

Female Solidarity Andresilience in Abi Dare's and So I Roar

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Date of Submission: 01-09-2025

Date of Acceptance: 10-09-2025

ABSTRACT

Every day, girls and women are subjected to prejudice and violence, especially in underdeveloped and developing nations like Nigeria. We read and hear of numerous stories confirming this reality on the mainstream and social media. While some women choose to die in silence, some are bold to speak up and confront their oppressors. Prominent women like Chimamanda Adichie – popular for her speech, “We Should All Be Feminists”, and her novels where she explores the themes of gender, race and identity, Aisha Yesufu – a prominent voice in the Bring Back Our Girls Movement, and Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi – co-founder of the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), have encouraged women to resist oppression and fight to reclaim their self-worth. Abi Dare, through her novels, *The Girl with the Louding Voice* and *And So I Roar*, also gives voice to the oppressed and marginalized women, portraying characters whose resilience and solidarity inspire change. This paper explores the themes of female solidarity and resilience in Abi Dare's *And So I Roar*, as a demonstration of the strength of girls and women. The speakers Tia and Aduni are portrayed as characters who are strong-willed and whose determination and unity bring positive change in the treatment of female, not just in the immediate environment, but also as a reflection of the wider Nigerian society. Significantly, the novel traverses across the three major ethnic groups, underscoring that violence against women persists nationwide.

I. INTRODUCTION

And So I Roar by Abi Dare is a compelling narrative that explores the themes of resilience and solidarity, alongside themes of identity, loss and self-discovery. Through her story, Dare sheds light on the complexities of female experience, loss of identity and the quest for self-discovery. Through the characters of Tia, 14-years-old Adunni, 15-years-old Zenab and a number of

other girls, the writer is able to show that determination, undaunted resolve to fight oppression and solidarity are tools of resistance in the face of adversity and systemic oppression. The novel highlights Adunni's determination to find her voice and clear her name of the accusation of murder labeled against her.

Anjana Shakya - gender rights advocate and leader in Nepal's women's rights movement, in her speech at the 1995 Beijing Conference noted that “While many structural barriers remain, today's challenges are more intertwined with technology, climate change, and globalization.” Abi Dare echoes this in her novel. Ikati village suffers lack of rain due to deforestation, leading to drought which the chiefs attribute to supposed “sacrilegious” acts by girls and women, reflecting the persistence of patriarchal scapegoating. Even in clear cases of male violence—such as Semi's rape of 12-year-old Hauwa—justice favors the male perpetrator.

Abi Dare's novel, *And So I Roar* is a strong advocate for the fair treatment of girls and women, as well as a call for women to support and encourage each other, reinforcing Anjana Shakya's words that “The struggle has to continue jointly to make a difference for women's equality.”

About the Author

Abi Dare is a Nigerian author, born in Lagos but currently lives in Essex with her family – husband and two daughters. She is the author of the New York Times bestselling novel, *The Girl With a Louding Voice*, and its sequel, *And So I Roar*.

In an interview with Abi Dare, she states that she derived her inspiration for her first novel from her conversation with her eight-year old daughter. Abi had asked the little girl to do some chores, but the girl had muttered her frustrations. Abi asks her if she knows that some little girls back in Nigeria do such works for rich families like theirs just to get paid. That conversation kept Abi thinking, and she desires to write a story about a

teenage girl who is determined to be educated so as to rise above the hardship and the societal pressure she is faced with. This produced the first novel, *The Girl with the Louding Voice*

In another interview with Abi Dare, she states that the desire to make *The Girl with the Louding Voice* a typical Nigerian story that usually doesn't end in part one, compelled her to write a sequel, which she titled *And So I Roar*. The novel has received the award of the first-ever Climate Fiction Prize.

Summary of the Novel: The story tells of fourteen-year-old Adunni who is forcefully married to an old man. She is unfortunate to be with her dying co-wife when she gives up. Out of fear, Adunni runs away from the village and moves to the city to get a better life. She unfortunately ends up in the house of a wicked woman who would overuse and not pay her. She luckily meets Tia who rescues her from Madam Florence and helps her get admission and scholarship into a free secondary school for young talented girls.

Just when all seemed bright with hope of a better life, emissaries from the village come to take Adunni back to the village to be judged for killing her co-wife.

Tia goes with Adunni to the village to help rescue the little girl from the claws of the patriarchs.

Adunni meets other girls who have also come for the sacrifice. In oneness, they raise their voices to withstand the oppression of the patriarchal society. Other women in the community are not left out. They all have experienced oppression in different ways. They therefore unite with the girls for sacrifice to 'roar' against the domineering patriarchs. Like miracle, things turn in their favor, as Zenab's military father brings his crew to arrest the chiefs who are carrying out the sacrifices.

Theme of Resilience: UNDRR defines resilience as "The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management."

Drawing from the above definition and bringing it to our context, it can be established that resilience is the ability of an individual who is faced with barriers of oppression or violence to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and

recover from the negative effects of these oppressions. Through the character of Tia and Adunni, Dare builds the structure of resilience. Both characters are able to cope with their present challenges, while maintaining their mental wellbeing.

The Theme of Resilience in the novel can be examined under these sub-topics:

Overcoming Obstacles: The characters are faced with numerous obstacles which try to hinder them from enjoying the bright side of life. Tia is faced with the obstacle of her past. She finds it difficult to forgive her mother for taking away Boma and her baby from her. Though married, she does not enjoy her marriage as she keeps visiting Boma's grave site and still reliving her memories with Boma. Nevertheless, she is forced to let go of the past to start a new life with her husband and her newly adopted children, Adunni and Kayus

Adunni is also faced with obstacles including poverty, lack of education and societal expectations, yet she is determined to forge her own path. Also, when luck smiles on her, offering her a scholarship to finally get educated, she is taken to the village to undergo a cleansing sacrifice that would cost her life, if not for the timely intervention of the military. In all these, Adunni is able to resist her fears and challenge her oppressors through her speech.

Finding Strength in Adversity: The characters are able to discover inner strength through their experiences, showcasing their resilience. Adunni's experience in the circle of forest empowers her to find her inner strength. The stories told in the Zee-Zee show by other girls empower her to speak up for her fellow female folk, as well as roar against their oppressors. Her roaring speech ignites fear in the men as the village becomes a focus for the government and human rights organization.

Theme of Solidarity: Solidarity emphasizes the importance of standing together, supporting one another. It is a powerful theme in the novel that explores the bond between women and their cooperative strength in the face of adversity. Solidarity is portrayed in the novel in the following ways:

Women Supporting Women: Mahatma Gandhi's quote, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others" is exemplified in Dare's *And So I Roar*. In the novel, the women stand together to support each and fight for their

rights. Tia knows that her mother is about to pass on with her secret, yet she chooses to remain with Adunni. In her service to Adunni, she finds the strength to forgive her mother, letting go of the past and open her heart to the beautiful life before her.

Kike goes against her husband by being friendly with the girls for the sacrifice and offers them the opportunity to enjoy their last moments. When asked to tie Adunni with the Rope of Blood, she refuses, offering herself to be killed with Adunni. Her revolt awakens other women who join her to rebel against the patriarchal biased society.

Zenab stands against Semi raping little Hauwa, and kills him when he threatens to rape her and Adunni as well. Although Zenab dies, her legacy empowers Adunni's voice to roar against the male-driven society.

This oneness help them overcome the bias they face in the patriarchal society and attract women empowerment from NGOs.

Empowerment through shared experience: The novel displays that women can empower themselves by sharing their experiences and providing emotional support to challenge their obstacles and fight for their rights.

The girls at the Circle of Forests share their experience in The Zee-Zee show on Ikati Forest Tv. Their various experiences encourage the others to be a better version of themselves. Even though Lady G does not participate in sharing her experience, she derives strength from Adunni's story to tell who the father of her twins is. She tells Adunni, "You've given me the courage to... speak up."

Empowerment through Solidarity: The girls and women are empowered through supporting each other, demonstrating the power of collective resilience, as seen in the relationships between Tia and Adunni, Kike and Adunni, Zenab and Hauwa and others.

Tia insists on going with Adunni to the village. Her presence strengthens Adunni to stay alive. Her presence serves as a source of support, comfort and empowerment to Adunni. She encourages Adunni to find her inner voice and Roar.

Tia's support for Adunni also makes her go all the way to see Iya, whom they believed to know the whereabouts of Adunni's father. In her bid to save Adunni, she finds strength to forgive her mom and let go of her past.

Kike is Adunni's husband's fourteen-year-old daughter, now married to the chief priest. Kike

is a victim of female oppression. She helps Adunni secretly, and refuses to tie her with the rope of blood. Her solidarity with her fellow women and rebellion against the male domineering society encourage other women to stand up against the domineering and abusive patriarchs.

Zenab's character, although childish, is a perfect portrayal of solidarity. She had met Hauwa on her way to the village for sacrifice and had seen Semi harassing the little girl. Zenab decides to protect little Hauwa by standing up against Semi. She ends up killing Semi, and consequently killing herself. She gives herself as a sacrificial lamb for others to be strengthened to fight for their freedom.

Mutual Support: Adunni and the women around her demonstrate the value of mutual support and solidarity, helping each other to navigate through the obstacles before them. The novel emphasizes the idea that when women come together to support themselves, they can overcome obstacles easily.

II. CONCLUSION

And So I Roar is a masterpiece that intertwines the themes of resilience and solidarity together, and celebrates the strength and determination of women in confronting injustice. Through her characters, Dare demonstrate that resilience can dismantle barriers, and solidarity can amplify the voices of the marginalized, highlighting the necessity for women to support women. The novel stands as a reminder that women supporting women is not only powerful but necessary for real change.

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