



ORPHANISM AND CHILDHOOD IN ABI DARE'S *THE GIRL WITH THE LOUDING VOICE* (2020)

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores orphanism and its impacts on childhood in Abi Daré's *The Girl with the Louding Voice* in African societies by putting stress on the vulnerabilities of orphaned children, especially girls in such societies already marked by gender inequality, poverty, and limited access to education. Through Psychoanalytic theory coupled with negofeminism to analyse the book understudy, probing results have been reached: orphanaged children face many other problems apart from food, clothing and a safe living place. They also face long term psychological problems including anxiety, depression, self-isolation, anger feeling, the desire to withdraw, the feeling of sadness, depersonalisation, lack of freedom, trauma and early marriage. The analyses reveal that to address material, emotional and behavioral problems, it is necessary to combine several interventions and a combination of group-based approaches.

Keywords: Orphanism, childhood, behavioral problems, inequality

RESUME

Cet article examine l'orphelinat et ses répercussions sur l'enfance dans les sociétés africaines dans le roman intitulé *The Girl With the louding Voice* écrit par Abi Daré en mettant l'accent sur les vulnérabilités des enfants orphelins, en particulier dans les sociétés africaines déjà marquées par les inégalités basées sur le genre, la pauvreté et l'accès limité à l'éducation. À travers la théorie psychoanalytique associée au négoféminisme utilisés pour analyser l'œuvre à l'étude, des résultats significatifs ont été obtenus : les enfants orphelins sont confrontés à de nombreux problèmes qui vont au-delà des besoins fondamentaux tels que la nourriture, les vêtements et un lieu sûr où vivre. Ils font aussi face à des problèmes psychologiques comme la dépression, le repli sur soi, le resenti de colère, le désir de s'isoler, le resenti de tristesse, la dépersonnalisation, le manque de liberté, le traumatisme et le mariage précocé. Les analyses ont révélé que pour remédier aux problèmes matériel, émotionnel et comportemental, il est nécessaire d'associer diverses interventions complémentaires et de recourir à des approches basées sur la dynamique de groupe.

Mots clés : orphelinat, enfance, problèmes comportementaux, inégalité

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, Abi Daré's debut novel with a provocative and meaningful title, *The Girl with the Louding Voice* launched her glorious entrance into the world literary scene, especially in African women's fiction. Written from the perspective of a child-narrator-protagonist, this novel explores gender biases against women in contemporary African communities as it can be concluded by the few scholars' production on this novel.

For instance, M'vouende Balenda *et al* (2024), discussed women's plight in a polygamous family where the man is expected a male child as is Adunni, the protagonist's case. Adunni, they concluded, "has experienced conflicting relationship on the one hand and friendly or peaceful relationship in her marital home on the other hand... All these aspects related to marriage helped us understand how Abi Daré perceives marriage in her novel. (Balenda *et al*, 2024, p. 54). As for Ardiansyah (2022, p.290), he explained that the most common oppression among Nigerians is the marriage of teenage girls like Adunni and several female characters in the society with men who are much older than them and already have wives. For him, Adunni is representative of all the other female teenagers who suffer from powerlessness, cultural imperialism he defined as an act or word that demeans women where everything about women is limited, marginalisation, all forms of violence, exploitation, etc. Interestingly, he noted that her great determination and commitment earned her a scholarship to study, which stands as an inspiration for future generations. Going along the same thought, (Arshad 2024, p.289) wrote in the introduction of her novel:

The African-American author Abi Daré made a successful case for how people can develop their individuality and a beautiful mind through knowledge to enjoy a fulfilled, prosperous, and meaningful life. Her novel, *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, depicts the realistic values of life and the realization that women try to be confident in who they are. Instead of men's centrism and the traditional values of masculinity, Abi Daré gives much importance to women and their wise decisions and reveals the female consciousness through her protagonist, Adunni.

In a nutshell, most scholars concerned themselves with women's status as a second class citizen. In the same vein, the present article scrutinises motherless female child's status, orphanhood known as orphanism, in a patriarchal Nigerian country especially Yoruba community as Abi Daré herself confessed during an interview with Kendra:

I think that Adunni was born into a culture and into a rural part of Nigeria... And there's extreme poverty,... And she was born, unfortunately, in the part where there's poverty... where a girl child is not seen as valuable. And she was seen as someone that should be silenced. Right? That's (1.). (2.) Her education was not that important to her father. But her mother really valued this. Her mother didn't have an education, and she wanted her daughter to have one. And so her mother says to her that your education will give you a voice. But Adunni says, I don't just want that. I want to have a louding voice. And so to her, that means to be able (1.) to be educated because she wants to (2.) It also means to be able to create a legacy.

The main objective of this paper is to show girls' resilience in contemporary african communities. Then, the central research question is: How does Abi Daré construct this resilience in her debut novel under study? This research question is subdivided into two others: What are the literary devices Abi Daré employs to emphasise motherless female children's conditions in the text? What are motherless' female children's tools of resistance in the text? In order to achieve this objective, this paper is divided into two main sections. In the first section, the literary devices Abi Daré uses to show

female motherless children's oppression are mentioned. The second one deals with tools of resistance to counter oppression in Abi Daré's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*.

1. Literary Devices used by Abi Daré to express orphanism

Orphanism is a powerful and repeated event in literature which explores the emotional, psychological and societal effects of parentlessness. To make her story vivid and appealing, Abi Daré has used many literary devices which are techniques that writers use to capture readers' attention, add depth to their writing, and engage the reader. In novels, these techniques play a pivotal role in creating vivid imagery, developing complex characters, explore themes shaping meaning, creating emotional impact and making the story pitiful and impressive. First, she uses first person narrative voice to bring directly inside Adunni's mind, to reinforce the importance of having a voice and the authenticity of Adunni's unique use of language and to encourage empathy.

The story in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* is told in this voice to make it vivid and foster a connection between the reader and the narrator. Thus, the novel is told from Adunni's perspective, allowing readers to intimately experience her pain, her vulnerability, and her longing for parental care. It helps the reader connect deeply with her thoughts and emotions. This is clearly understood when Adunni says that she is not just a girl but she is a girl with a louding voice. This statement definitely shows her desire to be heard and emphasises how important her voice is to her identity. This perspective makes the emotional impact of orphanhood more immediate and relatable. The following passage from the novel can illustrate this aspect: "*My name is Adunni. I am a girl, and I am a person too*" (p. 1). This immediately introduces Adunni's first-person narrative voice. The simple declarative shows both her innocence and her desire to assert her identity. It is part of Adunni's powerful introduction of herself, setting the tone for her journey and desire to be heard and recognised as a full human being. The same objective can be perceived in the following sentences from Adunni:

If I marry Morufu, that means that you are throwing all my future inside dustbin. I have a good brain Papa. You know it, Teacher know it. If I can be finding a way to go to school, I can be helping you when I get a good job. I am not minding to go back to school and be old of all in class. I know I can learn things quick. Soon, I finish all my educations, become teacher, and then I will collect monthly salary-moneys to build you a house, buy you a fine car, a black Benz (p.25).

Here, she highlights her plea for education and her belief that marrying Morufu would end all her hopes for a future beyond servitude. Another literary device in Abi Daré's novel is non-standard English/ Idiosyncratic Language. The aim behind this device is to make a large number of readers get her message. Adunni's "broken" English ("louding voice", himself, it something, it mean, etc.) reflects both her innocence and her marginalization. Her voice, despite being imperfect linguistically, powerfully expresses the confusion, fear, and yearning of a young orphan navigating in a hostile

world. This can be noticed through Adunni's words while expressing her anger as she was obliged to get married so that her father will have money to feed his children and himself: *I am marrying Morufu because Papa is needing moneys for food and community rent and nonsense* (p.17). This shows Adunni's blend of innocence and resignation especially the way she interprets harsh realities with her own speech rhythm. This type of language is also noticed through the contrasting of village life and city one: *In Ikati, we don't have begging childrens. Even if the mama and papa of a child is not having moneys, they don't send their childrens don't beg for food* (p.136). Her repetition and grammatical style highlight her fresh, unfiltered observations as she moves from village to Lagos. Another important device in literature is symbolism.

This literary device helps the author to represent larger ideas and concepts. Here, objects, people or actions are used to convey abstract ideas or quality beyond their literal meaning. Abi Daré has used many symbols to convey her message in the novel understudy.

2. Fighting problems associated with orphanism

First, Adunni's voice is a meaningful tool to fight orphanism in this novel. It symbolizes agency, identity, and resistance. Adunni's journey from silence to vocal empowerment parallels her transformation from a voiceless orphan to a self-aware individual. It stands for the power of her voice in a society that wants to silence girls as one can note here: *I want to go to school. I want to learn. I want to speak, and I want to have a louding voice* (p.13). Another symbol to show how orphans and especially female ones fight against their fate are books and education. In *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, they symbolize hope and the presence of her late mother guidance. Her mother's wish for her to go to school becomes a lasting emotional compass. Moreover, they represent hope, empowerment and the key to freedom. She portrays education as the greatest weapon against poverty and oppression as it said in this quotation: *If I have education, I can have a voice. I can talk and people will listen* (p.33). The lemon tree is another symbol used by Abi Daré. This tree at Big Madam's house symbolises Adunni's growth and resilience in a harsh environment. Like the tree, she survives and grows despite adversity. This is noted through the following words: *There is a lemon tree in the back of the house....I like to look at it. It is small, but it is trying to grow* (P. 121). Mama's death and the bride price are also used to draw the readers' attention on the fact that girls and especially orphan's are dehumanized and treated as property. To make her story interesting, flashbacks and memories are also made use of. Frequent references to Adunni's deceased mother and the emotional void left by her parents emphasize the theme of orphanism. These flashbacks show how the past shapes her current resilience and sense of purpose.

"Adunni, your mother have dead," Papa say after a moment. I can smell the the drink of his body as he is talking. Even when Papa, his skin and sweat still smell.

"Yes , Papa. I know", I say . Why he is telling me something I have already know? Something that have cause a hole inside my heart and fill it with block of pain that I am dragging with me to everywhere? How can I be forgetting how my Mama was coughing blood, red and thick with spit bubbles, inside my hand every day for three months. When I am closing my eyes to sleep at night, I still the blood, sometimes, I taste the salt in it.(.....) Sometimes, I have worries for Papa. Since Mama have dead, he keep saying things that didn't make sense, and sometimes talk to himself, talk to himself too when he think nobody is hearing. (p.2)

Through the flashbacks used in her novel, one can understand the reasons why Papa gave her daughter to a rich man as the third wife and the trauma she underwent and emphasizes the emotional impact of a woman's death, especially a mother and a wife's death on her family. Juxtaposition is also a literary device Abi Daré has used to convey her message.

Adunni's life is contrasted with that of other characters who will have family support, highlighting the vulnerability and exploitation orphans face. Most of time, childhood is a period associated with the following adjectives: joyful, playful, curious, imaginative, carefree, but in Adunni's case, the adjectives one can refer to are the antonyms of those which have just been cited because of her mother's as it is quoted here:

When Mama was dead, a light off itself inside of me. I keep myself in that dark for many months until one day Kayus find me in the room where I was sorrowing and weeping, and with his eyes round, full of fear, he beg me to stop my crying because my crying is causing him a heart pain.
That day, I pick up my sorrow and lock it in my heart so that i can be strong to take care of Kayus and Papa. But sometimes like today, the sorrow climb out of my heart and stick his tongue in my face (P. 4)

Another juxtaposition is about Anitan's house: Anitan's house is not like ours. Her Mama's house is doing well so last year or so, they begins to cover the red mud of their house with cement and begin to fix it so now they have a sofa with caushion and a bed with a good mattress and a standing fan that don't make a loud noise when it is turning. Their tee-vee is working too. Sometimes, it even catches the Abroad movies. (p. 11)

Imagery which are vivid descriptions of Adunni's harsh experiences (forced marriage, domestic slavery) bring the grim reality of being an orphan. First, imagery of abandonment and emptiness is a strong means to convey sorrows of being parentless. This situation is clearly perceived in these lines: *the house is quiet like a grave. No Mama voice to call my name. No laughter. No huge. Only the smell of gari in the air and the cry of my chest.* " (p. 3) This sensory image conveys deep loneliness and grief, emphasising the emotional void left by her mother's death and the absence of maternal love. The smell of gari conveys poverty as in families, when mothers are absent, there is no cooking so, children are obliged to eat gari which is cassava flour. Animals and objects are also a tool for Daré to convey her message about the loss of humanity. "I am like

goat for sale, passed from hand to hand" (p.22). Here, Adunni portrays herself as an animal; reflecting the dehumanization and powerlessness she faces as an orphaned girl with no one to protect her from forced marriage and abuse. Here, the image of goat suggests something that is owned and sold, emphasising that Adunni has no control over her life. She is treated as property by her father and later by her husband. In addition, Abi Daré uses imagery of captivity as it can be noticed in this sentence quoted from the novel understudy. "*My life is locked inside a cage. I am not having a key*" (P. 30) This metaphor and visual imagery show how orphanhood strips her of agency. Her father's death removes her last tie to familial security, and she becomes trapped in a life of servitude and silence. Darkness and silence also convey the sorrow of orphans: "*Darkness is swallowing me. There is no light, no voice, no hope.*" The use of these two elements represent the emotional despair and isolation Adunni experiences, suggesting that being orphan in African society is like being swallowed by forgetfulness invisible and unheard. To strengthen orphan's harsh living conditions Daré added hunger and emptiness: "*My belly is singing the song of hunger, and my hear is dry like firehood*". Physical suffering like hunger mirrors her emotional starvation, the lack of affection, education and support that orphaned girls like her are often denied. Apart from the above mentioned imageries, a lost voice is added. "Even my voice is hiding. I don't want to come out because it is fearing too (p. 103). Adunni's silenced voice becomes a recurring image symbolising the suppressing of her identity, rights and dreams, all intensified by her orphanhood.

These layered images collectively portray how being an orphan, especially in African context means being voiceless, vulnerable and invisible, reinforcing the novel's central themes of oppression and the fight for self-expression. Irony has also helped the author to emphasise the sorrow of orphans.

In *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, Abi Daré employs irony as a form of imagery to powerfully expose the challenges linked to orphanism in contemporary Nigerian society. A poignant example lies in the central of the title itself, Adunni dreams of having a "lounding voice" to express herself and advocate for girls like her (p.13). There is irony in how society exploits orphans under the guise of protecting them, as in the case of Adunni's arranged marriage and domestic servitude.

In this novel, Abi Daré masterfully uses literary techniques like first-person narration, symbolism and non standard English to express the pain, isolation and identity struggle of orphanism. This author also uses irony in *The Girl With a Louding Voice*. This device serves as a powerful form of imagery to highlight the harsh realities and contradictions linked to orphanism, a condition marked not only by the absence of parents but also by the systemic neglect and vulnerability that often follow.

In short, Irony in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* acts as a mirror to society hypocrisy and neglect of orphaned children. It draws vivid mental images of a world full of

contradictions, where the people who most need care are exploited, and where the very systems meant to support them instead reinforce their silence and suffering.

3. Resistance means to fight orphanism

African writers show that children who lose one or both parents face serious challenges. However, these children develop specific means of resistance. These means include education, voice, resilience, economic survival and community support.

3.1. Education

In *The Girl with the Louding voice* by Abi Daré, several characters, especially Adunni, actively resist the effects of orphanism through various forms of psychological, emotional, and social resistance. Adunni fights against the social limitations imposed on orphans by clinging to her dream of education. Her mother's final wish for her to be educated becomes her internal motivation and a tool for escaping systemic oppression. Despite the lack of parental support and the constraints placed on her as an orphan Adunni constantly seeks education as a path to liberation: "An education is the only thing that can stop a girl from becoming a slave" (P.30). This quote clearly shows Adunni's belief that knowledge equals power, a resistance to ignorance and oppression. Apart from education, hope and determination also embody a means for fighting the effects of orphanism.

In this novel, education is portrayed as the most powerful tool for resisting the vulnerabilities of orphanism. Adunni's mentor, Mama Idowu, tells her, "Your schooling is your voice, child. It will be speaking for you even if you didn't open your mouth to talk" (p. 24). This quote shows that education provides agency and a voice, even when Adunni is powerless in the households she is sent to. By valuing learning, Adunni begins to reclaim control over her life, challenging the social conditions that treat her as property and deny her choice.

Adunni's personal determination to resist is also evident when she declares, "That day, I tell myself that ... I will go to school.... I want a louding voice" (p.25). Despite being treated as a child laborer and having little support, she resolves to pursue her dreams. This internal resistance is her way of coping with orphanhood, not just the loss of her mother, but also the lack of protection, guidance, and recognition in her society. By setting education as her goal, she turns vulnerability into motivation.

Later in the novel, Adunni asserts control over her life story, stating, Not his-story.... My own will be called her-story (p. 324). This demonstrates a crucial form of resistance: reclaiming identity and voice from a world that tries to define her as powerless. By claiming her narrative, she challenges the invisibility imposed on those who are socially orphans, showing that resistance can also be a matter of self-expression and ownership of one's life.

Even in moments of hardship, adunni uses hope and self-worth as a form of resistance. She reflects, "When you get up everyday,... tomorrow will be better than today. (...) You are a person of value" (p.264). Here, the emotional resilience she cultivates allows her to endure exploitation and neglect. By believing in her own worth, she defies the isolation and dehumanisation associated with orphanhood.

Finally, Adunni's resistance extends beyond herself when she envisions helping other girls: "A day will come when my voice will sound so loud over Nigeria and the world....because when I finish my education, I will find a way to help other girls to go to school" (p.322). This shows that her fight against orphanism is not just personal but communal. Education and voice become tools to empower others who, like her, are vulnerable and silenced.

Similarly, in *Weep not Child*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o shows that gives hope to Njoroge, who believes that Education was the light that would guide him. So, education is portrayed as a tool for escaping vulnerability and rebuilding the future.

3.2. Self-awareness, defiance and inner-strength

In *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, the author presents orphanism as a condition marked by voicelessness, exploitation and emotional isolation. However, the novel also foregrounds alternative forms of resistance that extends beyonds education, particularly through self awareness, defiance and inner strength. Adunni's early recognition of her condition becomes the first step toward resistance. She laments in the following words, " My life is inside my body like rain inside a cloud, waiting to fall (p.40). This metaphor reflects her suppressed potential, suggesting that even in confinement, she possesses an inner force capable of transformation.

By articulating her condition, she begins to resist the silence imposed on her. Another significant form of resistance is endurance combined with quiet defiance. Rather than completely submitting to her circumstances, Adunni develops the ability to endure while maintaining a sense of self. At one point, she observes: "I am learning how to be strong inside, even if outside I am looking small" (p. 70). This illustrates that resistance does not always take the form of open rebellion ; it can also manifest as internal strength and the refusal to be psychologically broken. Such resilience allows her to survive conditions that are designed to strip her of dignity.

Furthermore, Daré highlights self-worth and moral awareness as tool to resist orphanism. Adunni consistently distinguishes between right and wrong, even when those around her normalise abuse and exploitation. This is evident when she reflects on injustice and mistreatment, suggesting that she does not accept her situation as natural or deserved. Her ability to maintain this moral clarity prevents her from internalising oppression, reinforcing her resistance to the dehumanizing effect of orphanism.

Moreover, the novel presents hope as an active, sustaining force. Adunni's forward-looking mindset enables her to resist despair and maintain her sense of purpose. This can be noticed through the following sentence: "*I am knowing that something better is coming for me*" (p.200). This belief in future transformation demonstrates that hope is not passive but rather a deliberate stance against the limitations imposed on her. By holding on to this vision, Adunni resists the finality of her circumstances and continues striving for change.

In the same vein, Ahmadou Kourouma, in *Allah is not obliged*, presents Birahima, a fully orphaned child who survives in a war environment. He introduces himself by saying, "I am a small boy called Birahima. I am a street kid". His ability to adapt to extreme conditions demonstrates how resilience becomes a survival mechanism. Without family support, he relies on inner strength to endure hardship.

In addition, challenging social and cultural norms is another means of resistance. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tsitsi Dangaremba portrays Tambu, who refuses to accept the limitation placed on her as a girl. Her statement: "I was not sorry when my brother died," reveals her awareness of inequality and her determination to seize opportunities. By insisting on her education, she resists both poverty and patriarchy. Her resistance is subtle, complex, and deeply shaped by her social context. Unlike open rebellion, her resistance often takes the form of persistence, ambition, and quiet defiance against the limitations imposed on her as a Black girl in colonial Rhodesia. Buchi Emecheta has also referred to orphanhood and the resistance linked to this state. She depicted Nnu Ego who effectively grows up as a marginalised

In short, African authors show that the problems linked to orphanhood can be confronted through several key means: education, voice, resilience, defiance of oppressive forms, and community support. These strategies allow children not only to survive difficult circumstances but also to reclaim their dignity and hope. Thus, while orphanhood creates vulnerability, some authors demonstrate that it also gives rise to powerful forms of resistance and transformation.

CONCLUSION

Abi Daré's novel, *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, is set in contemporary Nigeria where female teenagers' especially orphan's forced marriage is still a challenge because of traditional beliefs and rampant poverty. Just like Adunni's father, girls' early entrance into marriage, especially polygamous with men, old enough to be their father like Morufu, is an answer to their poor life. Female motherless children's vulnerability in such a patriarchal community is outstanding because she becomes a load the widower must get rid of. In this respect, literary devices like child-narrator, co-wife bonding between the second wife and the third, Adunni, the protagonist's language style (non standard English to use the author's word) are assertive of this. Fortunately, Abi Daré

sees to it that such female characters find out means of empowerment like education to free themselves as ultimately, the novel concludes that while orphanism intensifies vulnerability, it can also sharpen an individual's resolve. Through persistence, self-belief, and strategic use of limited opportunities, an orphan like Adunni can challenge societal constraints and reclaim the right to education. Daré thus delivers a powerful message: education is not only a means of empowerment but also a form of resistance against systems that seek to silence marginalized voices and orphanism underscores how the absence of parental protection deepens vulnerability, yet simultaneously fuels a determined struggle for dignity, solidarity and self-empowerment.

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