

## Narrating African Women's Marriage Perception in Abi Dare's the Girl with the Louding Voice

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**Abstract:** No man is an island. This is to say that we are social beings and dependent on each other. Therefore, aware that it is not good for a man to be alone, and with the view to satisfy his needs a man leaves his parents and attaches himself to his woman, making them husband and wife. It is in this connection that the present paper deals with marriage perception in Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*. Thus, anchored on theoretical insights from sociological and psychological approaches, the current paper aims at showing how the issue of marriage affects female characters in this novel, with a special mention on Adunni, the protagonist. The findings reveal that not only the way marriage is portrayed in this novel but also the way other aspects related to marriage predominate the authoress' vision while writing her novel. As a final assessment, the analysis has evidenced that Adunni, taken as the microcosm of African women, has experienced conflicting relationship on one hand and friendly or peaceful relationship in her marital home. All these aspects related to marriage unveil Abi Dare's perception of marriage in the novel under consideration.

**Keywords:** Partners, marriage, polygamy, childbearing, relationships, needs.

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**Résumé:** Aucun homme n'est une île. C'est dire que nous sommes des êtres sociaux et dépendants les uns les autres. C'est pourquoi, conscient qu'il n'est pas bon qu'un homme soit seul, et en vue de satisfaire ses besoins, l'homme quitte ses parents et s'attache à sa femme, les faisant mari et femme. C'est dans ce cadre que le présent article traite de la perception du mariage dans *The Girl with the Louding Voice* d'Abi Dare. Ainsi, en s'appuyant sur des éclairages théoriques issus d'approches sociologiques et psychologiques, le présent article vise à montrer comment la question du mariage affecte les personnages féminins de ce roman, avec une mention spéciale pour Adunni, le protagoniste. Les résultats révèlent que non seulement la façon dont le mariage est dépeint dans ce roman, mais aussi la façon dont d'autres aspects liés au mariage prédominent dans la vision de l'auteure lors de l'écriture de son roman. En fin de compte, l'analyse a mis en évidence qu'Adunni, prise comme microscope de la femme africaine, a connu des relations tantôt conflictuelles, tantôt amicales et paisibles dans son domicile conjugal. Tous ces aspects liés au mariage dévoilent la perception qu'Abi Dare a du mariage dans le roman exploité.

**Mots clés:** Partenaires, mariage, polygamie, procréation, relations, besoins.

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### Introduction

It is universally agreed that the visible and invisible world is created by God, the Almighty. Therefore, the Man endowed with power and intelligence governs over other creatures. Once mature, he shows the desire to leave his parents and attaches himself with his partner, making them husband and wife. In this respect, the definition of marriage (online) matches when it is considered as "a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring, if any". In fiction however, the issue of marriage is abundantly tackled by artists in their literary productions and among them Abi Dare whose *The Girl with the Louding Voice* grants an important place on the issue. To this effect, our study is based on marriage perception in Abi Dare's above-mentioned novel. Then, our research question is: How does marriage is perceived in Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*? The hypothesis backing up this query is that the exploration of this novel reveals the existence of aspects of marriage in different forms. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to show how Abi Dare presents the circumstances of marriage included in her novel.

Concerning the review of literature, we can say that *The Girl with the Louding Voice* is in its first years of publication and as such has not been object of many studies. However, some of analyses have been conducted on it. On local sphere, Wandzangoye Wazard Prudence (2020) wrote her master's dissertation on this novel

entitled: 'Women's Struggle for Self-Assertion in Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*. Two other Master theses have also been conducted on international level. Muhammad Yudi Ardiasyah (2022) wrote "Oppression Experienced by Adunni in *The Girl with the Louding Voice*" and Narafni Ashari Soffi (2022) wrote "An Analysis on the Needs of Adunni in *The Girl with the Louding Voice*". Unlike previous studies, the present study focuses on marriage in Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*.

For the achievement of this study, we resort to the sociological approach for its implication in the social process of events. Accordingly, Alan Swingewood (1972:11) declares: "*Sociology is essentially the scientific, objective study of man in society; the study of social institutions and social processes; it seeks to answer the question how society is possible, how it works, why it persists*". The psychological approach is also of great value as it helps understand the human nature, especially the characters' behaviours in a literary production. This methodological approach really corroborates the study as Adunni, the protagonist experiences numerous afflictions that sudden her human being or soul. So, to get the expected results, this research paper is organized around four main points: nature of marriage, childbearing, relationship between co-wives, and the protagonist's marital experience.

### **I- The Nature of Marriage**

In general, two persons cannot walk or dwell together without previous consent. Such is the case with marriage which is a cultural approved relationship of one man and one woman. Thus, talking of the nature of marriage, it is undoubtedly known that apart from monogamy, there is also polyandry, marriage of one woman with two or more men; polygamy, union of one man with two or more women. Mention should also be made to homosexual marriage, though not legally notified by political leaders in many countries. However, for the present section, we focus on the marriage of one man with more than one woman for it is the case of union the protagonist of the novel is concerned with.

As it can be seen, polygamy is one form of marriage among many. The choice of one form or another depends either on personal aspirations or on the countries, tribe's or ethnics' laws. In Africa for instance polygamy is permitted and observed in most countries regardless religious, political and social affiliations. Therefore, it becomes a common social phenomenon which dates back as old as human society. Indeed, polygamy becomes is allowed and becomes a formalized form of marriage in many African communities. It is in this connection that Yamani's wordings prove useful when he (2008:120) believes that "*polygamy was formalized in Africa, it has taken the form of anonymous polygamy, with partners or concubines incognito in different locations*". In this regime, the man has the ability to marry as many wives as he pleases. This statement is also shared by Yamani (2008: xi) pinpointing that polygamy describes "*the state of a man having more than one woman, including the religious, legal and customary aspects of these unions*".

In Africa in general, but in Nigeria (Igbo society) in particular, a man's worthiness depends on the number of wives he has and the more bride-prices he pays, the richer he is. Moreover, admiration and respect are prioritized to such a man. That is why, for having so many wives, Nwakibie, one of characters in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* took the highest but one title as the narrator (1960: 232) writes: "*There was a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village who had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children. His name was Nwakibie and he had the highest but one title a man could take in the clan*".

Likewise, the power or authority was not given to anyone. That is why in some communities, leaders and wealthy people are forced to be polygamous. In this way, polygamy symbolizes power, a practice which becomes common in most African works of fiction. Such is the case of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* where Ona's father was polygamous. Accordingly, the narrator (1979: 11) writes: "*Her father, despite having several wives, had few children, and in fact no living son at all*". Thus, we are right to infer that greatness, respect, power, and authority are subordinated to the fact of being polygamous. Yet, polygamy goes with children, meaning that a polygamous is likely to have many children, a source of power in the African context. Aware that only a wealthy and powerful man can feed a huge family, driving away poverty because he has an important manpower (many children), polygamy stands as an expression of wealth and power. This reality also prevails in Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice* that is our main concern in this section.

Indeed, in *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, Morufu is vividly illustrated as incarnation of polygamy. The novel informs that Morufu has got three wives: Labake, the senior wife; Khadjija, the junior and Adunni, the youngest wife. In fact, he did not get satisfaction with the first two wives that Morufu dreamed on Adunni. He needed a son who could go to school and bring honor to the family. Later on, Adunni declares that Morufu used to visit her father before demanding her hand and questions herself as we can learn from the following extract:

Apart from his two wives, Morufu is having four children that didn't go to school. They just be running around the village stream in their dirty pant, pulling sugar cartons with string, playing suwe and clapping their hand until the skin about to peel off. Why was Morufu visiting our house? What was he finding? (p. 5)

Truly, we can learn from this quotation that that Morufu is polygamous with four illiterate children. Though, Adunni questions on his visits, it comes true that Morufu was managing to ask her hand. His repeated visits were not in vain, rather than purposely. Admittedly, his choice toward Adunni was remarkable through the answer Enitan gave to Adunni when she declined the offer because she aimed at pursuing her studies. As a matter of fact, she wanted Adunni to seize the opportunity. Accordingly, Enitan (2020:95) argues: “*You can worry eh. School is not having any meaning in this village. We are not in Lagos. Forget about schooling this and that, marry Morufu and born fine, fine boys for him*”. While some men decide to be polygamous for wealth and power, this is the contrary to Morufu, the taxi driver who instead expects male children. The novel reveals that he was wealthy and as evidence, he promised to pay Adunni’s father money for food and community rent. As he already has children, it becomes clear that his ultimate reason to marry Adunni was for her to give him a child but not any child: a male child. This means that children are very important in a conjugal union, especially male children because female ones are doomed to housework. This deduction opens the door to the importance of childbearing, our concern in the second section.

## **II- Childbearing**

From inception, marriage comes God. It is a divine institution that people should simply observe because the Bible (Genesis 2: 18) says: “It is not good for the man to continue by himself. I am going to make a helper for him”. Moreover, it is said (Genesis 2: 24) “*that is why a man will leave his father and this mother and he must stick to his wife and they must become one flesh*”. In this way, marriage becomes the destiny offered to women in the society. However, the process should be an agreement between the suitor’s family and the prospective woman’s family but consequently childbearing remains at the center of union because the purpose of getting marriage is procreation.

Marriage is a worldwide event. Indeed, in each continent, country or community people celebrate marriages. However, the perception of marriage in one hand and that of childbearing in the other hand are differently viewed according to continents, countries or even communities. As evidence, the European culture considers marriage as a union between a man and a woman making them husband and wife, regardless childbearing. This perception of marriage in corroborates their culture as Europeans believe in or adopt children, a practice which is strange in to Africans. Based on that approach, the current section deals with childbearing with the subsidiary question structured as follows: What is the importance of childbearing in African societies, especially in Nigeria with Abi Dare’s *The Girl with the Louding Voice*?

Childbearing is at the crossroad of any conjugal union for it is “the process of giving birth to babies”, according to *Oxford Advanced Learning Dictionary*. Thus, in African communities in general, and in Nigerian community in particular, the birth of a child is not only a pivotal moment in the life of the mother but also a crucial time for both families because marriage in Africa is a matter of families. That is why once a woman gets married and is barren, she is not granted much esteem and as such the right to live and operate freely as anyone could. Obviously, any woman’s desire is to give birth to children. Therefore, procreation stands not only as the fulfilment of a woman’s dream but also as an index helping her to avoid external pressure of the community which disregards fruitless women. To this effect, Ngassaki Basile Marius in “Anglophone African Female Writings as a Talking Cure” appreciates Buchi Emecheta’s capacity of childbearing and decision to leave her husband for his misbehaving. Accordingly, Ngassaki (2005: 129) writes:

During six years of marriage, childbearing is the very active part of her life because she bore her husband five children in such a short spell. Sylvester, Emecheta’s husband, was misbehaving and the final blow descended when he burnt her first manuscript stating that it is impossible for a black woman to be a ‘man of letters’ in London. As a result, she left husband for another flat with her five children.

In this quotation we can realize how valuable Buchi Emecheta who has given five children to Sylvester is. This proud is not only for herself but also for both families from where they are from. We also praise her courage to quit Sylvester for his wrong doings toward Buchi. This is a common practice in people real life since literature, though fictitious paints social life of people within a given milieu. As a matter of fact, Emecheta has successfully fulfilled her role as woman for she is called ‘mother’ by her offspring. As such, she has been granted dignity any woman deserves in African communities, knowing that some others do not receive it.

In African context, the primary role of getting marriage is childbearing, mainly male children for the continuation and preservation of ancestors’ inheritances. That is why, *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, written in the African context bears evidences of marriage with fruitful couples. Adunni, the main character of the novel is from a family of three children where she is the lone daughter and whose father has more than one wife. For Adunni’s father, childbearing has been an opportunity of wealth for him because he married his Adunni to have food and money in return. Likewise, thanks to Adunni, Papa is able to pay the community rent as Adunni declares in the following passage: “*I am marrying Morufu because Papa is needing money and community rent*”

(p. 9). In this context, Adunni is synonymous of wealth for her father though she was compelled to marry Morufu against her own will. Similarly, Papa's advantage for marrying Adunni could be noticed through Adunni's friend, Enitan who in fact encourages her to enjoy her marriage. This happens when Adunni asks her to beg Papa for him to make up his mind: You cannot come and beg my Papa for me? I say.

Beg him for what? Enitan hisses a loud hiss and shake her head. Adunni, you know how this is a good thing for your family. Think of how you been suffering since your Mama...I know it is not what you want. I know you like school, but think it well, Adunni. Think of how your family will be better because of it. Even if I beg your papa, you know that he will not answer me. I swear, if I can find a man like Morufu to marry me, I will be too happy! (p. 18)

As it can be seen, Adunni's friend's will is for her to accept the offer of marriage due to the favour her father could benefit from, mostly the saving deeds accomplished by Morufu as soon as Adunni's mother passed away. However, for Morufu, having a child is good, but having especially a male child is better. Indeed, he has two wives but none of them gives birth to a son. This prompts Morufu to marry Adunni. Equally, Enitan does not get tired of eulogizing Morufu and encouraging Adunni to marry him as we can read: "*Morufu is a rich man. He will be taking care of you and your family. What more are you finding in this life when you have a good husband?*"(p. 26). This is an encouraging discourse that praises Morufu for Adunni to consent rather than declining the offer and for Enitan, nothing could be better for a woman than getting marriage to a wealthy man capable of providing for her needs. The taxi driver is aware that female children are products that can be sold to whoever wishes, that is why he longed to marry a third wife expecting a son. This assertion is evidenced through the character of Adunni who was sold to a rich man for physiological needs.

In addition, childbearing is necessary for parents since their worth within the community depends on children they have. In this connection, Morufu has sacrificed two goats for the gods in order to have children when his senior wife, Labake was unable to procreate as he confesses: "*First, I marry Labake but she was not having any child. It is after we have sacrificed two goats for the gods of Ikati River that Labake was able to born one child, a girl*". (p. 37). While Morufu's thoughts weighed on a male child, the will of God falls otherwise and he argues as if girl children are a curse, a bad gift from the Heaven but doomed for marriage and domestic house works as the following extract from Morufu confirms:

I want two boy children. If I have my boys, I will send them to school. They will become English speaking taxi-driver and make plenty money. Girls are only good for marriage, cooking food and bedroom work. I have already found Kite a husband. I will use her bride price to repair my car window, maybe buy more chickens for my farm, because I use too much plenty money to marry my sweet Adunni. (p. 37)

The most important thing to note is that both, boy and girl are children, though they do not have the same privilege within the society. This is due to the role each play. Thus, while the boy learns the driving métier, the girl's place is in the kitchen. Such is the opinion shared by Morufu who did not wait for his Kite to be old enough for marriage, using her bride-price for his business. Nevertheless, it matters to recognize that girl children face multiform hindrances to be schooling and Morufu's daughter is among them for she was discriminated and forced into child marriage at the age of fourteen. It is in this perspective that probing on children education and focusing on girls in a comparative manner, Gitonga's wordings are convincing when he (2009: 49) believes that:

They do not have the same opportunity as boys to demonstrate their abilities and develop their talents. As a result, girls grow up believing that just because they are girls, they are vastly inferior to boys. Girl child education will continue to face social discrimination as long as gender bias exists in society.

We can learn from the above quotation that having children is a good thing but schooling them without any discrimination on gender is better. Boys are encouraged to be educated as they will ensure the family bond compared to girls who are bound to serve in their second families. However, the reality in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* is different for most children, especially girls are forced into early marriages against their will like animals being doomed to the slaughterhouse. In like manner, Rolf Solberg raises male children over girls in his article entitled "The Woman of Black Africa, Buchi Emecheta: The Woman's Voice in the New Nigerian Novel". Indeed, Rolf believes that male children contribute to the preservation of kinship line when he (1983: 247) writes: "*The predominantly polygamous traditional marriage had as its main objective the preservation of the (male) kinship line, and was not based on romantic love*".

In a word, we can be tempted to argue that childbearing serves as an essential component of the family knowing that the family is made up of a father, a mother and children. That is why when a couple does not have children it is bound to troubles and naturally exposed to neighbouring or external pressure which might cause divorce if not tactfully handled. Finally, if childbearing is a key issue within a couple, the relationship between co-wives is also another topical issue in a polygamous household that we are concerned with shortly.

### III- Relationship between Co-wives

Humans are fundamentally social. This means to some extent that no one is sufficient and as such everyone relies on others. Therefore, referring to marriage, it is a vivid desire for each woman to get married though some of them like Adunni reluctantly shows the contrary as we can read from the following passage: “*Marriage is a good thing in our village. Many girls are wanting to marry, to be a wife of somebody, or of anybody; but not me, not Adunni*”. (p. 17). As a reminder, polygamy is highly encouraged in the African society in general and in Nigeria in particular which is the setting of *The Girl with the Louding Voice*. This means that we have a society where husbands possess more than one wife. Obviously, the taxi driver of the village, Morufu is a good example for he has married three wives: Labake, Khadija, and Adunni sharing the same household. It is undoubtedly certain that life in such environments cannot go without troubles. This deduction makes sense because the novel informs that of the three wives, Labake, the senior has a particular behavior, challenging the others mainly with the coming of Adunni, the youngest. Fortunately, Morufu is aware of Labake’s jealousy and informs the new wife about her wrong doings through the following words:

Good, very good. Because you are now a married woman. My wife, the other two wives in the house, what is their name again? Yes, Labake and Khadija, they will be jealousing you. Khadija is having small sense, but Labake, she will want to make you to be sad. You will not allow her, you hear? If Labake do you anyhow, talk you one kind, call me and I will flog her very well. (p. 32)

In this quotation Morufu reveals the behavior of his Labake, a repulsive or hatred behavior toward her co-wives. That is why the husband had prepared Adunni’s mind for her not to be surprisingly disappointed of Labake’s deeds or reactions. Truly, the relationship between Morufu’s wives was not a friendly one. In fact, as soon as Adunni gets married, in the household Labake starts troubling her through words: “*Husband snatcher welcome-o, she says to the candle, breeze from her mouth making the fire to sleep. When I finish with you in this house, you will curse the day your mother born you. Asheun*”. (p. 34). It is after she had pronounced such cruel words toward Adunni that on the same page Morufu retorted and tried to give moral or emotional strength to Adunni in these terms:

Labake! Morufu shout from behind the car, you have started your trouble again? You are calling my new wife *ascheun*? A prostitute? I think you want to die this night. Adunni, don’t mind her –o. she is having mental problem. Her head is not correct. Don’t mind her!

This attitude foretells the conflicting atmosphere which will prevail in Morufu’s household. It had become Labake’s habit to annoy co-wives because she did it at Khadija’s arrival and then at Adunni’s too. The truth is that no woman can hardly share her husband with others, but Labake’s attitude toward Adunni has gone beyond normal limit as she timelessly annoys her, wanting even Adunni to go back to her father’s home. Indeed, when Morufu leaves them be, Labake stands up, tightens her cloth around her waist as if she is getting ready for a fight. We can read it from Labake’s own words when she said:

You and my Kite are of same age. Your dead mother and me, we are age mates. God forbid for me to share my husband with my own child. God forbid that I am waiting for you to finish with my husband before I can enter his room. Ah, you will suffer in his room. Ah, you will suffer in this house. Ask Khadija, she will tell you that I am a wicked woman. That my madness is not having cure. (p. 38)

In all likelihood, Labake’s first daughter named Kite is as old as Adunni (14) and as such Adunni appears as her child too. Therefore, she couldn’t stand sharing the same husband with her daughter. Actually, Labake confesses that she is wicked and that wickedness extended Khadija’s children too. According to Khadija, this feeling of hatred or inhumanity is noticed when she explains and advises Adunni in the following terms: “*Don’t ever enter Labake’s room. One time, Alafia, my daughter, she goes to her room to give her food. That witch, Labake, she beat my Alafia till the girl was almost bleeding. If you like yourself, don’t go near her room*” (p. 42). In fact, there is a small devil inside Labake that is coming out when Adunni walks in her front. According to Adunni, Labake’s madness was remarkable when wanting to quickly take a bath before going to the market, I told her to wait her turn since I was having the bath first. In this respect, Adunni explains:

She hisses an angry hiss, jam the door open and drag me with my naked self-outside in the open. Then she begins to pack sand from the floor and paint my body with it. I never feel shame like that. Khadija’s children gather around us and was laughing as Labake was using sand to scrub my body and curse me. I am giving them respect, so I didn’t fight back. When she finishes beating me, she turns to the two of Khadija children and slap the laughters from their mouth. (p. 48)

From this quotation, it is clear that a conflictual atmosphere reigns in Morufu’s household, mainly between his wives wherein Labake doesn’t approve cohabitation. Her behavior really annoys the others leading the second senior wife to promise fighting back until one of them is bleeding blood if she keeps on troubling. To this effect, Khadija promises: “*Next time, I must keep a bowl of red, hot pepper beside me in baffle room so that when Labake come and find my trouble, I can pour the pepper in her face and bite her breast*” (pp. 49-50). As it can be noticed, Labake is at the center of troubles disuniting them in Morufu’s house.

However, if Labake was rough, lacking refinement or good-manners, Khadija on her hand was moderate, collaborating with Adunni as Morufu confesses: “*Khadija is having a small sense*”.(p. 33). Thus, while Labake hates her co-wives, that is Khadija and Adunni on one hand, these latter on the other hand love each other. Truly, throughout *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, it is demonstrated that Morufu’s second senior wife welcomes the new one and both start collaborating. As soon as Adunni arrived, Khadija started to befriend her by giving her advices about the likes and dislikes of their common husband: “*It is not easy to be wife of Morufu. If you want peace in this house, Adunni, don’t let our husband be angry. His anger is an evil spirit. Not good*” (p. 40). From there, we can read the good relationship existing between them and this is also proved through instructions or secrets of the house Khadija reveals to her co-wife, mainly about bathroom and eating habits. Therefore, after specifying that everybody is using the bathroom anyhow, Khadija keeps on instructing:

But I must tell you that our husband must be first. Very early in the morning, once the mosque calls for prayer, or when the cock crows, around five in the morning. After that, anybody can use it. Our husband must do everything first. If he has not eaten food, nobody can be eating. He is the king in this house. (p. 42)

It is evident that if Khadija and Adunni are in good terms, it is because right from the beginning Khadija welcomes Adunni by showing her generosity while the senior wife was repulsive toward her. In addition, Khadija affectionately develops altruism toward Adunni who was facing hardship in Morufu’s house. Definitely, Khadija’s attitude prompted Adunni to confess that “*Khadija make me feel a pinch of comfort in Morufu’s house. She keeps to caring for me in between caring for her three childrens and the one swelling in her stomach. Adunni, you must eat this yam...*” Later on, to render visible their co-wives’ relationship, Adunni confesses:

Me and Khadija are sharing bedroom now, except of when Morufu call for me. It makes things easy, sharing room with Khadija. When sad feelings are catching me in the night, Khadija will rub my back, her hand going around and around, as she is telling me to be strong, to be fighting to keep my mind. Sometimes, when her baby is kicking too hard on her stomach, I press my mouth to her hard stomach and sing a song to the baby inside until she and her baby will fall inside a deep sleep, and Khadija say that when she born the baby, I must keep singing to him too, because the baby is already knowing my voice. (p. 50)

Additionally, Khadija and Adunni are more than friends though they share the same husband. They mutually comprehend and this fact leads Adunni to confess that with Khadija, the days in Morufu’s house are short and sometimes sweet since they talk and laugh together. As a matter of fact, they were so faithful one another that when Khadija, with her stomach swelling so big and making her sometimes sick couldn’t cope with household chores, Adunni rescued her as well as her children. This is noticed through Adunni’s words when she writes:

I am helping to do her washing, cooking, everything. I am helping with her small children too, baffing for Alafia and her sisters, and feeding them food and washing their hair and cloths. They are good children, Khadija’s children, and ever happy. (p. 53)

In their daily conversations Khadija and Adunni do not prevent from secrets one another. Thus, to cement their relationship Khadija offers to assist Adunni. In fact, for having experienced the pain from Morufu’s use of Fire-Cracker, Khadija offered to help Adunni appeasing the suffering when she claims: “*I bleed small blood in my under*”. Thus, to help Adunni, she replies: “*I know how it feels, she says, voice kind. Ibukun powder is good for pain. When our husband leaves for his work, I can boil hot water, press the part for you and rub you some palm oil. The pain will go*”. (p. 47)

To round off this section, it matters to recall that it has been about relationship between co-wives in Abi Dare’s *The Girl with the Louding Voice*. The result is that there is a conflicting relationship between the senior wife and her co-wives on one hand and a friendly relationship between the second senior wife and the third wife. Finally, evidences to sustain these relationships have been given all along the text. However, based on marriage the current paper also revisits the protagonist’s marital experience that is our concern in the coming lines.

#### **IV- The Protagonist’s Marital Experience**

Adunni is the protagonist of *The Girl with the Louding Voice* and this section is devoted to the circumstances she comes across all along the story, especially in her conjugal life. It goes without saying that life in community cannot go without misunderstandings. As such each marriage faces up and down times but what matters is the way to settle problems. However, Adunni’s case is unique. Aware of the role education plays in the life of children, Adunni’s desire was to pursue her schooling but limited by the traditional law which requires young girls to get married when they no longer go to school. In this connection, Adunni’s mother’s words are relevant when she advised Adunni on her life time:

In this village, if you go to school, no one will be forcing you to marry any man. But if you didn't go to school, they will marry you to any man once you are reaching fifteen years old. Your schooling is your voice, child. It will be speaking for you even if you didn't open your mouth to talk. It will be speaking till the day God is calling you come. (p.21)

As we can see, early marriage is the first hardship Adunni has experienced after her mother's demise. At the age of 14, she no longer goes to school and consequently is forced to marry against her will. The answer she receives from her father was convincing but disappointing too, when Adunni wanted to know to whom the bride price belonged to:

*"Papa, is this bride price for me or for another person?"*

*"The bride price is for you, Adunni. You will be marrying Morufu next week"* (p. 6).

Actually, this answer fell like a thunderbolt in Adunni's ear and she naturally felt discomfort from her mind as we can read in the following passage: *"And my papa, he nods his head slowly low, not minding the tears standing in my eyes or the opening wide of my mind"* (p. 6). Surprised by this fact, she couldn't make up her mind but started to think of her future that would sink in darkness because of the constraints of marital home. *The Girl with the Louding Voice* is meaningful and revolves around Adunni's ambition. As a reminder, Adunni's dream was to have a louding voice but she was convinced that this could be possible only through education. That is why she didn't want to marry Morufu as she questions herself: *"Morufu will not help me to finish my school. Himself didn't go to school. And if I am not going to school, then how will I be finding a job and having money? How will I have a Louding Voice?"* (p. 26).

As soon as she sets foot in her husband house, Adunni starts undergoing hardships of different nature. This is certain because troubles in a marital home often depend on the existence of conflicts between co-wives, mainly in a polygamous household. Indeed, Adunni finds herself troubled not only by her husband but also by her husband's senior wife who doesn't stand sharing her husband with any other woman. Based on Morufu's attitude, Adunni finds herself in a kind of prison in his house for the rules he gave her, claiming himself to be the king of the house. Indeed, Adunni confesses that since she has been living in Morufu's house nearly four weeks, her eyes have seen things she can never wish for the worst of her enemy. As a result, she believes that *"there is a devil inside Morufu, a madness that comes out when he drinks that devil Fire-Cracker, or when one of the children is causing him to be angry"* (p. 10). Moreover, another hardship Adunni has experienced in Morufu's house is prevention or restriction of speech which serves as imprisonment for her. In fact, she was given rules taken as 'golden rules' by her husband as we can discover:

Adunni, this is your new house. And in this house, I am having rule. There is respect of me. I am the king in this house. Nobody must talk back to me. Not you, not the children, not anybody. When I am speaking, you keep your mouth quiet. Adunni that means you don't ask question in my front, you hear me? (p. 36)

Apart from that, Adunni has faced a tricky plight that even prompted her departure. In fact, on the same day that their husband's first daughter was getting marriage, Khadija, the second senior wife begged Adunni to accompany her to a midwife without their husband's knowledge because Khadija was pregnant. Unfortunately, this outing resulted in Khadija's demise. This unfortunate event prompted Adunni's flight to Agan village where she found refuge at Iya, asking Iya to help her. From there Adunni found herself on the way to Lagos thanks to Mr. Kola, Iya's brother who lives in Idanra village and whose agency offers help to needy people. Actually, Adunni escaped her people who was looking for her after Khadija's death. Iya incited her to move and also prayed for Adunni on her own demand: *"You better go with him before your peoples are coming back... Good things will meet you in Lagos. Your mama's spirit is with you. Go quick"* (p. 110). This is a factual situation that corroborates a saying stipulating "Nothing so bad in which there is not something of good". From Khadija's death, Adunni fled or escaped her husband for Lagos where she also faced some hardships before finding her bearings for her future. Thus, with her ambition to pursue education, Adunni has been embarked on an adventure life, one way to approve her mother's expression for education, especially she was confident and sure of her mother's wordings.

For her part, Morufu's senior wife, Labake had never ceased to annoy Adunni as she didn't approve cohabiting with Adunni. Her wickedness was so rough that she was instantly fighting Adunni as she reports:

Then she begins to pack sand from the floor and paints my body with it. I never feel shame like that. Khadija's childrens gather around us and was laughing as Labake was using sand to scrub my body and curse me. I am giving her respect, so I didn't fight back. When finish beating me, she turns to the two of Khadija's childrens and slap the laughters from their mouth. (p. 10)

It was a mere humiliation for Adunni who has never experienced such a factual situation, leading her to think back of her father who forced her in a precocious marriage. Finally, she was subjugated and powerless since everybody (excepted Khadija) around her limited her rights. This leads us to conclude that Adunni's

marital life was crowned with tribulations after tribulations. Her own husband and her senior co-wife didn't help her live a peaceful life during her stay in Morufu's house.

### Conclusion

The present research paper dealt with African women's marriage perception in Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*. The gist of it has been to show how Abi Dare presents the circumstances of marriage in her novel. To this effect, the research question that guided our analysis was stated as follows: How does marriage is perceived in Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*? The results obtained in this study reveal that the issue of marriage has been extensively discussed. This led us to probe the nature of marriage, childbearing, the relationship between co-wives and the protagonist's marital experience. More than one category of marriage has been mentioned but polygamy was our concern in the study because the protagonist was married in a polygamous household. The importance of childbearing has also been raised, especially male children, the reason that prompted Morufu to marry Adunni as third wife. Since Adunni stayed in a polygamous home with two co-wives, their relationship has also been analyzed. It results from the analysis that Adunni, taken as the microcosm of African women, has experienced conflicting relationship on one hand and friendly or peaceful relationship in her marital home. At last, the hardships faced by the protagonist have also been presented. As a matter of fact, all these aspects related to marriage helped us understand how Abi Dare perceives marriage in her novel.

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