



Empowering Generations across Time in Swallow by

Sefi Atta

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Abstract

This paper explores the focus of the story of Swallow, Sefi Atta's second book, which explores and reflects on Nigeria's socioeconomic issues. It focuses on the consequences, processes, and methods of survival adopted in the country's dire situation, and Atta's innovative approach demonstrates that socioeconomic ills are predominantly experienced by women. My research highlights how women's empowerment and use of ideas stress a tense generational position that is exacerbated by male-dominated systems and precarious socioeconomic conditions. Atta's status as an immigrant writer traveling abroad, despite her geographical distance from her home country, has not affected her creative focus, and indeed she The reinvention of the 'home' of the diaspora of the 20th century, we find it convincingly reinforcing its affinity and awareness of its socio-cultural environment.

Key words: generation, marriage, consciousness, woman.

Each generation depicted in Atta's Swallow shows how far women have come in gaining more autonomy in their society. Iya Alaro, Tolani's great aunt, was forced to wed her father's choice of husband and bear children in the union. However, because widowhood is a respected position in her society, her husband's early death exempted her from the requirement. In order to advocate for and take action for the fair treatment of women, she increases her resources, organizes the women in her neighborhood, and

“she protected women and children in the town with the help of the women of her co-op” (44). In addition, she mentors younger women such as her niece Arike who says, “I saw that as a girl and thought I would be exactly the sort of woman my aunt was when I grew up” (44). She teaches the younger generation a trade, thereby giving these

girls a profitable skill, organizing skills, and economic training in the cooperative. As Arike notes, “My aunt, Iya Alaro, was my mentor. She trained me to be a cloth dyer” and she did the same for many girls in the village (43).

Arike is capable of turning down the suitors her father insists she marry because of the training she received from her aunt. She declines his proposal of marriage because she has no other option because

“Your family arranged that. They received your dowry: cloth, yams, palm oil, goats or whatever your husband’s family could afford, to show his appreciation of your upbringing. It was a token, nothing more. You moved into his home, had children and took care of them” (42).

She suffers the patriarchal pressure to be married and have kids, but thanks to the assistance of her aunt, she is free to choose her own husband. Although being free to choose her own husband is a step forward, Arike dislikes that she can't stay alone and be in charge of her own life, including her financial independence.

As a result, Arike educates her daughter Tolani that she is not required to get married and provides her the life she desires. Arike will be able to defend a woman's right not to be married after she reaches elder status. She expresses this clearly to Tolani by saying, “It’s up to each woman to decide if she wants to be on her own or not. Marriage is optional for a woman; marriage is not” (243).

Arike continues to symbolize society's expectation that women should bear children, and this expectation reflects the relative advancements that Makoku has made. Tolani, however, has lived outside of Makoku and has endured city life, as she says, “I had to look after myself in the city. I had no one. No one. Ruin around me. Living in fear, trying to escape one problem or the other. It caught up with everyone” (262). She might therefore imagine a paradigm for herself that is even more liberated as a result of the struggles she has faced.

Tolani recognizes that maternal attitudes are already empowering, but she agrees with her best friend's assessment that socially mandated childbirth is oppressive, even more so for modern experts. Therefore, Tolani rejects childbearing as a social requirement and aims to become a woman who can freely choose her own future, such as marriage, motherhood, and self-sufficiency. The key to Tsubame is that it allows the protagonist to gain more and more power over his own body while still withstanding the gaze. Her rejection of society's panoptic on is sometimes heartbreaking, but when other women flock to her to support the next step in women's empowerment, instead of watching the masquerade ball, it can be empowering.

Because patriarchy is so firmly established in Swallow's Nigeria, and because women's subservience to the male patriarch, the disguised deity, is a powerful tradition, as demonstrated by life in Makoku, the society is cruel to these women. Legal processes and regulations in Nigeria substantially support the misogynist infrastructure, as is seen from the bank's grievance procedures and the Oba's historic authority to abduct and wed any woman without her consent.

But in *Swallow*, women are slowly, steadily, and with less consideration for the masculine expectations surrounding them, as demonstrated by Peju's mother and Tolani's personal decisions. In other words, even though they are labeled as witches or troublemakers, the women are asking questions, making different decisions, and gaining support for their right to do so. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the cooperatives founded by Iya Alaro, Arike, and Tolani, women are realizing the empowerment of female solidarity in cooperatives, families, and businesses. As Aunt Iya Alaro helps Arike, the narrative dramatically illustrates the empowerment of women in each previous generation.

Arike then supports Tolani in making the wisest decision for her own life. This decision to forego marriage and parenthood is made possible by the composite woman's consciousness, which results from coping mechanisms used by women, accumulated cultural knowledge, and a European education, as well as the understanding that these factors can work in concert to give women the power to effect change. Last but not least, Tolani's composite consciousness enables her to integrate the knowledge she has gained from both her traditional cosmology and her contemporary professional training. She then transforms this composite consciousness into a strong challenge to the prescriptive ideas about what constitutes an acceptable woman. Because of this, Tolani gains from the advancements her great aunt and mother have achieved, and she suggests for herself an exercise in normative agency and even more control over her body.

Women have the option to reclaim their agency in Atta's novels so that they can become the focal point of their own emancipation. Their choices determine their destiny and provide them the ability to succeed, including how they use their bodies and financial resources. Tolani embraces herself as the new deity she worships after doing extensive soul-searching and observing her culture.

Her culture is evolving toward women's and individual empowerment, which is more in line with Frantz Fanon's ideal of a country where "the living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people; it is the coherent, enlightened action of men and women" (204) than to a straightforward male-centered disguise that encourages patriarchal self-serving messaging. Tolani exemplifies this hope via her advocacy for women's rights and her confidence in her business idea for community empowerment.

The metaphor of the masquerade enables Atta's readers to gain a deeper understanding of the protagonists' transformations from innocent girls who think their fathers are gods to fierce warrior women who seek empowerment and independence by disguising the patriarchy in their lives and pursuing a woman-centered paradigm, respectively. Additionally, Enitan and Tolani's paths toward self-advocacy and activism are made possible by their ability to successfully apply the lessons learned from their indigenous cosmology and combine them with European training in order to create a more empowering space for themselves and the other women in their vicinity. By choosing to assume the role of lead dancer and perform their own dance of liberation, they create a different future than that which is intended for the audience of a masquerade and reject patriarchal belief as the standard.

Through the cultural analysis of the Nigerian protagonists in Atta's novels, Mohanty's Solidarity model is thus incorporated into the study of women's literature. This is because this analysis heavily relies on a turn toward women's composite consciousness that is shaped both by the characters' cultural upbringing in Nigeria and their exposure to European professional training.

Tolani Ajao's persona evolves into a composite consciousness for Nigerian women and joins a cross-generational campaign for a stronger sense of community autonomy. The women in her household gradually set the stage for her to enjoy more independence than they did. Since the women who came before them gave them access to additional instruments for empowerment, every generation of women advances. Iya Alaro, for instance, is free to establish her effective women's cooperative despite being a widow. In order for Arike to be financially independent and a leader among the women in her village, she trains Arike how to become the finest dyer. The daughter of Arike is then sent away from the hamlet, given a western education, and given a job at a prestigious bank thanks to Arike's economic success as a local businesswoman.

Because each generation of women has made her own steps and taken huge risks to transform the home community and create possibilities for the following generation, Tolani is able to accomplish these advancements. Because of her western education, Tolani has the business sense to develop a new business model that will allow her to sell her mother's clothing outside of the village in tourist-oriented stores in Lagos.

This is a significant advancement since prior to then, the women had created space for the next generation of women to live lives that were more emancipated, but they were ultimately constrained by the restrictions of the village. Given her education and expertise in Lagos, Tolani's new business turns the fabrics from her mother's cooperative into sought-after things for sale to a metropolitan market. The pricing will give the women a fair remuneration for their labor, which will be a relief for them in particular because it will take into account both their talent and the costs for similar goods on the global market. "business is not that good" (259).

As she would work at the federal level, Tolani will also be able to avoid being constrained by the social norms of the hamlet. Tolani is actually able to honor her mother and great aunt as well as their incredibly traditional crafts thanks to her decision to create her composite consciousness. She can also use her modern training to market those crafts to European tourists and to obtain reasonable and lucrative prices for them. She can advance from being a mere follower in Lagos, a secretary following instructions from lewd men, to an autonomous business leader in her neighborhood thanks to the growth of her composite consciousness. She increases the freedoms she already enjoys and acts as a catalyst for change. She actively contributes to the economic prosperity of women before her and those who will follow. She is also able to act without the influence of any men and to picture a life free from the negative patriarchal influences that currently govern it. She will actually act as Peju's role model, much like Iya Alaro did for Arike.

Tolani is obedient to and supportive of patriarchy when Swallow starts. She is incredibly eager to be married and start a family because that is what is expected of her. Despite having a degree, she doesn't consider herself a professional first; rather, she considers herself a mother and future wife. She freely declares that she has internalized the social imperative. "I don't want to be one of those jilted ones" when her boyfriend won't propose after two years of dating. She becomes so desperate to fulfill this requirement that she is even willing to give her boyfriend all her savings. Therefore, she begs, "Please, let me help. At least I can add my savings to what you have" (73).

However, as she experienced Indigenous patriarchy oppression at work, including blatant sexual harassment, she began to realize that throughout her life she had been limited by limitations. patriarchy and its expectations of women. She revisits her childhood memories and begins to understand her father's use of her as a cultural shield, his abuse of her mother's generosity and prosperity, her disdain. for her mother's sacrifice and her affection. In addition, she realizes that he has never done anything to help her mother move forward in life despite giving credit to her achievements. It was only her mother who worked hard to pay for her school fees, encouraged her to leave the village and now tells her to stand up instead of looking to a man for support.

The development of synthetic consciousness began while she was working in Lagos, and it was triggered by two very specific transformative events. The first is realizing that she doesn't want to be a drug donkey because she wants to be a productive citizen. The death of her roommate Rose confirms to Tolani that Nigerian society uses women and considers them indispensable. The patriarchy restricts their freedom and forces them to compromise. The only reason Rose became a drug donkey was because she was short of money after being fired by the bank for rejecting Mr. Salako's sexual advances and publicizing his inappropriate behavior. With Franka's help, he argues that they are lovers, so Rose is discredited. Once discredited as an abandoned lover, her physical assault was deemed unprovoked, leading her to be fired for her

"had insulted him in front of everyone downstairs, including the customers on the banking floor and security guards. She'd called him a bloody bastard and slapped him" (18).

Her stellar career track record has been tainted by her actions, and her chances of getting another job without a favorable referral are close to zero. So her courage to stand up against sexual harassment was punished by the bankers who blacklisted her, and the despair that followed led to her death, her anger.

The sexual harassment that Tolani experienced from Mr. Salako is the second crucial incident, and she goes through all the denial, rage, and helplessness when she formally complains about her boss. For daring to even film the occurrence, she is made fun of by the bank personnel, accused of being sexually promiscuous, and generally harassed. She is then placed on leave in order for her to understand how financially dependent she is on the job and withdraw her complaint. However, it is only then that she decides to go back to her mother, the strongest and most independent person she knows, to ask questions about patriarchy in her society and about how women have reacted to the oppression. At that point, she realizes that she is entirely at the mercy of the patriarchal oppressors.

She therefore goes back to the community to reside in her mother's compound and search for the solutions she needs. She is confident that her mother's property will serve as a safe haven. Rose was reliant on her natural talent in Lagos because she lacked a strong female line to support her. "You have people, and I don't, as Rose said Tolani. No one" (208). Because Rose lacks a mother who loves and cares for her, when Salako destroys her job, she is left without a chance to regain her professional status or her means of subsistence. Arike, however, is a source of support and inspiration for Tolani to overcome the oppressive consequences of patriarchy, therefore Tolani is fortunate to have him.

She can fully establish a composite awareness if she takes refuge in her mother's compound. She spends time analyzing how patriarchy affects her life as well as the lives of her mother and great aunt. She can develop her own strategy and let go of her young infatuation with marriage and having children as the only paths to fulfillment once she sees how they empower themselves. Instead, she now very gently declines the suitor she would have previously paid to wed her and introduces a more recent development—women choosing for themselves whether or not to have children—to her family's history. She understands that she is not required to get married or have children. Without having children, she can still be a powerful member of the community, which is a novel option and a liberating freedom. It doesn't necessarily show a new trend toward childlessness, but rather a movement toward allowing space for this unconventional choice of being single and childless as a real possibility for Nigerian women.

She pursues the emancipatory business venture that links her to the skill of her mother and great aunt and will bring her and the community weavers and dyers financial freedom rather than devoting her energies to her husband and children.

In Sefi Atta's *Swallow*, Tolani, Arike, and Iya Alaro learn to recognize the repressive patriarchal forces at play in their life, to analyze them, and to seek a freeing release by putting both conventional and contemporary emancipatory methods to use. As a result, every generation of women in her family works harder to create spaces for women and combat patriarchal tyranny. However, because these women desire to live as women in their communities, they do not try to overthrow the system there; instead, they improve it so that change happens gradually but steadily with each succeeding generation. As this empowerment through the development of complex consciousness is the interweaving of traditional and contemporary knowledge achieved by Tolani, she also believes that her strategy for We recognize that both must be addressed. The trade-offs inherent in the development of combined consciousness are breaking with the past, favoring either modernity or tradition, and overthrowing the present system. Instead, Torani seeks to draw tools of empowerment from both modernity and tradition, advocating an intergenerational movement for women's emancipation. This allows women of all generations to live in their communities and remain empowered to embrace continuous change. She uses sexual and indigenous matrilineal pressures to achieve a greater sense of self-determination, thereby expressing her mixed consciousness in Nigerian society.

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