

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN WOMEN'S WRITINGS: A POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST STUDY OF SEFI ATTA'S *THE BEAD COLLECTOR*

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Abstract

Women writers have employed various ways of continuing with the depiction of some of the issues that are prominent in their writings through which the plights of women are represented. While other women writers' works are devoid of women oppression, violence and abuse, writers like Atta continue with the long-held style of focusing on women emancipation along with the themes of subjugation and violence as depicted in *The Bead Collector*. In view of this, this paper seeks to show how women in the twenty first century still focus on women emancipation with a slight change in thematic concern. The study uses Postcolonial Feminist theory for explication because it uncovers multiple realities and roles so that all voices may be heard. Postcolonial feminism dissolves the universal subject and the possibility that women speak in a unified voice or that they can be universally addressed. Using Atta's, *The Bead Collector*, the study asserts that women's writings are changing, they are not the same and the writers do not strictly focus on gender issues. The change in the thematic preoccupation of Atta which touched on Nigerian History indicates the recent shift or transformation in Atta's writing particularly in terms of thematic concern.

Key Words: Postcolonial, Feminism, Continuity, Change, Voice

Introduction

Continuity suggests the state of continuing for a period without problems, interruptions, or changes. Kagan (1980) describes four

meanings of stability or continuity: “the persistence of a psychological quality as reflected in normal rate of change in that quality over time; the persistence of hierarchical relation between complementary dispositions within an individual (ipsative stability); the preservation of a set of individual ranks on a quality within a constant cohort (normative stability); the necessary and contingent relation between phenotypically different structures or functions at two points in time due to the operation of specifiable processes”(p.32). Kagan (1980) further describes continuity as “a relative dominance of one response over a complimentary response over a period of time (p.34). This is related to women writings because women writers try to focus on clearing the misconceptions and negative depiction of women in male writings. As a result of time and changes in the society, the responses of women writers begin to change and vary. Waraich and Bhardwg (2007) cited in Shaikh (2020) describe change as “the continuous modifications that an organisation or individuals make to deal with adjustments in any matter” (p.40). Lewin (1947) initiated change models based on three fundamental steps to implement a planned change. These include unfreezing, moving and refreezing. Bakhai et al. (2017), cited in Shaikh (2020) define unfreezing as “creating people’s readiness for change by changing their behaviours towards the change. Unfreezing includes raising people awareness about the current situation and the planned change, giving incentives towards engaging people with the planned change” (p.41). This stage, according to Shaikh (2020), is the most difficult stage and the stage needs time to be completed and nurtured to overcome change resistance and letting go of the old behaviour which does not support the change. The second stage is moving or changing for set of behaviour(s) to another behaviour that is more supportive and acceptable for the planned stage. The third stage is refreezing to bring the situation to steadiness and to make change permanent and get support to sustain the change and maintain it as planned in stage one (p.42).

Change concerns 'the transformation of society, whether gradual or rapid, over a given period. This alteration can be caused willingly, grudgingly or it can happen unconsciously (Evvierhoma, 2002, p.95). Within the society, change, in the words of Wilmott (1985) 'is the alteration in the sources or organization of society or its component parts over time. It also concerns size, complexity, direction, and functions' (p.174). Bennett (1993) argues on the nature of continuity particularly patriarchal continuities in women's history. She posits that "radical feminist theories have focused exclusively on gender relations and women's oppression. Both feminism and women's history have developed far beyond this original dualism, and our field is now much enriched with black feminist thought, psychoanalytic feminism, postmodernism and queer theory" (p.173). Despite Bennett's view that women lives have not been a static factor in history, she still insists that the overall status of women has not changed. This is because in the words of Bennett, 'women's works certainly changed over these centuries, but it wasn't transformed' (p.176). For her, history is not just about change, it is about continuity too. Perhaps, this explains the reason behind the continued emphasis on the issue of gender and women oppression among critics and women writers. The issue of change and transformation is unique in Bennett's view simply because she did not accept transformation in women's writings. However, this is different in the 21st century because women's writings have undergone transformation both in terms of characterisation and thematic concern.

In addition, change on the other hand involves pinpointing a before and after. This means in effect, that stages in the writing of a work, or points of development noticed in comparing finished works, writing forms and even whole genres must be identified from the outside as it were: their points of stability and constancy must be fixed and identified so that contrasts, progressions, and modifications can begin to be recognised (Daniel, 1980, p.275). This paper selected Atta's

The Bead Collector in other to compare and identify the progressions (continuity) and modifications (changes) inherent in the selected texts of women specifically in Nigeria. This is because some women writers like Atta have provided certain ways of transforming not only her female characters but also her concern in order to accommodate broader issues.

Background to the Text

It is a text that centres on Nigeria's history in 1976 during the military regime. The text provides an insight into the neo-colonial government in Nigeria in the mid 70's which is set in Lagos. It is a text that depicts the issues of power and power relations particularly the issue of coup de tats and the assassination of General Murtala Muhammad. The novel touches on the way voices are created for both and female characters. Prominent issues of marriage, betrayal, divorce and abuse are clearly revised and depicted in the text.

Sefi Atta is a Nigerian novelist and a play writer. She was born in Lagos in 1964. Ogunidipe (2014:131) indicates that Atta insists that unlike many Nigerian writers who consider themselves Yoruba, Hausa or Igbo, she does not identify with or privilege any affiliation in her writing because she feels Nigerian only. She is the author of *Everything Good will Come* (2005), *Swallow* (2010), *News from Home* (2010), *A Bit of Difference* (2013) and *The Bead Collector* (2019). She has received several literary awards including the 2006 Wole Soyinka's prize for literature in Africa and Noma Award for publishing in Africa among others. Her radio plays have been broadcast by the BBC and her stage plays have been performed internationally. Atta in an interview state that she chooses Lagos as the setting of almost all her writings because she was born and raised in Lagos before she moved to England and United States. She admires great American playwrights like Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Eugene O Neil.

Theoretical Framework

This study is conceptualised within the subaltern theory as expounded by Gayatri C. Spivak. Postcolonial theory as Bressler (2003) defines it “is an approach to literary analysis that particularly concerns itself with literature written in English in formerly colonized countries... [it] concentrates on writings from colonized or formerly colonized cultures in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, South Africa and other places that were once dominated by but remained outside of the white, male” (p.199). Certain classical texts have become foundational for postcolonial studies like Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1967), Aime Cesaires’s *The Coloniser and the Colonised* (1965). Postcolonial Feminists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988, 1990 and 1999) and Chandra Mohanty (1991, 2003) have led to a focus on the insight that literature can provide multiple gendered histories. Like many other schools of literary criticism, Post colonialism utilises a variety of approaches to textual analysis like Deconstruction, Feminism, Marxism etc and at the heart of this study is Postcolonial Feminism.

Postcolonial Feminism is certainly concerned to analyse the nervous condition of being a woman in a postcolonial environment, whether in the social oppression of the post colony or the communities. For this reason, it places greater emphasis on social and political campaigns for material, cultural and legal rights, equal treatment in the law, education, and workplace alongside the social challenge of everyday Patriarchy. Tyagi (2004) states that:

Postcolonial Feminist theory is primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonised countries and in western locations. It concentrates on construction of gender difference discourses representation of women in anticolonial and postcolonial discourses of women writers (p.1).

This is because the woman suffers from a double form of colonization: that of colonialism and patriarchy as Peterson and

Rutherford (1986) puts it. In this oppression, the colonised brother is no longer her accomplice but her oppressor. In his struggle against the coloniser, he even exploits her by misrepresenting her in nationalist discourses. Not only that, but she also suffers in the hands of western feminists from the coloniser countries who misrepresent their colonised counterparts. The concern with women as “other” emanated largely from the writings of white western middle-class women, whose generalisation was grounded for the most part in their own experience. The feminist theory explained women as if the reality of white western women applied to women from all classes and regions of the world. Feminist concerns with female “otherness” have often ignored the possibility of differences among the women themselves. Postcolonial feminism dissolves the universal subject and the possibility that women speak in a unified voice or that they can be universally addressed. Spivak’s writings reflected the background of women’s struggles and oppression in the two world countries. She reiterates the fact that there are differences in the case of race, class, religion, citizenship and culture among others. Feminism needs to concentrate on this variation that exist among women and help them to achieve their personal goals. Subaltern postcolonial studies have provided ways with which subalterns/subjugated and subordinated people can be identified. Scholars like Homi Babha and Gayatri Spivak among others have made their inputs to the definition of the subaltern and how the subaltern can earn their voice or be effectively represented. Babha (1996) describes the subaltern groups as “oppressed minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority groups” (p.91). Spivak in her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” views the fate of the subaltern subject and how it can be marred by the politics of representation. She argues that “Since representation can be made by only the privilege in the society; effective representation of the subaltern subject can be a futile venture. This will always keep the subaltern in the terrain of the “margin, the silent center, the center of voicelessness”.

Spivak's argues that "the subalterns are not people who cannot be represented by privilege people. They are subjects who speak for themselves. It is only when the subaltern speaks for themselves that they can cease to be subaltern subjects" (p.25). It is also through women's writings and their creation of positive modern characters; happenings in the society as it relates to history of a particular society that people can learn and accept the possibilities of change in the tenets of women's writings.

The significance of choosing postcolonial subaltern theory as a working tool for this study is that the theoretical approach has the capacity to embrace the diversity of global political and social life. This is because the theory stands resolutely in support of change in the political, cultural, and social landscape.

Continuity in the Thematic Preoccupation of Atta in *The Bead Collector*

The themes in most women writings have been on the common themes as depicted in early women's writings. However, the depiction of such themes particularly in the 21st century differs when compared to the early works written by women. Atta in *The Bead Collector* has depicted various themes like marriage, divorce, betrayal among others.

Marriage and its impact are depicted from various angles in *The Bead Collector*. Ngocobo (1998, p.53) cited in Yacim (2012) describes marriage in the African society "as mainly an institution of procreation. Everywoman is encouraged to marry and bear children to express womanhood to the full. The basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman's fertility to the husband's family group" (p.51). Within the marriage institution, Atta brings out numerous issues and their challenges to women and one of the issues is the issue of divorce. In most women's writings, particularly, divorce is seen as the last resort for the woman and sometimes marks the beginning of freedom to the

women. This is because of the nature of hardship faced by the women ranging from abuse, infidelity, violence and other vital issues like bareness and marginalisation. All these issues are depicted from different perspectives because they form the basis of oppressing women. For instance, marriage is depicted in some of the women's writings like Alkali's *The Initiates* to be a sign of fulfilment and achievement in the novel. Avi Dayyan's marriage to Brigadier Hussein of Dapchi and Salvia's marriage to Hafsa symbolise hope and final fulfilment in their lives. However, the story is different in Atta's *The Bead Collector*. That is why women writers provide different ways of giving their female characters voice in their writings. For instance, Atta in *The Bead Collector* depicts the marriage between Moji and Ade, and she calls it a 'mess' (p.18). The men in women's writings cheat in their marriages just like in the early works of women's writers, and this leads to various problems among which is divorce. Marriage is depicted from different dimensions with each having a unique problem which leads to divorce. One of the problems is lack of respect and infidelity. Moji and Ade's marriage has this quality because they no longer respect each other. Atta depicts both characters with the same quality and they threaten one another. For instance, Moji accuses her husband of infidelity, and she retaliates with his friends. Atta portrays a female character that is influenced by the modern way of life. It symbolises a radical and negative trait given to her female character that is no longer submissive and could not guide her husband towards the right direction like Mama Enitan does in one of Atta's novels *Everything Good will Come*.

However, the method adopted in solving this issue in a marriage by the women writers varies extensively. Women writers, particularly Atta in *The Bead Collector* portrays a radical female character that is given liberation in a negative manner. Unlike in the early writings of women whereby the women remain docile in their marriages, the characters in this novel, like Moji, take revenge in a radical manner by indulging in

extra marital affair. This contradicts the depiction of female characters in women's writings where the women work hard and struggle to live a good life. This equally represents the kind of female character depiction in male writings in which the female characters are portrayed as prostitutes or in other negative ways. Atta describes Moji and Ade's situation when Remi tries to mediate between them:

Moji had asked me to talk to Ade about the affair he was having with her friend. I'd make the mistake of agreeing to, for the sake of their children... I eventually stopped trying to mediate but had since learned that he'd had one mistress after another before the affair with her friend, and she'd slept with his colleagues to get revenge (p.18).

Atta in a way did not empower or liberate her female characters and Moji could not bear the effect of the divorce on her. As such, she engages in all sorts of drug abuse to overcome her problems. This indicates that women in the 21st century are still not empowered.

Another instance is indicated in the character of Biola and Muiyiwa who encounter a similar situation. Muiyiwa, Biola's husband "had fathered a son by another woman during one of their hiatuses in Lagos" (p.66). Again, the women in Atta's *The Bead Collector* are portrayed as weak because Biola does not have such radical thinking of some of the female characters. She does not have the power to make any radical decision like the modern women when her husband broke the news of the child he had with another woman. She has no option than to forgive him simply because 'Biola needs an heir'. Atta describes the situation:

Muiyiwa had to break the news about his son to Biola, who apparently attacked him so viciously he barely had a shred of his shirt left by the time she finished with him. She forgave

him, as best as a woman could under the circumstances.
(p.66)

This indicates that the women in women's writings still faced the usual problems highlighted by the early women writers. These issues include barrenness or childlessness, betrayal, and divorce. This suggests continuity in the thematic preoccupation of women writers. Atta emphasises the importance of motherhood and the effect of barrenness. No matter the situation, marriage remains the only option because of its importance. That is why Sheri in *Everything Good will Come* states that:

Better to be ugly, to be crippled, to be a thief even, than to be barren. We had been raised to believe that our greatest days would be: the birth of our first child, our wedding and graduation days in that circle. A woman may be forgiven for having a child out of wedlock...marriage could immediately wipe out sluttish past but angel or not, a woman had to have a child. (p.105)

Another instance is seen in Deola's case in *A Bit of Difference* whereby she is empowered socially and economically by working in a London office of an international charity, she is unhappy with her job and life simply because she is unmarried. Also, Tolani in *Swallow* was also too desperate to get married that she offered her life savings to a man who lost it after being duped.

However, the issue of marriage and barrenness remains the part that limits the progress of a woman. This is because a woman may choose to stay in a marriage even without a child, but marginalisation and the stigma attached to the issue of barrenness may live the woman at the margin. This is because of the various layers of oppression that the woman witnesses in her marriage at both family and societal level.

The issue of women empowerment is reiterated in *The Bead Collector* as Atta depicts the struggles of women in the novel. Atta

constructs a voice for some of her female characters in a positive manner. Asake, for example, is a woman who lost three husbands in succession (p.93). Despite the problems she encounters in her marriage, she can fight for the women over the issue of water rates. Her ability to hold a press conference and the way she pours out threats indicates her bravery: “she threatened to shut down the whole of Lagos if her women were forced to pay water rates... Iya demonstrated she could add faster than a mathematician (p.94). This indicates that the women in the novel struggle to speak for the voiceless and attempt to shift their positions from the margin to the centre. Just like Pam in *The Bead Collector*, Iya Alaro in *Swallow* is a brave woman who advocates and takes action for the fair treatment of women. “She protected women and children in the town with the help of other women in her cooperative (p.44). She teaches and trains women in various skills in the cooperative. This suggests a kind of continuity in terms of female empowerment in Atta’s novels.

Furthermore, Atta tries to depict the issue of polygamy and in a way compare it with the lives of other characters in the novels. Atta’s portrayal of Habiba Ibrahim exposes the different situations in marriage and the different attitudes of women in their marriages. Habiba is not like Moji who is jealous and feels she cannot share her husband with other women even though she is not legally married to Ade her husband. Habiba lives happily with her co mates as indicated in the novel because she decides to throw a birthday party for one of her co mates. Remi describes the three characters: “If Moji was one extreme, Habiba was the other and somewhere between them were women like me neither crazy nor controlled” (p.148). Another incident is depicted through Pam and her husband whom she sponsored for his PhD and at the end he meets another Nigerian woman. Atta’s male characters have the same qualities of betrayal. Atta indicates that “pam made the mistake of taking care of him while he was studying. He got his PhD,

they got married and came to Nigeria. Within a year, the man had found himself a Nigerian woman on the side. Before we knew it, the woman was pregnant. Pam stayed with him regardless" (p.164.). Pam's ability to stay with Niyi despite his infidelity suggests that it is not all Atta's female characters that are radical. Atta juxtaposes the life of the female characters and their ability to handle different situations. This suggests that women have varying attitudes towards men and marriage generally. Atta's depiction of Habiba, Moji and Remi and the circumstances in each of the characters marriages suggests that not all men are bad, and the situation sometimes depends on each woman's ability to deal with her problems.

The issue of education is another important aspect that Atta depicts in her novels. Education serves as a strong weapon that liberates a woman from her problems. It is also through education that female writers' express their female characters in the positions they found themselves and the conditions that is attached to their situations. Characters like Remi and Pam in *The Bead Collector* are also given the opportunity to resolve various issues at both family and societal levels because of the education they had. Anato et al. (2023) assert that "a cover feature in making a new type of women in the Nigerian novel is that of their bookish education until the 1970's, the taboo that the place of a woman is in the marriage household was still more visible than today. In the context of Africa in general, fewer women than today completed their degree course" (p.97). This form of women empowerment or liberation using education is an important style that women writers use in order to create awareness and expose the consequences of not being educated.

Depiction of Nigerian History and Voice in *The Bead Collector*

Just like most of her novels, *The Bead Collector* also touches on the way voice is created to both the women who are the subalterns and

those that are oppressed by the military regime in the country. Here, in this novel, the subalterns are not just the women but include the people that are socially, politically, and economically outside the hegemonic power structure of the society. In other words, the people that are denied the hegemonic power particularly the ones that suffered the consequences of the military coup are depicted in the novel. This indicates that there are different classes of people whose voices are constructed from different dimensions by the writer. By doing this, Atta fulfils Ogundice Leslie's argument concerning the responsibilities of a writer. Leslie (1987) argues that "the woman writer has two major responsibilities; firstly, to talk about being a woman; secondly, to describe reality from a woman's view, a woman's perspective (p.5). Atta's ability to shift her focus or concern to a different perspective or themes fit into Leslie's description of the second commitment of the writer who should be concerned with the issues of third world realities. This in the words of Giwa (2016) refers to the political awareness and the apprehension of social responsibility of every member of the society (p.312).

The novel opens with the date 10th January 1976 with the exhibition of beads by Oyinda. It is where Remi Lawal met Frances and American who was a bead collector (p.9). This date in *The Bead Collector* signifies an important date in the Nigerian history. It is the year after the coup which happened in 1966 under General Murtala Muhammad's regime. Remi describes the incident to Frances in the novel:

General Murtala Muhammad was in power; General Yakubu Gowon was in exile in England. The reality was that we were expecting a counter coup. We had a good reason to after the coups of January and July of 1966 that preceded the civil war. Last year's coup had occurred in July (p.7).

Similarly, Atta emphasises on the issue of coup, the significance of the month of January and the essence of carrying out the coup. She states “a group of officers overthrew the prime minister. They killed him, killed the Sardauna and the Western Premier. They were known as January boys but most of them were Igbo, so people called it an Igbo coup” (p.113).

This clearly describes the situation in the country and the impact it had on the people. The arrival of Frances to the country indicates another incident whereby people come on a secret mission to get vital information concerning any society that witnesses the same situation. This in effect creates suspicion among the presence of any foreigner as indicated by Atta in the novel. That is why Tunde, who is Remi's husband, suspects Frances to be a spy because he believes she comes to get information about the country particularly the coup. This is indicated in the conversation with Remi: “I leave you alone for one second and you are spilling state secrets. These Americans, they come here and think they can take us for fools” (p.15). Atta emphasises the consequences or the damaging negative effect of the coup which happens to be lack of trust. The same issue indicates the attitudes of people towards foreigners, the relationship between Atta's family and the two characters in *The Bead Collector*. Atta in an interview with Toni Kan states:

During the coup that brought General Muhammed to power in 1975, an expatriate woman befriended my mother. We'd never seen the woman before, but she came to our house in Southwest Ikoyi for a few nights and talked to my mother about the coup...but soon she stopped coming and my mother said she had to be a spy...it doesn't matter whether Frances-The Bead Collector- was spying or not. It was enough to show that there were allegations in those days, which may have been partly due to xenophobia...

The few examples given above by Atta and the allegations Atta's mother made of the visitor they had is typical of Tunde and Frances in *The Bead Collector* who represent Nigerians and Americans respectively. The most important thing is that Atta tries to capture the situation that is important in the Nigerian history.

The issue of coup is depicted in some works of women writers like Alkali and Adichie in the *The Initiates* and *Purple Hibiscus* respectively. Alkali depicts the issue of coup through Samba who was shot, and parts of his body became damaged in his attempt to plot a coup simply because he is not satisfied with the government. The issue of coup and its consequences are both highlighted by the two writers. This suggests the importance attached to the coup in the Nigerian History and the impact it had on the people. This indicates that it is not only the female characters that are moved to the centre in female literary works but also the writers as well. This tremendous shift in the thematic preoccupation of the women writers indicates the new dimensions in their writings.

More so, Atta compares politics from independence with the politics in the contemporary times specifically, the 21st century. Atta describes the nature of politics:

In these days politics was about fistfights, kidnappings, neck lacing, firebombs, sedition charges, court trials and jail sentences. Thugs take over the ballot process. There is cheating all over the place...women walking around with ballot papers stuffed in their wrappers and claiming they are pregnant. (p.112)

This is typical of the Nigerian situation where political aspirants organise thugs to partake in the electioneering campaigns and elections. Atta's depiction of the issue of politics symbolises the new changes in

the thematic concern whereby the concern was on women empowerment and liberation in early women writings. Instead, female writers now focus on the capabilities of an empowered woman when given the opportunity. The attitudes and backgrounds to which these characters are depicted reflect the lives of politicians in the society. Atta as a woman narrates the experiences of the people and the history of the Nigerian society in *The Bead Collector* from a different dimension. This indicates a significant change and advancement in the lives of female characters in women's writings because they are giving the opportunity to tell the history of their societies or countries. This is in line with the tenets of postcolonial feminism because it encourages women to be concerned with third world and the realities of their societies. As such, Leslie (1987) in Giwa (2016:312) emphasises on the commitment of the female writer:

Female writers cannot usefully claim to be concerned with various predicaments in their countries or in Africa without situating their awareness and solutions within the larger global context of imperialism and neo colonialism...a deep female writer who has anything worthwhile to say must have these insights (p.12).

Furthermore, Okpiliya (2018:105) asserts that "the success of these contemporary writers is derived from their consummate ability to place their narratives in the context of historical experiences...they historicise discourse and textualize history.

This issue is quite important in Atta's *The Bead Collector* because she shed light on the varying problems in Nigeria from independence up to date. Atta's ability to look beyond woman issues depicts that history has proven a new direction particularly on the nature and consequences of the civil war which still lingers up to date. Atta, through Remi, describes her view on the problems of the country: "My

opinion was that the political tensions preceding the war were exacerbated by the inflated census and men with inflated egos” (p.114). This describes the situation in the Nigerian society where people create problem and confusion to win elections and pour their revenge on their political opponents. This situation suggests continuity in the politics of the Nigerian society. Atta reiterates her love for her country because the incidents she described touch virtually on every member or citizen in the Nigerian society. Remi’s conversation with Frances in the novel clearly brings out the problem that bedevilled the Nigerian society. Remi argues:

Nigeria does have a reputation. The thing is corruption happens everywhere... before Muhammad’s Regime, it went unchecked for a while even when it was obvious. General Muhammad may be trying to reinstate public shaming through his announcements, but the public ends up sympathising with the people who are being shamed. (p.121.)

This indicates that the issue of corruption has a long history because it is still having impact on the Nigerian society. Akung (2012,p.115) cited in Ogundipe (2014) argues that Atta acknowledges men and women as victims of the social, economic and political plaques affecting her country, her text effectively writes women into the protest against military dictatorships giving them voice, power and recognition they are deemed in the texts that men have written on the attitudes of the government and the troubles of the ordinary people in Nigeria (p.163). Many women writers have depicted similar issues in different ways in their novels. Alkali in *The Initiates* and *Invisible Borders* depict the issues of coup and politics as represented in the characters of Samba and Sam. Similarly, Adichie in her *Purple Hibiscus* has portrayed the negative effect of the civil war. One of the negative effects of the civil war is the

loss of friendship. Atta states “not only did friendships die during the war, but they also suffered chronically as result...before the war, we could talk about being Nigerian. During the war, we couldn't. After the war, any conversation we had about Nigeria were like chit-chatting about debris floating on a river that harboured skeletons” (p.127). This suggests that there is a kind of change in the thematic preoccupation of women writers because of the change in the nature of the society which also indicates that women too are not strictly concerned with gender issues only. Atta indicates that their thematic preoccupation is not fixed. Her ability to write in line with the recent trends and contemporary issues justifies her being a writer who is concerned with the happenings in the postcolonial era.

Another significant event in the history of Nigeria that Atta depicts is the issue of slave trade. The bead is very important, and it was used as currency in the Nigerian history. Frances and Pam's conversation clearly justify the significance of the beads as they are given different names. Atta indicates that “the chevron is known as the star bead and millefiori means a thousand flowers...they were used to buy slaves (p.167). This is justified in an interview with Toni Kan where Atta comments on the significance of history and bead in *The Bead Collector*:

History is very important to my work...Nigeria is not exactly a newly industrialised country either, but we have engaged in trading activities for centuries and have a history of selling people for mere beads. Fast forward to what we have witnessed of late, with our governments. Selling down the river by privatising public utilities and contracting out public services...

This quotation reflects the Nigerian situation during the colonial era. Another important issue that Atta depicts in her novel is the issue of

colonialism and the impact it had on the lives of people. Atta highlights this issue through the character of Remi's father who converted to Christianity and became a priest at St Johns. Remi describes how her grandfather converted to Christianity:

My grandfather converted to Christianity while his family rejected it. Their family would rather have had my grandfather dead than converted to Christianity, so he ran away to a Christian settlement to escape the threats. Missionaries taught him how to read and write English. The English missionary who baptized him stripped him of his family name, Durodula, and baptised and gave him the surname Thomas. (p.76)

Atta stresses the impact of the work of the missionaries which had a tremendous effect on their family. Even though he benefited from the activities of the colonialists, Remi's father is prouder of his culture and did not in any way want to adapt to the way of the colonialists. He argues: Nigerians ought to separate Christianity from colonialism and went on about the ills of the British 'we don't know who we are because of them' (p.88).

In essence, Atta tries to focus on the issue of coup, and its effect in the 21st century particularly highlighted by women writers. Her narration suggests a fulfilment in third world women's writings. This is because the writers are saddled with the responsibility of not only empowering women but also the entire society at large. Even though Atta has highlighted various incidents and touches on different themes in her novel such as oppression, divorce, love, and marriage which are common themes found in women writings, Atta has succinctly introduced something new in *The Bead Collector*. This is because the story did not solely focus on Remi as a married woman with numerous challenges, rather it touches on a very important issue and foreign

character, Frances who is trapped in a difficult situation, how it affected her and how it relates to the Nigerian history.

Conclusion

This paper reveals how Atta continue to empower women and revise the problems of women from different perspectives. Also, an examination of the depiction of Nigerian History and how it relates with women's writings reveals how Atta writes like her early counterparts who continue to emphasise on the need to end gender oppression. Her depiction of the incidents that touch not only women but the society at large in *The Bead Collector* reveals the shift or transformation in women's writings. The concern with gender issues is gradually changing because women writers are changing their concerns as revealed in the novel. As such, this paper concludes that women's writings have gained recognition because of the changes in their concerns which are in line with the happenings in the modern world.

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