own fears of AIDS encourages him to write about love because love is not trivial and can be dangerous (142). She finds African literature preoccupied with politics and so she tried to take interest in the many events that shook her country. But she finds that “the death toll from civil war and years of political unrest combined could not add up to the number of casualties from AIDS, so perhaps her concerns over what was happening between chicks and guys were not so misplaced after all” (142). She makes a similar call to Subu asking her to get tested for HIV.

This week Anne Hirsch of Atlanta office comes to England and Deola takes her out for a pizzeria. During their conversation Anne brings in the topic of Dara, the Nigerian hip-hop-singer now living in England and a spokesperson for LINK who in a recent interview justified polygamy. His contention was that “when men have several wives, they don’t sleep around” (147). Anne considers it to be sexist but Deola thinks that he just ‘came up with any answer he could think of’ (147). She rightly thinks that “in Nigeria, no one would have paid him any mind, as a college drop out. Overseas, people are asking for his opinions on Africa (147). Deola later shares with Subu, Anne’s remark that Dara’s opinion about polygamy amounts to sexism. She not only questions Anne’s remark about sexism but also brushes aside Dara’s words as ‘just daft’ (149). Subu of course, mocks the *oyinbo* women and their fragility. She says: “They come with their feminism. When push comes to shove, they turn to their men. Don’t trust them” (149). Subu later on informs that Dara was arrested for passing lewd remarks against a woman in a nightclub.

Anne then enquires about Deola's recent visit to Lagos and her concern for the NGO's Vice-President's (Elizabeth Okeke) interest in microfinance. Even though Anne agrees with Deola that microcredit is catching up she says that it will be a 'shift' from what they (LINK) do in Africa – Charity (147). This makes Deola contemplate about the West's demeaning dependency attitude towards Africa: "Of course, Deola thinks, LINK is not in the business of making their beneficiaries look self-sufficient. They must evoke sympathy to raise money. This is how charity works. No one gives money to people they are on par with, so someone has to be diminished in the process" (147-148). Conscious of the West's patronizing attitude, Deola still taunts Anne: "But the aim is to enable self-sufficiency in the long run, isn't it?" (148). Anne, claiming herself the authority first points out Deola's lack of field experience and then says, "Women and children are especially vulnerable in Africa. Mothers become sex workers and they pass the virus to their babies. Babies die before they reach their second birthdays. Grandmothers are raising orphans. It is awful what is going on. It makes you so angry" (148). Rather than make her angry, Deola thinks, it makes her sad, especially to know how much Africa suffers. Hence, the narrative questions the subtle hegemony of the West even in matters of compassion: "She does not represent Africa and Anne does not represent the West, but Anne swings easily from guilt to having a monopoly on compassion" (148). Later, frustrated over the dependency syndrome that has gripped Africa for long in the hands of its former colonizers, Deola questions in her discussion with Subu: "Where has charity ever got us?" (150). Making the text a truly womanist national narrative, Deola says: "So why don't we solve our economy problems instead of begging for funds all over the place? Why should Africa always be seen as a charity case? Can't people invest in Africa instead?" (150). Hence she concludes 'make no mistake, these charities are

dangerous for us' (150). Subu also agrees and says vociferously: It's true ! I blame them for the lack of progress in Africa. They make us dependent on the money they keep handing us. They do, and their ultimate aim is to hold us back" (151). Aid, the narrative proves, is primarily based on the interests of the donors and is obstructing the autonomous development of the country. Africa is thus kept a reliant continent with the metropolitan capitals gaining a dominant position, controlling and influencing it. So Deola decides to talk to her employer 'to an idea that involves a community of Africans being independent and if 'they can't be open' then she concludes that she is 'working for the wrong organization' and hence may have to quit (152). But before quitting, Deola decides to put across her opinion about the microcredit to the board of LINK. She informs Kate that she is going to give her opinion but Kate tells her that it is Graham who will be deciding even in the board. She also tells Deola that Dara's fiasco is likely to influence the board's decision on getting involved with Nigerian NGOs. Deola feels bad that the whole issue is finally jeopardizing the NGOs in Nigeria. She feels guilty for letting down the women at WIN, but is also not sure even if the microfinance scheme is extended, corruption at WIN may prevent the benefit reaching them. After all, "She can't overlook Africa's self-sabotage" (159). LINK the organization she is working, is doing developmental and rehabilitation work in numerous countries of Africa, but due to the 'mischief' of a few Africans the organization may withdraw support giving "the notion that Africans are disposable and of as much consequence to humanity as waste material" (160). She recollects how systems work and it is not because of some 'greater insidious design' but because "systems serve people who are not party to conceiving and creating them" (160). That day Deola realizes that the unusual health symptoms she has been observing for some days is actually due to her pregnancy. She calls

her white friend Tessa who is planning her wedding and promises to help her with the wedding dress and also as the bridesmaid. In the process Deola remembers Tessa's fiancé Peter who wanted to speak with her about African safaris and how Tessa told him that Deola doesn't "care about animals or people who cared about them" (162). But the narrative makes a potshot at the rest of the world for caring more about African animals than its people: "what Deola actually said was that she couldn't understand why people cared more about African animals than they did about Africans" (162). Tessa and Deola fix the appointment with Helen a tailor of Nigerian origin near Pimlico Station for the wedding dress, whose flat happened to be very close to Bandele's. In the course of their conversation, Deola comes to know that Helen is aware of Bandele Davis and his gay partner Charles.

After seeing off Tessa, Deola calls Bandele and goes to meet him in his flat. She confronts him with the recent information she got from Helen about his gay partner Charles. She was annoyed that he hid the fact from her all these days. The ensuing conversation is interesting as it brings out the attitudes of people in Nigeria about gays. She asks: "Why didn't you just tell me you are gay?" He replies: "You're Nigerian." She says: "Helen is Nigerian" but he replies that she is not Nigerian like her. He continues and says that he isn't taking any chances as Nigeria is "such an emotionally brutal place to grow up in" (172). Even though Deola confronts him that England is no better, Bandele has his own reasons. She then tells him that as she is now pregnant she is going back home, quitting her job. And the reason for her quitting the job is having, as she quotes James Baldwin "The price one pays for pursuing any profession, or calling, is an intimate knowledge of its ugly side." Deola then thinks of how gays were treated in Nigeria. Nigerians may not be 'overly concerned so long as gays have the decency to marry and have children' but both Muslim

and Christian fundamentalists consider it a heinous crime. There are incidents of stoning to death under Sharia law, but usually the victims are poor. Even in gentle society gays are reduced to an orifice (173). Anyhow, Bandele is going to live in England even though it ‘can’t be easy’ here as a Nigerian 174).

Deola finally announces to Kate and Graham that she is leaving the organization and will be returning home. Fiercely independent, Deola is especially resentful for the loss of her identity as a Nigerian in the metropolitan center. She doesn’t like to work ‘for an organization that hired Africans like herself, who, in the process of being refined, could no longer think for themselves’ (175). She is fed up of mimicking the West which starts from ‘rounding her vowels’ (175). She tells them that her ‘last trip to Nigeria woke her up to the fact that she misses home and she ought to go back for good instead of contributing to the brain drain’ (175). She puts in her papers and leaves for Lagos to inform her mother about her pregnancy. She thinks that Ivie’s mother is more suitable to break the news to her mother.

At Lagos, she is received by Ivie and decides to stay at Wale’s hotel. She informs Wale her pregnancy which he receives with a pleasant surprise. She meets him in his hotel and they have a pleasant conversation about many things trying to know each other. She informs him that she reads newspapers online via Nigeriaworld.com. Sefi Atta too admitted that she stays connected with her country through online newspapers. Interestingly, the headlines she mentions “Vision of Mary Appears on Latrine Window” is made into a story in Sefi Atta’s short story collection with the title “Miracle Worker” (182). Discussing about the importance of news, Wale comments that the radio jockeys in Nigeria are now putting on American accents. He puts very sarcastically but aptly: “They copy American accents to the horror of those who copy British ones” (182). Educated at Colombia and being a

seasoned traveler, Wale too appears to agree with Deola on many issues related to her country. Stating that there are good radio programs in Yoruba and other Nigerian languages he thinks that the Nigerian people, rather than catch up with the computer age, will be better for them the other way round. It appears that both Wale and Deola agree on aspects of nativity. They also come to know about each other's family but do not make a commitment about marriage, although Wale is not indifferent to the proposal.

The next morning Deola goes to see her mother 'who is splendid in her disappointment and 'magnificent in her displeasure' about her daughter's pregnancy out of wedlock (187). Aunty Bisi is already with her trying to convince if not console her. Her mother is naturally angry 'that she ought to have been told' and she ought to have been given that respect, as a mother' (187). Even though she is not much upset about the pregnancy, she is annoyed at her daughter's unconventional and adamant attitude in telling the man that she is not interested in marrying him or meeting his family and expect him to be a father to her child (188). Indeed both her daughters, even Jaiye, Deola's sister, is haughty enough to ask her husband to go out of the house. She even doesn't want her children to be sent to her mother-in-law's house. Deola's mother of course doesn't agree with her daughter and sends the grandchildren to Jaiye's mother-in-law's house. Even though the mother is Western in her culture and behavior she does subscribe to the traditional norms of marriage and family. She enquires about Wale and finds that she knows his father, who was lawyer. However, Wale's mother was not married to his father, J.T. Adeniran. The mother also come to know that Deola is coming home for good. Later Deola meets her brother Lanre, who is aware of her pregnancy. However, he advises her against coming home due to the many difficulties she is likely to face in Nigeria:

. . . traffic, poor quality repairs and servicing, stupid and devious house help. Mosquitoes. Good schools are expensive and so is pediatric food and medicine. Any serious illness and she would have to get on the next flight to London, if she wants to survive. . . . There is so much frustration here. Too much. People will harass you, insult you and waste your time. . . . Every day, you're fighting to hold on to what you have and to stay alive. What you will go through here will make you want to run back to London. That is Lagos to you. (195)

She however questions him why everybody is asking her to come back home. He replies, "Abroad you can have it all – money, good health and security – and it's as if someone is chipping away at your backbone every day with that racialism rubbish. I can't deal with that" (195).

The next day Lanre comes with his wife and children and Deola spends a happy day with them recollecting her childhood days along with her siblings. For the children it is like history lesson because they are not allowed to play in the neighborhood due to fear of armed robbers. These days children are 'transported from an air-conditioned car to an air-conditioned room because of malaria (195). Deola and her brother entertain the boys with stories from their childhood. Jayie also calls from Jamaica and asks Deola to stand her ground against marriage (199). She tells her how she abused her husband in front of her mother-in-law and asked him to get out of her house. Even though Deola initially finds fault with Jayie's attitude on her listening to rap, she corrects herself that she is fighting for her life. Jayie's husband of course thinks that she is 'trying to do women's rights (200). Jayie has been suspecting that her husband, who stays mostly in South Africa, is having affairs. Deola then goes to meet Wale, who for her appears to be the only sensible person around (200). While

Deola shares all about her family, Wale tells her why he remained a widower. Even though he was pressurized to marry within six months of his wife's death in childbirth, he decided to remain single for his child. His mother too wanted him to marry to take care of his daughter. Yet he says: "I was the one changing her nappies and feeding her, but I wasn't supposed to" (201). This proves that Wale is a sensible man and a loving and responsible father. Later their conversation moves to education and training and the difficulty of getting trained people in Nigeria. He speaks about the ordeals he faces everyday with his staff in maintaining the hotel. Deola too agrees and thinks that she can get into the business of training given her exposure to various organizations and businesses. Their conversation, which is affectionate and personal hints at nation building. By imparting training and professionalism, Deola in the true womanist spirit, wants to contribute in her own little way to nation building. With the right partner in Wale, Deola finally appears to accept the proposal of marriage. She expresses her doubt when she says that she knows many married couples who are not compatible. Wale assures her that they will be fine and 'she chooses to believe him' (203).

In the last chapter of the novel 'For Good' Deola returns to London. Unlike her earlier trips where she was eager to leave Lagos, this time she starts missing Lagos, the moment she reaches London. She calls Tessa, her friend and informs her that she is leaving England for good. Tessa is surprised and asks why Deola should go after living here for long. Even though Deola replies that she is not getting anywhere, Tessa, while trying to persuade her, says that there are good and bad people everywhere (205). To this Deola replies that there is also 'your people' and 'my people' and asks Tessa not to prolong the argument (205) Even though Deola knows that there are good and bad people everywhere it is the subtle fact of racism that is forcing her to leave England. Leaving that topic, Tessa,

who is about to marry, then tells her how commercialized marriage ceremonies have become and advises Deola against it. Though Deola doesn't mind a civil ceremony she is reminded of Jayie's elaborate marriage ceremony and the ritualistic ordeal her sister underwent. More than such ceremonies she is concerned about the different ways of cohabiting in her country. She comes from a country where 'she could have been handed over to a man at the age of twelve, under the guise of respectability (205). Every occasion of discussion takes her back to her own country and practices. Tessa is however worried about her father who is now suffering with Alzheimer's. As people live longer and longer, the only option left for her is to send him to a 'home'. She is worried over the lack of support in families over such situations in England. She thinks that due to extended families in Nigeria one can expect better support. Deola however is not sure and is loath to idealize Nigerian culture (206). It all depends on the 'means' of the 'incapacitated' person. If the persons are well-off they are treated better otherwise they may be treated as burden (206). She however, knows that people don't live that long in Nigeria: "She can't think of many Nigerians her age who have both parents alive and she can't name one Nigerian her age who has a grandparent alive" (206). The average life span of the people is less in Nigeria and thanks to the many diseases like AIDS it is getting worse day by day. She then calls Bandele who is interested to get the HIV test and she proposes to take him to the clinic. She then goes through the 'confrontational' email from Kate who read her report on the malaria NGO in Nigeria (208). Kate even refers to her appointment which Graham was reluctant to offer. Even though she is tempted to reply angrily she 'trashes' the email as she is anyhow 'going home' (208).

She later drives Bandele to the clinic for the HIV test on the following Thursday. A terrified Bandele is tested under the fake name James Baldwin. Bandele who used to call

Nigerians a bunch of backward religious fanatics, cries Christ, unable to bear the tense moments. Of course he is diagnosed negative. Knowing that he is a gay, Deola, seems to be particularly concerned about his welfare. While returning, Wale calls Deola's mobile which is picked up by Bandele as she is at the wheel. Even though Deola asks for the phone he dodges her and answers the call stating that they are going to Paris and she will call him back after they return. Deola drops him off and rushes home thinking Wale might be calling her at home. But he doesn't. That night she watches a morbid Hollywood movie on genocide in an imaginary African country.⁴ She observes the usual elements in such films: benevolent missionary priest, the hopeful expatriate, cynical foreign journalist, sidekick African intellectual, corrupt local politician, red-eyed African military men and UN troops with familiar scenes like children running after army trucks and refugees. This makes her contemplate about the stereotyped way Africa is represented in films and on television: She is not bothered about the "barrage of news clips on wars and poverty-stricken villages – after all, they are not made up – but lack of perspective and continued absence of her experiences" (213). These negative images repeated over the years solidified into stereotypes and generalizations about Africa affecting mostly the lives of expatriate Africans.

The narrative here gives voice to the fears of African expatriates living abroad as their future is in jeopardy in the host countries due to the poor and stereotyped portrayal of life at home. Atta's other short stories and novels too discuss many issues like email scams,

4. A good number of movies are produced in Hollywood around 2005 & 2006 like *Blood Diamond* (2006), *The Last King of Scotland* (2006) and movies based on Rwanda genocide like *Shooting Dogs*, (called *Beyond the Gates* (2005) in U.S.

drug mules and other notorious activities that show the mother country in a poor light. Remi Adekoya speaks about the fears of these expatriates:

Also, many African professionals in Europe I have spoken to get exhausted by constantly being underestimated in their workplaces because it is assumed that since they grew up and went to school in a poor, backward environment (as many presume all of Africa is), they can't know terribly much after all. A Nigerian, Kenyan or Zambian university graduate working in Europe will likely have to over perform in their job before they are accorded the same respect. Each major news item presenting Africa in a negative light is viewed by these folk as something that will make their working lives that bit harder.

Hence Deola questions why the western media is unable to see other than the usual poverty stricken, violent Africa. She questions if this is a conspiracy to fix the Africans permanently in a backward state. She says:

What she would give to see a boring old banker going on about capital growth, as they do in Nigeria, just for once. Why not? Don't they exist? Don't they count? Or are they so well assimilated into the rest of the world that they are no longer visible? Or-- and this would be a conspiracy of the most tragic consequence -- are Westerners, now that Africans readily process themselves for Western consumption, developing a preference for Africans who are pure and unadulterated? (213)

It is pertinent to note that throughout this novel Sefi Atta is expressing her concerns about the misrepresentation of Africa in the West. Africa, a continent of diverse cultures, nations (with 53 individual countries) and languages is portrayed as a homogenous entity.

This misrepresentation has a long history. From the times of slavery and colonization, images of a dark, savage, backward, starved and hungry Africa have persisted in Western discourse which is still influencing the perspective taken by the western media journalists, editors, academics and politicians. The African womanist perspective adopted by Sefi Atta in all her writings is in a way contesting this misrepresentation both within and outside.

The following Saturday, Deola has a surprising visitor. Wale, who was worried finding Deola with Bandele, and her supposed trip with him to Paris, comes to meet Deola without informing her. After his doubts get cleared they both warm up to each other. She comes to know of his Muslim and Christian parentage. While his mother is a Muslim, his father is a Christian and hence he went to both the church and the mosque. Given his mixed parentage he speaks both Yoruba and Hausa. When Deola proposes to name their son Babajide, he agrees stating that Jide is a solid traditional name (217). Even though she is accustomed to living alone and is fiercely independent she starts adjusting herself to his presence. After spending the day with her, Wale shifts to The Hilton in Hyde Park promising to come back the next day. He is going to stay in London for ten days and she promises not to interrogate him again. Dropping him at the hotel, Deola drives back to her flat fighting her loneliness (218). On her way back she drops in at Subu's house. She meets Subu's mother who wishes that God will guide them and they will get all they want, a good husband and children (220). The novel concludes with all good signs for Deola. Returning home to her own people, a loving man and the fulfillment of her own urge to nest (10).