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## **The Mappings of New Gender Roles in Sefi Atta's *Lawless* (2012)**

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Master Degree in  
Literature

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## DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this work to

my great parents, the most precious and priceless blessing in my life,

my dear parents, my brothers and sisters: the eldest Kamel who

encouraged me, Fatma, the genius of the family, Djoumana, the

darling of the family, Farouk and Rabiee my brave ones, i wish them a

good future. To my uncles at their head doctors Dakhia Abdelouahab

and Ouafi Abdelkarim without forgetting my wonderful aunts who

filled me with their love, i am fortunate to have you.

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## ABSTRACT

The gender issue is a big concern all over the world especially in Africa. Many gender-related topics are provoked by African novelists, short stories including the new generation of writers who have used English as a vehicle to convey their interest in the field of gender and sexuality writing such as the Nigerian Sefi Atta. The present work is conducted to study the gender role portrayals in Sefi Atta's *Lawless*. It instigates to question the effects of the novel's unusual gender role representations in the social and psychological development of characters. The study is inspired by developmental theories in sociology and psychology. It draws on the assumption of eclectic approach gender theories which demonstrate the gender identification. Therefore, this study focuses on the new path taken in the novel *Lawless* by a figure whose influential voice today.

**Key Words:** African novelists, Gender, Influential, New gender role, New path, Voice.

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the content of this dissertation is purely the result of my research, and that appropriate references or acknowledgements to the work of other researchers are made where required.

Signature

Dakhia

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# **General Introduction**



## General Introduction

The Gender issue is a big concern all over the world especially in Africa. Many Gender-related topics are provoked by African novelists, short stories including the new generation of writers who have used English as a vehicle to convey their interest in the field of Gender and sexuality writing such as the nigerian Séfi Atta.

The themes of this writer's novels or short stories strongly transgress conventions of Gender and sexuality by challenging societal norms and traditions. Séfi Atta of nigerian origin, trained in Great Britain and in the United States, is one of the very good specialists in cultural forms and exchanges between Africa, Europe and the United States, within the framework of feminist studies. and cultural studies. We read one of her works which she has exploited in the representation of nigerian society and which has allowed us to map the new gender roles the , “Lawless” from the collection of short stories “Lawless and other stories”.

Séfi Atta, let's recognize it, as has already been done “she is one of these writers who will not only write a story unless the story is worth telling, artistically, aesthetically, and culturally”( Creative writing class in English, from May 20 to 24, 2010, “Translation events, global networks. Cosmo-politics in Literature and Science)

.The function we wish to give to our object research would be a somewhat in-depth analysis of the new Lawless on certain levels, but our goal is above all to reflect on the influence of the new role of the genre and to be able to participate in some way in highlighting foreign literature to enrich our thinking.

### **The Rational of the Study**

We want to know more about African literature, the literature of African women in particular and above all to promote our culture by opening up to the culture of the other and to participate a little in promoting foreign literature at home in Algeria in order to enrich our universal and human thought and to be able to accept the other, African either he or other. The function that we wish to give to our study would then be formative insofar as the study of gender roles in *Lawless* makes us cross new avenues of reflection and learning.

### **The Statement of the Problem**

The Gender role in recent years tends to take a big leap thanks to the attempts of certain writers like Séfi Atta to transgress the usual one to evoke the new and make the existence of characters with their imaginable behaviours therefore real that they expose on second thought. From the point of view of gender theory, *Lawless* is a literary text of cultural and human condition where the characters bring new gender roles that Séfi Atta uses to convey her ideas and concerns. In her role as an intellectual, she seeks to argue on certain issues of concern to convey her points of view.

*What gender roles are played in Séfi Atta's work Lawless?*

### **Research Questions**

Three questions deserve to be addressed:

1-How does Séfi Atta present postcolonial African society (Nigerian society in particular)?

2-What strategies does Séfi Atta implement in her short story to demonstrate new gender roles?

3- What would she offer to contemporary literature and what would she bring to the intercultural and human learning of the contemporary reader by transgressing traditional Gender norms in this context of evolving globalization?

### **Hypotheses**

We therefore make the following assumptions:

- 1- The novel informs about the postcolonial situation of Nigeria through the narrator voice and the characters who express themselves and expose their experience and their opinions..
- 2- The new gender roles depicted through these characters transgress traditional norms.
- 3- Séfi Atta opts for a new path in contemporary literature with what she offers as points of reflection and alts for learning, she dared to disagree. This work would be a buildings roman that would bring something new to the Nigerian, the African, the Universal thought.

### **Methodology**

The theoretical framework aims to understand the issues of literature with its role in demonstrating the new gender roles that writers would like to see in today's society. The analysis of the short story "Lawless" allows us to analyze the behaviour of gendered characters, their words, their attitudes and to draw from them the function that universal public thought could grant them.

### **Objective of Study**

Through our modest study, we would like to demonstrate that the female character of the short story Lawless by Séfi Atta plays a new role that transgresses the normative genre.

Knowing that his collection, *Lawless and Other Stories*, received the 2009 Noma Award, the work is important in more ways than one so it deserves interest and we want to participate in its analysis to better learn from new literature in world.

### **Scope and Limitation of Study**

The function we wish to give to our object research would be a somewhat in-depth analysis of the new *Lawless* on certain levels, but our goal is above all to reflect on the influence of the new Gender role and to be able to participate in some way in highlighting foreign literature to enrich our thinking.

### **Over View of Upcoming Chapters**

Our study will be divided into three chapters: first a contextual framework where we will define African-American women's literature, its major themes and its main figures, we will present the literary account of Séfi Atta, we will examine her new "*Lawless*" and approach critical reception of the work. The second chapter is a theoretical framework dealing with the Gender matters, femininity, masculinity, gender identity and Gender role. In the third chapter, we will first give a broad idea about *Lawless* where the voice of the narrator and certain characters informs about Nigeria and the tragic situation experienced by the large part of its population. Then we made a table gathering characters, portraits, and a specific character for each character. So, we try to analyse the novel through the characters. We will try to explain that Séfi Atta chooses a new path in contemporary literature and that she dare to say and reveal abnormal situations in a dynamic and full of vivacity story, a story more engaging but less tiring to read despite the complexity of certain themes. We try to demonstrate it by illustration of Toyosi female character that Séfi Atta uses to add a new touch to the contemporary novel.

# **Chapter One**

## **Contextual Framework**

## **Chapter One: Contextual Framework**

1.1 Introduction

1.2 African American Woman Literature

1.2.1 Major Themes

1.2.2 Main Figures

1.3 Sefi Atta: Literary Account

1.4 *Lawless*: a Literary Examination

1.5 Critical Reception

1.6 Conclusion

## 1.1 Introduction

The literary works of the Nigerian writer Séfi Atta have enjoyed great success and remarkable reception. Reading one of her works is an opportunity for us not only to appreciate African American literature but to have a moment of reflection created by a creative writer who has been able to hook the reader without he has the slightest weariness or disgust. Literature, being the fruit of interaction between different peoples and cultures, the reflection of a society allowing visualizing the society of an era, “the novelist is the witness, a historian”. We feat one of the works of this writer for our research study that we would like to see it multidimensional insofar as we are going to take the opportunity to try to show its importance and its contribution on several levels. And as the Senegalese novelist Marima Ba said, Reading is an opening to the world in the sense that it questions our singularities, revisits our collective history while providing us with food for thought in our way of inhabiting the world" (.....) , «the literary examination of this short story, and end by addressing the reception and criticism of this literary creation. For those who want to enjoy it more read Séfi Atta and find out more. The researcher attempts to examine one of the works of this writer multidimensional insofar as he is going to take the opportunity to try to show its importance and its contribution on several levels. This what motivated us to work on a "Lawless", an example of literary creation by Séfi Atta, with the intention of making it a dissertation thesis topic. Recently published with his novel Swallow, “Lawless and other stories” concerns postcolonial thought and translation in the tradition of Antoine Berman, Henri Meschonnic and Lawrence Vénuti today.

In our first chapter, we will first begin the contextual framework: African American feminist literature, its main themes, these main characters, the literary account of this novelist, the literary examination of this short story and end by

addressing the reception and criticism of this literary creation. For those who want to enjoy it more read Séfi Atta and find out more.

## **1.2 African American Woman Literature**

Afro-American literature is a literary current of the United States which has its origins in the authors of the 18th century and which sees the apogee of the institute of slavery, the slave trade culminates, this triangular trade takes place between Europe (junk , fabrics , beads, firearms, etc...), West and Equatorial Africa (slaves) and the West Indies and the Americas (agricultural products: cotton, tea...)

Africans used English as a "medium of expression", the first African novel written in English was by Ekra Agiman known by Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford, Ethiopia Unbound, Studies in Race Emancipation.(Encyclopedia), which sets out the conflict between the African world and the English world. However, the latest generation of African writers has decided to expand their writing to surpass that of colonization and they write on global themes.

Most of the novels by female writers, such as "The Bluest Eye" (1970) by Toni Morrison and "The Devil That Danced on the Water" (2002) by Aminatta Forna deal with the difficulties of African women, especially in rural villages. Women writers challenge societal norms and traditions. They develop a broad awareness of themselves and the world around them. Their writings decolonize African and the English world. However, the latest generation of African writers has decided to expand their writing to surpass that of colonization and they write on global themes.



## 1-2-1 Major Themes

Many African-American writers deal with different important themes in their writing such as equality, gender relations, social class, forced marriages, sexuality, etc., most of which are related to the experience of postcolonial African women themselves. These writers thus give voice to the experiences of women in order to raise their awareness and promote their rights. Kumah attributes this as he states that:

As a consequence of the male-dominated literary tradition, many of the depictions of African women are reductive – perpetuating popular myths of female subordination. Female characters in male-authored works are rarely granted primary status – their roles often trivialized to varying degrees – and they are depicted as silent and submissive in nature. (6)

African female writers show how women are portrayed as socially backward and how African women are traditionally overlooked

It is important to comment on the famous writer Mariana Ba, in another article: "Mariana Ba, a woman, an activist", according to her, which makes the quality of her novel "A so long Letter", it is the exact and painful expression of women's lives. It is in this, in the evocation of experiences placed at the heart of the contradictions and tensions of a society in full transition, that his novel reaches its literary.

Other authors have also treated different themes, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie for example who tackled issues of racism, feminism, and cultural purotin in her autobiography "I know Why the Caged Bird Sing", Maya Angelou who describe her tumultuous childhood. and Emechta, her works explores the tension between tradition and modernity.

### 1.2.2 Main figures

A few figures from African-American women's literature including:

Maya Angelou (1928), celebrated author and poet, her autobiography *I know why the Caged Bird Sings* described her tumultuous childhood.

Toni Morrison (1931), celebrated author of the African American experience. She received the Pulitzer Prize in 1987 for her novel *Beloved*. In 1993, she was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

Alice Walker (1944), is a graduate of Lawrence College. After graduating in 1965, she moved to Mississippi and was involved in the civil rights movement.

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), African American writer associated with the Harlem Renaissance. She was an anthropologist and folklorist who wrote about African.

American writer Dorothy West at Home (1907-1998) was an author and part of the literary circle during the Harlem Renaissance that also included Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston.

Other figures that deserve our attention:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, recognized as one of the most significant African writers on her generation. She started her career to some acclaim with *Purple Hibiscus*, but it was her second novel: *Half of a Yellow Sun*, that cemented her reputation as a writer. She followed that with "Americanah". In 2017, *Fortune* magazine ranked Adichie as one of the 50 most influential people in the world.

Chinua Achebe, his two best known books "*Things Fall Apart*", "*No Longer at Ease*" have left a lasting mark on literature from the continent.

Buchi Emecheta (21 July 1944-25 January 2017), her stories as "stories of the world, where women face the universal problems of poverty and oppression, and the longer they stay, no matter where they have come from originally, the more the problems become identical." Her works explore the tension between tradition and modernity. She has been characterized as "the first successful black woman novelist living in Britain after 1948".

Flora Nwapu, In 1966, her book "*Efuru*" published in the "African Writers Series" collection made her the first woman to join this collection. It will be necessary to wait again until thirty titles are published for a woman to reappear in the collection.

Séfi Atta was a juror for the 2010 Neustadt International Prize for literature, and has received several literary awards for her works, including the 2006 Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa and 2009 Noma Award for Publishing in Africa. In 2015, a critical study of her novels and short stories, *Writing Contemporary Nigeria: How Sefi Atta illuminates African culture and Tradition*, was published by Cambria Press, Also a playwright, her radio plays have been broadcast by BBC and her stage plays have been performed and published internationally

### **1.3 Sefi Atta Literary Account**

Séfi Atta, novelist, short story writer and playwright, born in Lagos, Nigeria in 1964, graduated from the University of Birmingham, she left England for the United States in 1994. She began writing in New York and divided her time between Nigeria, England and the United States. She is part of the new generation of Nigerian writers who have taken over from their illustrious elders: Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapu. This rising generation including Séfi Atta is part of

telling the stories of the ups and downs of contemporary Nigeria, its dictatorships, its corrupt elites, its civil wars and its failings as a nurturing and protective nation. . Postcolonial Nigeria inspires her, a country where men and women face authoritarianism, corruption, precariousness and underdevelopment.

Séfi Atta's novels are characterized by their resolutely urban setting; she paints the portrait of Lagos, her hometown, where she located dramatic daily life, full of sound and fury besides most of her intrigues. Her writings are shaking up and renewing the Anglophone literary situation in Africa. A few works of the writer with the aim of exposing a sample of her literary account as rich and weighty:

In her first novel “Everything good will come” where she talks about the friendship between two women, Séfi Atta paints the portrait of Nigeria, a country which, barely out of the Biafra war, will be the prey of multiple disorders, has won the Wole-Soyinka Prize in 2006.

#### **1.4 Lawless: Literary Examination**

An examination of the social, political, individual and psychological situation of characters representing a cross-section of many categories of Nigerien African-American society during the Abacha regime depicting the tension, suffering, conflict and many other problems to through the story of five unionist university students, Crazehead, Professor Fineboy, Shango and the narrator Ogun. A moving story in a simple style but weighty at all levels and which will be the topic of our study in the third chapter. A short story with what it plays as roles in reflection, thought, awareness, sharing and universalism brings back scenes copies of African reality, Nigeria in particular, with a description of extraordinary characters which transports the reader to such a fascinating yet thought-provoking literary world. (Jyothirmai and Ramesh)

## 1.5 Critical Reception

The works of Séfi Atta have been very successful and received an excellent reception, but concerning us in person, as a researcher reader, the short story "Lawless" from its first reading proves to be endearing in what it tells and depicts. , in the universalism of the words in his multidimensional characters description. Séfi Atta does all this with a zealous story, a simple narration. The magic lies in his power to hook us and make us familiar with the situations of his scenes presented. Here themes and characters are inspired by the true real postcolonial Nigerien from which it draws elements of reflection. Her ideas are today topic of interest of the new generation writers

- 1 In "Every Thing Good Will Come", Sefi Atta offers an initiatory novel, spanning several decades, of an Africa tirelessly repeating these errors. It gives an image that is both fair and not very optimistic of a continent locked in corruption and the careerism of these leaders. These portraits of women are touching, confirming the richness of African literature.
- 2 "*Swallow*" An African novel, a mixture of modernity and ancestral traditions, a good time to read.
- 3 "News from the country", eleven ingenious and captivating news! Sefi Atta affixes to it a panoramic vision of Nigerian life as well as its customs which fit in with a modern world hounded between Christianity and Islam, an adulterous woman is condemned to be stoned, a coachbuilder sees his house become a place of pilgrimage after the appearance of an image of the Virgin Mary on a windshield than of a contemporary Nigeria where the only motive is survival.

Atta's works deal generally with the the journey's culmination, is still beyond of the heroes' reach. Instead, their movement is marked by a stagnation that is a rather depressing embodiment of postcolonial theoretical terms like liminality, hybridity, or in-betweenness that reflect a "optimistic and celebratory picture of globalization." (Gikandi 610)

## **1.6 Conclusion**

Literary reading with all that it brings us would help develop our identity and open ourselves to others with a deeper vision shared with the intellectuals of our time. Thus, reading *Lawless* by Séfi Atta is an opportunity for us not only to taste African American literature but to enter it with a present and conscientious spirit in this conflicting area of globalization. It is good to open up to other cultures that are a little different from our own but with common humanitarian points, for example. This kind of literary creation in Séfi Atta as an English-speaking African woman tends to share with us the dynamic of universal expression that has been essential in recent years with this new generation of ambitious writers, including women.

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# **Chapter Two:**

## **Theoretical Debate**

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Debate**

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Gender Matters

2.3 Gender Role

2.4 Femininity

2.5 Masculinity

2.6 Gender Identity

2.7 Conclusion



## 2.1 Introduction

Gender matter has been and remains problematic as long as visions and definitions differ. The interest that we bring to the Gender has increased in recent years and those who take the responsibility of finding an adequate definition for it continue to notice the evolution of this term according to societal, scientific and other changes. In literature, the representation of Gender bodies and behaviors is significant. We consult quite a few sources to be able to define Gender, femininity, masculinity, Gender identity. In order to make this theoretical part more relevant, we will state Gender concept as an element of fundamental analysis for literature.

## 2.2 Gender Matters

“By Gender, we mean the socio-cultural construction of male and female roles and relationships between men and women, while “sex” refers to biological characteristics, being born male or female. Research on gender has in its construction been deeply nourished by the contribution of literature. Literature has been a place and a privileged means to question the social order of the sexes”( .Gender in literature refers to the ways in which cha | <https://monusco.unmissions.org/>)

Characters are defined and treated by others based on their Gender It is first to be noted, as we have read, that in the current landscape of Gender studies, literature was very present during the emergence of the concept and the constitution of the field of research in English-speaking countries.

Gender has been mentioned in literature for young people and children, we note for example from an important article that: "Though they claim to be interested in the deconstruction of gender, such analyzes tend to presuppose the binary opposition between men and women, focusing almost exclusively on women and assuming that what is at stake in dealing with Gender is merely the subversion of Gender models. within culture in its broader sense"

### **2-3 Gender Role.**

It is defined; in literature that Gender refers to how authors and characters define themselves and how society evaluates them based on their Gender. Sex, Gender, and sexuality shape narrative texts and readers' understanding of them in many ways. And that "Gender roles serve as individual codes of behavior determined by societal expectations of different sexes. Sex, Gender, and sexuality are not the same thing: Sex is a biological concept determined by primary sex Characteristics, Gender refers to the identities, values, and roles which individuals ascribe to different sexes, sexuality refers to the orientation of desire towards a particular sex. Strict Gender roles resulted in a system that privileged straight white men over other categories of people. It affected individuals' access to education, financial support, and career. Eventually, feminism has emerged worldwide to advocate for political, economic, social, and personal equality of all genders.

[https://customwriting.org/?et=a1056o6p98&discount\\_code=welcom20](https://customwriting.org/?et=a1056o6p98&discount_code=welcom20)

In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler explains that Gender is so much more complicated than just identity, "Our Gender structure is changing, unevenly, and without any clear guidelines. We also know that while most Americans think gender is an identity, something deeply felt internally, Gender is far more than that. She adds that Gender as a social structure includes one's individual sex category

but is far more than simply that. Gender is also a social construct that is used to display and claim one's sex category. Few of us actually can judge someone's sex by inspecting naked bodies, but all of us assess each other's Gender identity during an interaction (xiv, xv).

Gender roles in society means how we're expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves based upon our assigned sex. For example, girls and women are generally expected to dress in typically feminine ways and be polite, accommodating, and nurturing. Men are generally expected to be strong, aggressive, and bold. Every society, ethnic group, and culture has gender role expectations, but they can be very different from group to group. They can also change in the same society over time (Yinger 625-627,629).

A stereotype is a widely accepted judgment or bias about a person or group — even though it's overly simplified and not always accurate. Stereotypes about gender can cause unequal and unfair treatment because of a person's Gender. This is called sexism. In her article entitled *Gender Stereotypes in the Five Year Engagement Movie*, Zuhro distinguishes four basic kinds of gender stereotypes:

1. Personality traits— For example, women are often expected to be accommodating and emotional, while men are usually expected to be self-confident and aggressive.
2. Domestic behaviors— For example, some people expect that women will take care of the children, cook, and clean the home, while men take care of finances, work on the car, and do the home repairs.
3. occupations— Some people are quick to assume that teachers and nurses are women, and that pilots, doctors, and engineers are men.

4. physical appearance— For example, women are expected to be thin and graceful, while men are expected to be tall and muscular. Men and women are also expected to dress and groom in ways that are stereotypical to their Gender (men wearing pants and short hairstyles, women wearing dresses and make-up (125).

Gender, with the characteristic aspect it offers, should be taken consciously into the rules of respect for one another in society and in this conflicting context of globalization.

#### **2-4 Femininity**

It is reported that Femininity is not merely a psychologically or biologically defined attribute. Despite the significance of biological and psychological mechanisms in the formation of gender, it is important to define it as a non-essentialist concept formed through socio-cultural processes.<sup>1</sup>, and that “In our culture, a trait is deemed “feminine” if it is often associated with women. Common examples include being verbal and communicative, emotive or effusive, being nurturing and having an appreciation for beautiful or aesthetically pleasing things. Similarly, other traits are deemed “masculine” solely because they are often associated with men (Hofstede).

#### **2-5 Masculinity**

Masculinity is a form of Gender, variously defined as an identity, a social role, and a form of power and is typically, though not exclusively, associated with men. From the same reference, we retain that: Masculinities and femininities refer to the social roles, behaviors, and meanings prescribed for men and women in any society at any time. Such normative Gender ideologies must be distinguished from biological 'sex,' and must be understood to be plural as there is no single definition for all men and all women. Masculinities and femininities are structured and expressed through

other axes of identity such as class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexuality. Thus some definitions are held up as the hegemonic versions, against which others are measured. Gender ideologies are more than properties of individuals; masculinities and femininities are also institutionally organized and elaborated and experienced through interactions.( Freidan 30)

“The term 'masculinity' refers to the roles, behaviors and attributes that are considered appropriate for boys and men in a given society. Masculinity is constructed and defined socially, historically and politically, rather than being biologically driven. We can think of masculinity as a shorthand for talking about the social expectations and practices of manhood; expectations and practices which are reinforced everyday by individuals as well as by institutions, such as the law, the economy, religion, education and the media. Women as well as men are involved in reinforcing these social expectations of masculinity (eg when a mother tells her son to act like a man”(. <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/>)

Variety of masculinities: Because masculinity is about the social expectations of manhood, this means that there is no single, fixed definition of masculinity. There are many socially constructed definitions for being a man and these can change over time and from place to place; as we can see from our own lives when we compare the lives of our fathers and grandfathers with those of the younger generation of men today. If different masculinities exist, then alternatives to patriarchal masculinities are possible. In many places we can see that there are roles, behaviors and attributes that are considered appropriate for men who emphasize relations of equality and respect between women and men (Butler 33).

## **2-6 Gender Identity**

To better understand ourselves and the people around us, Gender should be well perceived. It is important to know more about Gender identity and Gender expression. But, there is evidence that femininity and masculinity as two opposite terms, experience an evolution of their definition through the societal and evolutionary chronology of perception.

Gender identity is defined as a personal conception of oneself as male or female (or rarely, both or neither). This concept is intimately related to the concept of gender role, which is defined as the outward manifestations of personality that reflect the gender identity. Gender identity, in nearly all instances, is self-identified, as a result of a combination of inherent and extrinsic or environmental factors.

## **2-7 Conclusion**

In terms of connections between women and men, girls and boys, and women and men, Gender refers to the social characteristics and possibilities that come with being male or female. These characteristics, chances, and connections are socially formed and acquired through the socialization processes. They can be altered and are context- and time-specific. What is expected, permitted, and valued in a woman or a man in a certain setting is determined by Gender. The ability to make decisions, the tasks given to them, the activities they engage in, and the access to and control over resources varies and are unequally distributed between men and women in the majority of civilizations.

**Chapter Three:**  
**Dared to Disagree**

## **Chapter Three: Dared to Disagree**

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Safi Atta's Lawless(2012)

3.3 Character Summary Table

3.4 Characterisation

3.5 New Path

3.6 Dared to Desagree

3.7 Founding

3.8 Conclusion



### 3.1 Introduction

We are going to analyze some elements of description, some remarks of the characters and the tricks that Séfi Atta puts in place to work to transmit points of view in a literary creation so endearing as *Lawless*, or, as we notice, from the beginning, different portraits are intelligently juxtaposed as if the writer seeks to expose them all to us at once without delay to introduce us to their lives and experiences through the narrating voice which is that of one of her characters to make us launch the sequel in different situations depending on the rapid development of the story.

We begin at first by giving a broad idea about *Lawless* where the voice of the narrator and certain characters informs about Nigeria and the tragic situation experienced by the large part of its population. We made a table gathering characters, portraits, and a specific character for each character. Then, we try to analyse the novel through the characters. We will try to explain that Séfi Atta chooses a new path in contemporary literature and she dare to say and reveal abnormal giving identifying each character by the characterisation granted to him, which will make us discover that the narration of Séfi Atta is out of the ordinary and takes a different path compared to previous writings , which gives him this aspect of transgressor of the normal. Séfi Atta dares to differ from what has been gendered before and whose representation has been commonly instilled in the minds of the public. This characterisation will lead us to analyze the new path in gender representation taken by the author to transgress the normal and allow us to distinguish innovation in this gender literary from the new generation of African-American women writers as influential voices today. We are going to note the important character granted to the narration of Séfi Atta which is that of the "daring to be in disagreement" of its characters with the norms existing in society as an expression on their part, therefore of the writer, of the will to say no, to want to change. We do this as a final step in analyzing the novel *Lawless*.

### 3-2 Séfi Atta's *Lawless*(2012)

The story of *Lawless* introduces the reader to a difficult period in postcolonial Nigeria where Lagos and all the country was going through a tragic situation affecting a large part of the population through the voice of the narrator who describes it from the beginning and throughout the narration and sometimes leaving it to a character which further reinforces the aim of the author to inform everything in order to set up a background for the story of five third-year university theater students who formed a group of trade unionists who demanded legal rights in society at a time when the dictatorship of the regime, the legacy of colonialism persisted causing injustice, inequality, poverty, famine.....and violence The narrator announces that **“Lagos wasn’t exactly a paradise when the Lawless was formed”**(Séfi Atta page 67...), He let be known that the trade union body, of which he was a member, was .feared because of the demonstration organized in disagreement with the regime after the arrest of the president elect, long before his wife was assassinated, and many people had sought asylum abroad.

Séfi Atta develops a real concern about discomfort experienced by Nigerian people through the characters of *Lawless*. For example, the tragic memory of Ogun character and narrator **”The garden turned on a mess after my family was killed”,** **”,As a tribute to my family, I placed candles on the pool steps each time the Lawless occurred on the deep end of the pool”**, to say that the theater played by this group is done at Ogun home and that *Lawless* is produced there too. Séfi Atta means that the *Lawless* was born of intense suffering and and unease in a society drowned in disorder and unjust dictatorship and in clever allegorical style, she conveys her at it by implying her argumentative ideas hidden behind the lines of narration or the characters lines.

Five male characters playing at the theater, They are mostly men and that has an impact on the conception of the female gender by confronting them. Toyosi fired from acting due to lack of funding and kicked out of family home, her father behaved badly towards her mother and her mother behaved badly towards her. Throughout the story, the writer gives the impression of embodying a strong woman whom she uses to paint a portrait of Nigerian woman who could defy difficulties and impose herself in society. This confrontation ended in their favor since Toyosi was able to make theme change and in her favor when she defied and exceeded the difficulties and found again her passion for writing.

### **3-3 Characterization**

From one novel or to another, from one portrait to another, Séfi Atta exhibits different stereotypes actually existing in Niger. For example, in “Every Thing Good Will Come”The, his first novel, Enitan and Sheri are two young girls breaking away from the order and disorder of a Nigeria barely out of the war in Biafra<sup>1</sup>, in Avale, her second novel, the character Lamidi Salako, like the metonymic character, allowed her to paint the portrait of the egocentric Nigerian man who poisons the female living space, to reveal the writer's journey to use his characters to transmit his concerns which are those of any Nigerian or even of any human being through literature.

In the novel Lawless, Séfi Atta proceeds from the beginning to juxtapose her male characters: Fine Boy, Professor, Crazehead, Shango and Ogun, the narrator and add the fifth, a woman, With a mixture of simplicity, humor and brevity, she passes from one description to another while involving the reader in the situation of Nigeria by painting the portrait of this country barely out of the war of Blafra, therefore prey to disorders and social problems as it did

in the other novels. But she also proceeds to argue. The novel is therefore intended to be informative and argumentative insofar as, through its characters, Sefi Atta gives us various points of view and arguments throughout the story. They are about five third-year theater arts students who were due to graduate when the Abacha regime shut down their university. The narrator portraying one of these Ogun students introduces them to us as members of a trade unionist group that defends legal political and societal rights and performs theater in Lagos.

Five male characters, the narrator Ogun, portraying one of these students, introduces them to us as members of a trade unionist group that defends legal political and societal rights and performs theater in Lagos. . Fineboy, Proffissor, Creazheaid, Shango and Ogun the narrator are just pseudonyms used, Ogun for example: God of iron and war. The writer relies on the description and the words of these characters to encourage reflection and why not react. As we have already announced

The writer relies on the description and the words of these characters to encourage reflection and why not react.

1-First, the narrator character Ogun is a creative who against violence.

The others, we can get an idea through the presentation of the narrator:

**2-“Fineboy was from the Niger Delta, thick-chested, and he had all that Norwegian ancestry working for him.” “They(rich women who used him) said he was a bushman”**

**3- “Professor was another who had good reasons to begrudge women: his small hands, small feet. Add to that, his back was crooked from scoliosis, so he panicked when he got undressed and couldn’t successfully get laid. To save himself, he wrote poetry”.**

4-Creashead,“He mixed up his H’s like a typical Ibadan man, had theses crowded teeth covered in plaque, and his eyes were perpetually red. Creashead had no musical talent. ----

5-“Shango was just big for nothing, really”

.These are just a few characters that may help us to make a modest analysis by confronting them with the female character that Séfi Atta introduced into the story to implement the issue of gender roles in his novel.

### 3-4 Summary table

Character	Physical portrait	Character trait	Specific character
Fine Boy	Massive chest	Bushman	skirt racer
Professor	-small -twisted back -croxded	Write poetry	liar
Creashead	-crowded teeth covered in plaque -eyes perpetually red and swollen		No musical talent
Shango	-mesures more than one meter 80 -deep dimples	-The narrator right hand man -little shiny	-The darling of the association of university -women trusted him

The table summarizes the presentation of the men characters, the narrator character Ogun was creative and against violence

### 3-5 New Path

The woman character, Toyosi , as soon as she appears in the story, reports a social situation representing the experience of a Nigerien woman marginalized by the patriarchal society but combative and seeks to impose herself and advance towards the future, forward and not submit to the harshness of life. After being fired from her job as an actress in a soap opera for lack of funding, she refuses to sleep with her director, she looks for work with the young peoples, their cooking for example. From the first words, we quickly understand that she is not the feminine type sensitive to reproaches or insulting remarks, she is there because she has a goal, no matter what one or the other says, that interests her less. Granted, she's fired from her acting job due to lack of funding,

Séfi Atta adopts a new path in contemporary literature by using characters in new Gender roles, abnormal roles.

Once, she proposed the groupe to rob her rich sister when her baby had just died and had nothing to save him. and they did it, but finally, as Ogun says at the end, there is some regret.

Séfi atta by the narrator Ogun signales also the change of Crazehead: **“One surprise: as we prepared for our next night as the Lawless, it was Crazehead who became the most solemn in our group, Crazehead who made us promise to stick to our plans and vow never to spill blood again”**

### 3-6 Dared to Desagree

What Toyosi is looking for is to rebuild herself, to prove her ability to change her situation. The narrating voice is involved in the justification of points of this character. Thus, we notice what is called the “daring to disagree” very present in this

short story where Soyosi, a woman like no other, at least not of the ordinary kind that the students could imagine. She keeps them quiet, she impresses them with her strong lines. They weren't used to meeting a woman with this audacity, this tone and this determination. At first, Ogun was about to let her down in view of their situation, the others refused her, too but she insists and she stays. Her confrontation with these characters was depicted by Séfi Atta in an intelligent manner. Once, she proposed the groupe to rob her rich sister when her baby had just died and had nothing to save him. and they did it, but finally, as Ogun says at the end, there is some regret.

### **3-5 Foundings**

We are far from making a complete analysis of the novel but it clear that the writer with the artistic sense felt at home, the intellectual and cultural level that she possesses was able to make *Lawless*, a document history, a report and a relevant argumentative text insofar as it combines its functions in a work where the reader can learn about postcolonial Nigeria. It set a backdrop for the suffering and problems of Nigerians during a turbulent time, civil war, armed gangs, famine, unemployment...the list goes on. The magic of this writer lies in her techniques of doing it sometimes through storytelling, e.g. "The body yelled 'No' to the IMF, they had organized a "peaceful demonstration in support of the National Democratic Coalition" to inform the reader of the political conflict in the country. The sentence "Lagos was not exactly a peaceful paradise" is significant, many others are illustrative. Dates, places, comments, different points of view... the whole issue of the literary creation of the writer.



To demonstrate the new gender roles in the work *Lawless* we take the confrontation of the characters through the words of Toyosi, for example, such as: **"The story is so parished and irrelevant today"** reply addressed to Ogun and the others with an unexpected audacity, again: **"You do not act"**, a call, an exhortation to action on her part to the men, what more can we say ?....this and many other stops on informations, arguments, appeals or other.

When the narrator evoked to Toyosi his tragic memory of the assassination of all his family, the statement: **"In tribute to my family, I place candles on the steps of the swimming pool each time the *Lawless* was happening in the deep end of the pool"**, it contains this word (*Lawless*) that he uses at other times, the reader could fall into loss and confusion without this narrative strategy of the writer to hook the reader by putting stops to ask questions.

Throughout the reading, the female character Toyosi evolves in her role and leads a remarkable change, it says by the narrator Ogun in the end of the story:

**((At first we were a little shy of one another in that house. We were not sure how to regard each other, as actors or armed robbers. Then, the haze of harmattan lifted and it became clear that we were brothers))**

**The Abacha regime announced they were reopening our university. We knew we would not be returning to graduate. We heard from the British Council and I asked them to save their patronage for a more serving theater group.**

**One surprise: as we prepared for our next night as the *Lawless*, it was Crazehead who became the most solemn in our group, Crazehead who made us promise to stick to our plans and vow never to spill blood again..**

As for Toyosi, and this was way before she christened me Lord of the Lawless, way before we became lovers, her daughter got better, plumper than the day she arrived, and Toyosi began to write her play. Just like that. She didn't know how the story would end, but I had a clue how it began. She claimed that she'd unblocked us and now we were unblocking her. I told her she'd invented a new form of plagiarism. As we went out to perform in homes throughout Lagos, the woman just wrote and wrote, and wrote)).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we demonstrated the new gender role through the female character of Toyosi after demonstrating some strategies of the writer to report the situation of her country and the experiences of the characters made real. Our analysis was limited to a few illustrative elements only but frankly we learned a lot in a short time and few lines to say that the writings of Séfi Atta weigh a lot. This end of the story alone proves the effect of the new gender role in Lawless 2012.

# **General Conclusion**

## General Conclusion

After an in-depth reading on the theme of our study, we retain above all that African female writers develop a broad awareness of themselves and of the world around them. Their writings decolonize their minds from the imprisonment of human habit of thought and redefine their perception of who they are. So, they undertake to participate in the fight against certain obstacles that prevent women from living peacefully without discomfort in a community based on justice and respect far from gender issues.

At the end of our study, we report that first that African literature has been the subject of investigations by many scholars and critics for its belonging to Western language and genre, but also for the study of characteristic aspects of human societies and cultures.

Nigerian English-speaking women writers in their post-colonial writings used literature to represent the real world. Séfi Atta, like many other writers, introduces new issues into African literature. Her goal is to create a path through freedom for African women who are doubly colonized; by the habit of thought of the colonizer and of men.

. The female character Toyosi played a big role in changing the situation of the group of trade unionists. She is a dynamic character who dares to speak.

In *Lawless*, she develops her real concern for the subject of the dramatic situation in her country and that of women.

The new roles she assigns to her characters shape behaviors in ways that can affect readers' perceptions.

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-<https://reference.medscape.com/> **DefinitionsGender identity and gender role**Updated: Dec 09, 2020 Author: Shuvo Ghosh, MD, FAAP, DABP



## ملخص

تشكل مسألة نوع الجنس شاغلا كبيرا في جميع أنحاء العالم، ولا سيما في أفريقيا. ويستفز الروائيون الأفارقة العديد من المواضيع المتعلقة بنوع الجنس، ومن بينها قصص قصيرة عن جيل جديد من الكتاب الذين يستخدمون اللغة الإنكليزية كوسيلة للتعبير عن اهتمامهم في مجال الكتابة الجنسية والجنسانية، من قبيل الكتاب النيجيريين سفي آتا. وهي تحرض على التشكيك في الآثار المترتبة على الدور غير العادي للرواية بين الجنسين في التطور الاجتماعي والنفسي للشخصيات. وتستلهم الدراسة النظريات التنموية في علم الاجتماع وعلم النفس. ويستند هذا النهج إلى افتراض النظريات الجنسانية للنهج الانتقائي التي تبين تحديد نوع الجنس. ولذلك، توضح هذه الدراسة الآثار المحتملة لعدم ملائمة التمثيل الجنساني في الرواية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الجنس، الدور الجنساني، الروائيون الأفارقة، عدم الملائمة