



## Dokumentation

# Sefi Atta – It's my turn

Der weibliche Blick auf Nigeria

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## Opening

**Schmidjell:** Dear ladies and gentleman, dear friends, welcome to our reading. I would like to give a special welcome to our guest Sefi Atta who came all the long way from Alabama in the USA. I would like to thank our partner, the City Libraries of Vienna, the Austrian Development Cooperation and NANCA. Who or what is NANCA? This might be better answered by the President, Mr. Oluyemi Ogundele.

**Ogundele:** Dear ladies and gentleman, dear Sefi Atta, I would like to welcome you in the name of NANCA, the National Association of Nigerians in Austria. It is our second cooperation with the VIDC. The first event was also related to Sefi Atta's book and took place within the celebrations of the 50 Years of Independence. I do not want to give a long introduction about NANCA. Rather I would like to recommend our website, [www.nanca.net](http://www.nanca.net).

**Schmidjell:** Why is the VIDC organizing this event? First, I would like to refer to a very famous person, the Nobel Prize winner Doris Lessing, who said: "Without African literature the orchestra of world literature is missing an important instrument". This is true. But if you look to today's realities, especially in the German speaking countries, African literature is not very known. If you go to the mainstream bookstores you will hardly find African literature, and if so, it is placed in the "exotic" section. There is one bookstore in Vienna called Südwind, which promotes contemporary African literature. Today, Südwind has a bookstand here, where you can buy the books by Sefi Atta.

Secondly, being part of the so-called developmental organizations we must realize one thing as a friend once said: "The European development experts know very much about Africa. But I am not sure if they understand the social and cultural context properly, about the dynamics of our societies." Arts, theatre or literature can teach us a lot about the complexity of the daily life in African societies.

Thirdly, as my friend Oluyemi said before, we cooperated last year already. Culture and literature brought together the people. 42,000 Africans and Austrians with African roots live in Austria. But the dialogue with Austrian organizations is not yet like it should be. Therefore I am happy that we had the opportunity to organize this event together with NANCA and that many Nigerians and friends of Nigeria followed our invitation.

Now I would like to hand over to our moderator, Mrs. Corinna Milborn. She is a journalist. Maybe you know her from TIV and the News-Magazine. She is editor-in-

chief of the Human Rights magazine *Liga für Menschenrechte*. She is the author of several books; one is called *Gestürmte Festung Europa*. She is a specialist in areas like Human Rights, Migration and EU-Policies. Thank you very much and I wish you an interesting evening.

**Milborn (Moderation):** It is a big pleasure for me to be here tonight because I really love the books by Sefi Atta. Thank you for your coming. I will start with a short introduction of the author. Sefi Atta is one of the most important postcolonial authors. She was born in Lagos; she transferred to England and later to United States. Actually, Sefi Atta is a trained accountant. Later on she became a writer and very soon a successful one. Her short stories have appeared in literary journals. Sefi Atta won with her debut novel *Everything Good Will Come* the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa. In 2009, *News From Home* won the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa.

Today she will read from her novel *Swallow*. The German part will be read by Dorit Ehlers who I would like to welcome too. Dorit Ehlers is an actress from the Group "Ohne Titel". *Swallow* is about two young women in Nigeria. They have their struggle within the complex society of Nigeria. The two young women work in a bank and confronted with sexism and dismissal. One goes the way of emancipation; the other one chooses the more conventional way, the "house-wife path". It shows the ways between the modern world as well as the world of traditional and spiritual life, which can be very harmful to women.

What I really like about your books Sefi, the women you paint are always fighters. So revolution, evolution is a big thing there, and they are always strong women although they have big difficulties in their lives. Your book really helps to understand the life in Nigeria a lot better than any other books I've read about the country. So, thanks for being here and I'd invite both of you to start with the reading.

## Reading by Sefi Atta and Dorit Ehlers from “Swallow” (English Edition) and “It’s is my turn” (German Edition)



“Swallow” (English), [Interlink Books](#)  
(Sept, 2010), Pages: 296 pages, ISBN-10: 1566568333

“It’s is my turn” (German Edition),  
ISBN-10: 3779502968 | ISBN-13: 978-3779502968, July 2010, Peter Hammer,  
Wuppertal

## Statements and Panel Discussion

**Milborn:** We’ll have a discussion now and of course you’re all invited to join. I’d like to present you the people who are on the panel. First, Sarah Udoh Grossfurthner, member of NANCA, that’s the National Association of Nigerian Communities in Austria. She studied Diplomatic Studies and is now doing her Masters in Professional Writing, creative writing, so she’s an author too. And she also helped and supported African women and children in Nigeria, specifically in Akwa Ibom State, in education and forming cooperatives and microfinance. Welcome.

Joana Adesuwa Reiterer comes also from Nigeria. She came to Austria eight years ago and she’s the founder and head of the Verein “Exit”. This is an organization, which works against women trafficking. And she’s also an author and she’s also an actress. Her latest book is called *Wassergöttin, Wie ich den Bann des Voodoo brach*. I think you’ll translate it to English better than me. It deals with her growing up in Nigeria. Welcome, Joana.

Finally I welcome Joseph Orji. He’s born in Nigeria, he’s a priest, he’s in Austria since 2005 and studied Catholic Theology, and for five years he was working with ACC, the Africa Catholic Community in Austria. Now he’s concentrating on his studies and his research on migration, gender, and ethnic discrimination. Welcome, Joseph.

Sefi, I think before we ask you any questions we'll hear some reactions of the three here. I think I would like to ask Sarah as you are yourself an author, to give us some words on what you felt when you read the books and what you think about them.

**Sarah Udoh Grossfurthner:** My first take on the book is the way that Sefi has been able to depict the complexity of life, you know, issues that we see are much more than what we see on the surface, and then there's also the idea in the book of choices, of course, you make choices and that choices have consequences. But then again we see that the choices that we make are often determined by circumstances that we find ourselves in. Either that or they are also determined or as a result of values that were given to us during our formative years. And so at the end of the day you ask yourself really, the choices that we call our own, are they really our own? Or are they determined by the circumstances that we find ourselves in?

**Milborn:** Joana, you work with women who have migrated to Europe, either migrated or were taken here and most of them have stories a bit similar I think to the ones that I know of the women in Sefi's books. Because they are victims of circumstance on one hand and true fighters on the other hand. They want to fight their way to Europe. Could you tell us a bit about how you see them living here and what are the circumstances around them.

**Joana Adesuwa Reiterer:** Good evening and thank you for allowing me to be here. Most of the women we work with are not very representative, because Nigeria is a very diverse country. There are certain areas in Nigeria where women are specifically recruited to come to Europe and they take this offer hoping to have a better life. It's all in the search for a better life and some of them decide because they want to enhance their families. They take very strong decisions to sacrifice their time or their education to come to Europe. So when they get here, actually, sometimes they realize that it's not that much better than it was in Nigeria. There are other hurdles and challenges to face. But in the long run what we notice actually is that the women are very courageous, and they're very strong. That although they end up being exploited either as domestic labor or as prostitutes, they still have this kind of joy to hope again, to wake up the next morning and say: "Well it's going to be better". So when you go to the book and you read and see the hurdles and how they wake up the next day or face new challenges: "Well I'm going to defeat this challenge and make it again." That's a very common similarity that we notice with the women, no matter what they go through, there is always hope to move on.

**Milborn:** Joseph, what's your reaction to the book? You also work in Austria; you study gender discrimination, ethnic discrimination, what's your view on this?

**Joseph Orji:** Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Actually I read the book and I read it from two perspectives. I read it as a gender student and I read it from the background of ethnography. And in these two areas I looked at it like this and that is where I have a question for the author. When I read the book I can't help laughing when you brought up the issue of gender roles and gender issues. It was wonderful. A scene that actually kept me laughing was riding their Vespas in the compound. I was very, very happy reading that. And I also enjoyed the scene when you spoke about the current religious movement in Nigeria, when they come to give money and they have no money and say: "This God that demands money from those who have no money, what could be wrong with the pastor and what could be wrong with the man of God?" And they ran away from this scene, refused to be part of the church. I thought, could it be one day that those who are in the church in Nigeria will realize that there are little deceits and what effect would it have? I'm going to ask you a question, Ms. Sefi. My question is on the philosophy of neutrality and ethnicity. You spoke about the children fighting themselves when the parents are away. We Nigerians have continued to fight ourselves after the colonialists left. I understood that parent concept in a way after the colonialists have gone. And I position it in the two characters in the book. You spoke about Rose as coming from river state. When I speak of somebody coming from river state you say, Rose had eight men at once. She was keeping eight men as boyfriends. Rose couldn't wash after she has eaten, Rose swallowed drugs to go to Europe, exploitation of women. You spoke about Machidi coming from the eastern part of the ethnography, another part of Nigeria. And you spoke about a man who had more children that he could not feed. You spoke of the woman from the east who was a sex mother, an itinerant sex mother, who does not behave like us. The Hausa women, yes, the Hausa women are pretenders and the Hausa men are homosexuals. Rose was a total tribalist. The Igbo people never forgive. But Tolani was everything perfect, had only one boyfriend, refused sexual advances from the boys in the office, and refused to swallow drugs. And my question after I have read through all of these things, this wonderful book, this fiction, do these fictions conform to the philosophy of neutrality given the tribal and the cultural sensitivity of the country of Nigeria?

**Atta:** I think I understood what he's trying to say. I'm sorry, I'm not an academic so when you phrase it that way it doesn't mean much to me. But I think what is interesting is how you have interpreted it, not what I have written. You pointed out the one character Tolani as being virtuous and compared her to Rose. You missed out

the uncle's wife, another Yoruba woman who wasn't so virtuous. Didn't you? And several other characters. So it seemed to me that you had your argument already and you found the characters on which to base it. And that's not the way it works as an academic, I'm not one myself, or maybe that's the way it works with academics. I don't know. I can't remember all my characters, but I'm pretty sure I had equal opportunities, people who were on the wrong side of morality and people who were on the right side of morality. I'm not Yoruba myself, my mother is. My father is Ebira. So I was raised in Nigeria ethno-neutral, genuinely. I come from a family, the Atta family, they're from a small part of Nigeria, a town called Okeni, and my grandfather was a Muslim man. I have aunts who converted to Catholicism, aunts who married Ibo men, and the joke in my family is that nobody married anyone from Okeni because they are probably all related to them. So I have cousins from other parts of Nigeria, I have cousins from other parts of Africa, and from the rest of the world. That's the way in which I was raised. Now, have you read my first novel, *Everything Good Will Come*? This is my second. And the first one reflects the way in which I grew up in Nigeria. This one, I'm not writing about myself. I'm writing about a section of society, of Lagos, not society, a section of Lagos that is more aware of ethnicity and the politics of it. So for me to write from my point of view would be disingenuous. You know, I have to reflect them exactly the way they are with their suspicions, their stereotypes, and everything else. And that's why you have Rose, who's more outspoken, speaking about the different ethnicities in Nigeria. She dislikes Yorubas, she dislikes Hausas, she dislikes Ibos, she dislikes everybody but people from the Delta. And that's exactly what it was, and it's the same way in which, you know, just before we came in you asked me if something my character had said was something that I believe in.

**Orji:** I read in the book and asked you: "Pretend he's black, what does it matter? Have you seen God to know his color?" I smiled: "She. And she looks exactly like me." And I said, was this author or was this speaker, because this is a fiction, visioning God as She? Because I have read books like *She Who Is* by Elizabeth Johnson, which described God as She. In memory of her...

**Milborn:** So I guess obviously she was?

**Orji:** In memory of her, Elizabeth Fiorenza (Note: Catholic feminist) described God as She. I'm asking is this author, is this fiction describing God as She. If God is She, I would be wondering in our context. God being described as She is a Western issue that has not reached our own level of thought. For now God is just God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

**Atta:** Well, you did ask if the author believed that and you then progressed to no. I actually don't think it's a bad question at all but the only answer is, I don't know. All I'm saying is that you shouldn't mix up my fiction with my own views, because I'm not writing about myself. It's as simple as that.

**Milborn:** Can we go back to the women's issues that the two of them wrote?

**Orji:** Excuse me; I want to apologize, because I wouldn't have put your personal, private opinion in a fiction. And I'm not like your confessor, examiner please. That was not what I had in mind; it is what you have understood me to have said.

**Milborn:** I think there was confusion between speaker and author, when you asked about the speaker.

**Orji:** Yeah, because if I'm going to have my PhD, I'm going to have my PhD in gender. I'm not going to have my PhD in man and woman. There is no man, there is no woman.

**Milborn:** So let's go back to perhaps the gender issues.

**Atta:** On the subject of discussion, this exchange we're having is very, very common in Nigeria, and that's why I like my readings in Nigeria a lot more. Nigerians are very passionate about literature. We're also very argumentative, I was telling a journalist this, this morning she was asking me about stereotypes. And I said the one stereotype that I will claim as a Nigerian is that we are argumentative. And when we argue people get nervous, especially people who are not used to see our arguments. We will argue as if we hate each other, and trust me, we don't. But we are very opinionated people, we enjoy arguments. So don't be, this is typical.

**Milborn:** We've got some questions from the audience already. But I'd still like to have your view on what Joana and Sarah said. Joana, in your book *Die Wassergöttin*, the whole thing of religion and Ju Ju and so on plays a major role in terms of circumstances. Like Sarah described the circumstances that bring people to do something. Could you say a bit about that in Nigeria, how important is religion there?

**Adesuwa Reiterer:** How important is religion? It's so much important as for those religion is not very important. I mean, in Nigeria it doesn't really matter exactly if you

believe in Allah or God or the idols or how we wish to call it. All that matters is you believe in something. How you deal with it, that's maybe the issue. So, well, we've had in the past years a new Pentecostal movement. We cannot generalize and say all of them, because I fortunately or unfortunately, I don't know, had to go through one of such Pentecostal schools, and so I also had a very good experience there and also, well, there were no bad experiences in the schools. But afterwards I started realizing, my mom used to take us to church; every day you get to go. Then all of a sudden you were confronted with another kind of religion, we call it Ju Ju, when you try to get a German word for it you will find voodoo. But I've been researching for a couple of years and there is a difference between them. In Nigeria you are brought up in a way to believe that Ju Ju is something very negative and bad and it will hurt you. But looking at the situation now from outside, in the sense that I've been living away from Nigeria and I can choose and try to analyze both, and considering my work in the field of anti human trafficking, all of a sudden you get to realize that there is the danger of misuse of religion. For Ju Ju is not actually the danger of Ju Ju itself. Rather it's the danger of the misuse of those religions. Like making people very dependent or like in the book, about the church giving offerings when you don't even have three square meals and such things. And believing, having superstitious beliefs, that also reflects not taking responsibility for your own actions because you can always say the devil is responsible, you couldn't do anything, the devil has done everything.

So these are the basic challenges we experience. It's not about Christianity, Ju Ju, Islam or whatever. It's all about the dependency of these religions and it's not just particular to Nigeria. It's, I see it here in Europe too. How people get very dependent and lose your own self-responsibility to some kind of big structure that we call religion. That's actually a very, very important part within the work against human trafficking because this is an instrument that's been misused. It is an important factor when it comes to develop Africa in general. In the last six months I've been touring around and trying to understand why there's so many resources in Africa, a lot of people who are very well educated and why there is there still this problem of development around. And every time I came in contact with sayings: "Well I can't, my business won't work because God is not good to me. My business won't work because my neighbor is a witch". And then you start asking yourself, maybe something should happen. Maybe people should start talking about this dependence. Maybe people should start taking some kind of responsibility of their own actions. Don't leave everything on the spiritual level or belief. That's actually the basic area where I see this religious, I would say, some kind of fundamentalism in there.

**Milborn:** Do you want to say something to this, Sefi?

**Atta:** No, no, no. I was listening to her. And again I think neatly and it takes me a while to get there. But basically we have three different main types of religion in Nigeria, Christianity, Islam, and our own, I wouldn't call it Ju Ju. Ju Ju is just a part of it, part our own traditional religions. The main problem has always been the fundamentalism, the intolerance, which is usually whipped up for political purposes, and not necessarily the dependency, but I think the idea that - and I think this is with all religions - what role the person plays between God and themselves. Whatever you do, do you have any consequence for your action or is it something that's determined from somewhere. These are questions that all cultures face. I don't think it's different in Nigeria or the rest of Africa. It's just that where there's more difficulty, people do tend to focus more on the fact that whatever they do won't change anything. So, I don't know. The question of religion in Nigeria is such a complicated one.

**Udoh Grossfurthner:** Sorry, could I say something? I think what I'm hearing from Joana is that religious dependence is one of the root causes of our problems in our society. What I would like to say is that whether you're dependent on religion or on yourself, until there's an understanding within a society amongst the people, until you learn to respect one another even when you don't understand why one person does what he does, until we learn the cultural respect among people, we are still going to have problems. You're still going to have problems within society and that was another thing that I've found really profound about your book. Just because you look similar to the person in front of you doesn't mean you are going to or you have cultural understanding. In the book, you have Alex, who is very, very different from the society in which he came to learn about music. But then, Alex was better understanding the people; he accepted the hospitality of his hostess, accepted whatever he was given. A few weeks or months later, down the road came another Oyibo, but this Oyibo was not such an Oyibo as such. He was and looked more similar to Arike and to the people. You know, to get him just counted on the similarity of his looks, into friendly contact with his hostess. But he refused what Arike offered him. Probably he thought it was beneath him. My point here is that until there's cultural understanding amongst the people, whether you have religion or not, until there's that understanding that we each have a right to be, until there's that understanding, you are always going to have a problem amongst people.

## Audience Discussion

**Audience member:** One week ago I was in Barcelona and attended a meeting of civil society organizations discussing after a long process effects of Washington consensus, this liberal agenda. I met two strong women from Africa, from Kenya and Tanzania, which have a very strong women's movement. In my opinion the women are the ones who are changing Africa. That is my question to you.

**Audience member:** My question goes to Mrs. Sefi. The description of the readings, the semantics and the beautiful ways she attached to description, I just would like to know where you got your inspiration.

**Atta:** The first question was about whether women were going to change Africa. I think it's a nice slogan, but I don't know what it actually means to be honest with you. And maybe we are, maybe we're not. Why not with men and why not children, you know? That's the way I see it. Where I get my inspiration? I grew up in Lagos, one of the most exciting cities to be for a storyteller. So I never run out of inspiration. There's a story around ever corner in Lagos. I started off telling a story that was typical for a woman like myself. I moved on to tell this story, which was slightly different from me, well a lot different from my experience. And then I went into a collection of short stories, where I told stories from everywhere, all different parts of Nigeria. So, my question is not where I get my inspiration from, it's if I have enough time to tell all the stories that come to me from Lagos.

**Audience member:** I want to ask you, you said Lagos is a place to find a big source for storytelling. Why is it for some people such a haunted place to live?

**Atta:** A haunted place? You mean a difficult place to live?

**Audience member:** But I mean, it's a serious question; I want to ask what makes it so difficult to live there?

**Atta:** A lot of Nigerians leave Nigeria to come to Europe, but a lot of Europeans leave Europe to come to Nigeria. I see them all the time. Americans, this is just the way the world is. People are moving for work, for education, for marriage, for so many different reasons. But your question is legitimate. Lagos is a very difficult city to be in. It's a place where people can become millionaires in a matter of weeks and they can be destitute in a matter of weeks. They can be born destitute and die destitute. They can be born wealthy and die destitute. So there are all these extremes in Lagos

between the rich, between the poor, with all the different religions, with the different ethnicities coming from outside Lagos, with the foreigners, the foreign community within Lagos and it's a complex place to navigate socially, economically, politically. So why people move, I don't know. They have their own different reasons, you know. Personally, I can tell you this, I would be better off if I lived in Nigeria today. You know, people find it hard to believe, but it's true. I don't come from a family that couldn't, that I would suffer if I lived in Nigeria. I live in Mississippi, and you know, my life, if I measure it, is not much better off than I would be in Nigeria. But the trouble is, in Nigeria I wouldn't have the freedom I have in Mississippi of all places as a black person. But I'm able to fend for myself and to feed myself, whereas in Nigeria I'd probably be dependent on family or somebody else to do that for me.

**Udoh Grossfurthner:** I'd like to add something to that what Sefi has said. The belief is, and it's wrongly held, that when people see Nigerians in diaspora they think we left Nigeria because we didn't want to live there. You know, just as with other people, Nigerians are travelers first and foremost. We like traveling. They are entrepreneurs, they like to do business. And so when you have these two factors together it will move you. You know it moves a person to go. You don't find Nigerians outside Nigeria because they don't want to stay in their country. You find them outside Nigeria because they like to travel. And there are lots of Nigerians you see probably in Austria who are probably not a good representation of the people from our country. But believe me, if you move outside of Austria, Austria is quite small and to tell you the truth, Nigerians who come to Austria actually come here as a last resort, although Austria is a beautiful country. But really, Nigerians who come here, come here as a last resort. Either they come here because they have to work with the UN or some are married, they come with their husbands. You see Nigerians in the UK, in America, in France or Austria doing awesome things. Unfortunately, the media tends to focus on the negative things. Nigerians are not here because they don't like to be in their country. They are here because they are travelers.

**Milborn:** Now there are a lot of questions, but Joseph wanted to add something and we'll take the three, we've still got like 15 minutes.

**Orji:** I have worked here for five years as a priest who is in charge of the English speaking African community. If I understood the question you asked from the perspective of what we see every day on the street and in the media, I think your question is actually correct. Because having been somebody who is in charge of asylum seekers and refugees in Austria and supporting them in Austria, I think your

question is correct. When I look at the media like *Heute* and *Österreich*, it is exactly what you say. Fortunately or unfortunately, many people know about Nigeria as this Lagos. Lagos is the biggest city, it's our capital, and people read about Lagos. Like Sefi said, you read about Lagos written by those who may not have understood Lagos. The other part of it is that we have a bad image in Austria, just like other countries have. But we have also good people from Nigeria who live in Austria. In Lagos we have bad people and good people. In Lagos we have poor people and also rich people, just like in Austria. Lagos is good and Lagos is bad. It depends on how you come in to it.

**Audience member:** I just wanted to commend the author for a work well done. Thank you very much; it's a good presentation. The question is about Lagos. I'm a Nigerian and I came from Lagos and I'm going back to Lagos tomorrow. Let us not commonly agree that Lagos is a difficult place to live. I bet that there are Lagosians who will not like to leave Lagos for any other place in the world. Never. And it's not only that they're Nigerians. No, they're foreign nationalities in Nigeria. They are living in Lagos and they are not interested in leaving. They have been acclimatized to Lagos. They like the life in Lagos and not in another place. So it depends on who's interpreting what is the hardship or the difficulty in Lagos. For some people it's the best place in the world and for some other people they don't want to be there. Those who live in Austria, it's not that for them Lagos is terrible. That's not why Nigerians are here. I'm going back to Lagos tomorrow.

**Audience member:** Thank you for the book. My name is Awoba and I haven't read the book yet, but I definitely will. Actually the point I wanted to raise is about the part you talked about women. You mentioned in your book, in the reading, that the Ibo woman had this squeaky voice and would hand over her thing to her partner, you know. It is true that there is this image of the black woman as strong, as someone who can shoulder responsibilities. She's the black African mama. And that's the question I think the gentleman in front was asking about when he met this Tanzanian woman and Kenyan woman. That's the point, I'm happy that the book depicts this image of woman, African woman, because I feel that it's true that the change that we want to have, it should come from the men. It should come from the children, but it is in our hands, because we give birth to these babies. We are the ones who will tell our daughters to tell their sons, this is the way we want to go. I think that really it starts with us as women. It's my responsibility in Austria not to give a bad image of where I'm from. As a woman, this is what an African black woman is and that will be what I will take from your book.

**Atta:** She feels a responsibility, and that's not necessarily, it doesn't mean that it's going to come from women. Some of us feel a certain responsibility and some of us don't. I don't think it's right to speak of the progress of Africa in terms of one gender or the other. I'm saying that as someone who would sometimes describe myself as feminist. It sounds good, but what does it mean?

**Audience member:** You know, that will take a whole human change or something. But in the moment we do have that because of issues like trafficking. The girls get trafficked, why? Because the mothers say: "My daughter, you can go abroad and make money. And the mothers give their children off to the traffickers. I'm not saying that women are the only ones, no. But we do, as African mamas, we have the possibility to put a wheel, to put a cog in this wheel of ...

**Atta:** I agree with you. I was actually agreeing with you. I understand that there's a need to take responsibility as a woman. But to say that the progress of Africa was in the hands of African women is completely different. It's the same thing when we talk about the strong African woman or the African mama. Sometimes she exists and sometimes she doesn't.

**Audience member:** I just want to go back to your text. Listening to this beautiful text I had the impression that people who talk to each other, at least the two or the three you are writing about, don't understand each other because they have contact. There's a natural law in social sciences where you say in order to understand somebody you have to be in contact. But there are contrary examples where understanding is fostered by separation. Nobody wants to hear it, but there are many, many examples where people just get along well if they don't know each other too well. And there's also this peculiar aspect of humanity that you become... I just wanted to add, there's a peculiar aspect of white, black, and all other people, that they seem to actually become unjust and very fanatic if they have an interest in something. So my question is, would it be nice not having interests and not meeting too much in order to understand each other better?

**Atta:** That's an interesting question. I live down south in Mississippi and most of my neighbors are Republicans and Christian conservatives and I don't go to their homes. They don't come to mine and we get on pretty well. So, I don't know whether that would work on a grand scale, but it certainly works for me living in Mississippi.

**Audience member:** Thank you very much, I don't have a question to ask, I just wanted to add to my sister's comment about strong black African women and about

bringing progress. But I think that is more a partnership. The gender issue is not just about one sex. It's about two. The male and the female, so it's only when we do it together then the strong African woman can come to full realization of her potential.

**Audience member:** I want to say I am for the women, and I was doing after I see - I'm a Sudanese - a long time troubles in Sudan and that men bringing us dictators and so on. Therefore I have worked out a parliament and a government of women for Sudan, that's all.

**Audience member:** I enjoyed the reading and I hope I'll have the opportunity of taking one of the books to read. The issue of development in Africa has to do with the fact that we remain the type of birds who would like to fly with one wing. My friend or colleague just said it. It's an issue of partnership for the full potential of the two to be realized. Our societies cannot move forward if the great potential that lies in the other half is suppressed, not allowed, not made available for the use of the community. The issue is, the partnership and the acceptance of responsibility by both sexes and understanding the potential of the two working as one.

**Adesuwa Reiterer:** Well, the only thing I can say is that's why I love books or art, because it caused this kind of debate. We'll definitely see how diverse Nigeria is, that there are different perspectives. But we can't debate Nigeria on one book. Because you know, it'll be a fictional book, it will be documentary, it could be biographic, and it will always reflect a part of Nigeria, a part of Lagos. Because I stayed very long in Lagos and I love Lagos, although it is very hard. But one thing is that in Nigeria we have people that are privileged. We have women that grew up in families where they saw their father washing the clothes of their mother. We have people that grew up in families where the father had 16 wives and he just sit there and they cook and worship him. So these are very diverse cultures in one, I'm not even talking about different ethnic groups. I'm talking about the same ethnic group and maybe even the same family from the same parents. We should not forget about the influence we get from outside. We humans, we're so fond of building a picture like there is a strong African woman. Let her break down; let her not be the strong African woman. Let her just be herself. And then we get these pictures of how it should be, how it's in the West and that we should be like that. It's like we are like trying to run after a kind of parents. I think maybe the issue of Africa in general should just be left alone and maybe people should try to start listening to Africans. Listen to people living in Africa, not even us living abroad, coming back once a year and trying to understand where we lived before. But maybe try to really look into the society and look into the people on the ground and appreciate what is being done. I tell you just one example. I went

to a so-called witch village in Ghana. My colleagues from the film team were filming, oh my God, what has happened was terrible. What they forgot to see was that this is a village where nobody can read and write; it's like on the end of the world. Nobody goes there. But they realized 60 years ago that they will build mud shelters to protect the witches, the so-called witches that had been chased out of the country. But if you come to the West that will be a protection shelter and everybody will celebrate this as a big deal and appreciate it, but no one is looking at these little efforts, these initiatives that are being done. So maybe when we start looking at the resources on the ground, then we can stop building up what we think we're missing in Africa.

**Udoh Grossfurthner:** We're talking about African women. I think what I understood from her is that the women send these girls here. When you say the women, we should be specific. We should not say the women, because not all women are sending their children here to be prostitutes. Just as there are good mothers, so also are there bad mothers, like everywhere. I come on the issue of African women. What I'm hearing is, as if African women are just now being told or being agitated to be strong, to be there or to stand up and be the leaders of the world. African women have always been leaders of their world. I mean, you look at Arike in the book, the husband is the big wig, he's in a band, he's recognized. But is he bringing food to the table? No. Who is bringing food to the table, it is Arike, his wife. The wife who was not allowed to use a Vespa, even though what she got out of using that Vespa was for the good of the home. And I think I speak to our brothers here. We want African women to be strong verbally. But when it comes to actions and actually making, agitating for all to be strong, are men. I don't know if it applies to other men, but we are speaking of African men. Our men are so scared because they want you to go only so much. It's OK to be strong. But please, don't pass a certain level. When you ask for us to be in a partnership in this, you also have to realize that in a partnership sometimes one partner can be stronger than the other. And the only way the good can come out of that partnership is when you realize the potential of your partner and allow your partner to be the best she can be and allow her progress. African women have always been strong. I think that a lot of the good and strength that we have now in Africa - forget all of the problems we're having - is a result of the women, the women who do not have the limelight or the cameras in their faces showing that which they are. African women are the backbone of our society.

**Orji:** I'm seeing it from another perspective. It is not that African women will liberate their continent or that the mothers are all bad. I don't think it's so. I remember seeing it from the perspective that like what the book said, we have a lot of time for petty stories in Africa, in the Nigerian context. We have too much time and we do little with

it. We talk too much. And this problem I see it. I see it's also depicted in this book. I also see there's another problem from the perspective that we imitate a lot, rather than taking initiatives. In this imitation, that's what I'm talking about women trafficking or people coming overseas and they don't concentrate on what they came for. They want to make their money so quick. That's what I'm talking about. We imitate too much; we forget about initiatives. If you just leave home, you want to be like the other person. The other person came back from overseas; he did so well. You don't ask how many years he took and what he did. The other family wants their child to be like the other one. That is where the families I feel have to do more work, not only from the man, not only from the woman, but from all of us as Nigerians. A family should be able to concentrate on initiatives and not just rushing to make their money. It's like struggling for the mat without the floor, when you get the mat there's no place to lay the bed again. That's the way I'm seeing it.

**Atta:** Thank you so much for coming, I really enjoy these readings, and sometimes the discussions, it feels to me, as I said to you I'm a neat thinker. So sometimes the discussions seem all over the place, I don't even know how to get my head around it. And I think it's just a result of people wanting to be heard. Everybody wants to be heard and that's what I'm getting from the audience. So I'm glad that even though my book has nothing to do with most of what was discussed today, I'm glad that we could at least come together. I don't think I have the answers to everything and I'd never pretend, I know as much as everybody else does. And it's nice to hear your views and to hear you express them in your own way or in your own way of storytelling. Thank you.

**Milborn:** Thank you very much again for being here. It's really a pleasure to have you here. There's time for going on, venting, or chatting, or talking now with a glass of wine or a glass of anything right outside.