



## Research Paper

# Marriage In Traditional African Community: The Perspective Of Ama Ata Aido's Anowa

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### ABSTRACT

*In this presentation, the traditional African marriage is examined in relation to the involvement of family and community for sustenance from the perspective of Ama Ata Aido's Anowa. Marriage in this context is a union which brings a man and a woman together for companionship and procreation. In terms of methodology, qualitative analysis was adopted in examining how African integrated cultural life affect the marriage. Experience from the drama shows that the family and community play a fundamental role in the success and stabilization of the marriage. It is observed that the failure of Kofi Ako and Anowa's marriage was as a result of disobedience to good counsel of parents and elders of the community. It is important to state that child bearing is fundamental to African marriage as it was the major crisis that brought this one to failure. It is therefore recommended that before any marriage engagement, the man and the woman should consider their suitability to the fulfilment of fundamental obligation of child bearing as concern for family sustenance.*

*Received 06 July, 2021; Revised: 18 July, 2021; Accepted 20 July, 2021 © The author(s) 2021.  
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## I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage in our human experience is a fundamental event which takes place in the society for its sustenance and continuity. Marriage in this context is the union of the man and the woman for companionship and procreation aimed at sustaining the human family through generational offspring emanating from child bearing. This seems to be in accordance with the view espoused by Chiegboka when he states that:

Marriage is important to human race, all cultures and religious affiliations.

This is because marriage is basic, natural, sacred and central human institution. It is the nucleus or the vital cell of all human societies in so far as it inaugurates human family (4)

The above shows that marriage is fundamental to the existence of the human race. It also implies that any society which wishes to continue in existence should embrace marriage for procreation.

In traditional African society, a man is united in marriage with the woman through the performance of rites and ceremonies as recommended by the family and the host community where it is taking place. Again, experience from Nigeria particularly the Igbo has shown that each community has its peculiar pattern of ceremonies which are performed before any marriage is considered consummated and binding on both families. From this point, marriage becomes a communal affair which brings concerned families and the community in celebration of the continuity of their lives as ordained by God-the Creator. This is the process which man complements through the process of procreation. Again, this seems to be in agreement with the opinion canvassed by Chiegboka when he observes that:

The birth of marriage reveals the presence and participation of God, the spouses and the human communities. These agents reflect respectively the divine, the human and public dimensions of the institution of the marriage (91)

From the above perspective, marriage is seen as an institution enshrined with divine and communal approval as the married couple is recognized by the community.

### **Definition of Terms**

From the perspective of Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English, marriage is the legal relationship between a husband and wife. Marriage is a ceremony in which two people become husband and wife. This indicates that marriage involves the union of a man and a woman with the aim of becoming husband and wife. In many traditional African communities, this type of marriage involves the participation of both families in the fulfillment of some rites and ceremonies. For example, in Igboland, the man may be required by custom to pay the bride price before being recognized by the family and community as an in-law. It is in fulfillment of this obligation that Agoro observes that the idea of marriage... maintains that until a man has sent the head-drink on behalf of a girl to the father, she cannot be regarded as his wife (37). He goes further to state that:

For people to be said to be married, the ceremonies that are done to legitimize marriage must be carried out either traditionally in the court, or in the church. Any other form of living together by a man and a woman could only be said to be illegal. Of course such an arrangement does not make for the respect of any of the partners concerned (37).

The implication is that in a legal and recognized marriage certain conditions are expected to be fulfilled by both the intending husband and wife as well as their families.

### **The Family and Community Involvement**

The family is the nucleus of any marriage arrangement in Africa which involves the husband and the wife as well as the community. The family is fundamentally the centre where basic inquiries and support are generated for the sustenance of the marriage. Apart from the couples, the next in the hierarchy of relevance are the parents and the other members of the family who serve as facilitators to ensure the success of the marriage. The parents are usually involved in the initial decision making process of choosing the wife or the husband. This is to ensure that the right choice is made to maximize the benefits and reduce the chances of failures. In African traditional society, a man or woman does not simply choose a wife or husband without the consent of the parents and even in some cases, other members of extended family are involved. From the play, it is observed that the unusual manner which Anowa chose Kofi as her husband without the consent of the family that brought her into quarrel with the parents who felt neglected and disconnected in her action. The situation prompts the mother to lament her daughter's inability to choose the right man as husband and queries the rational.

Badua: Why should it be my daughter who would want to marry that good-for-nothing cassava man? (17).

She goes further to express her frustration and laments Anowa's choice.

Badua: I am in disgrace so suit your teeth at me. Other women certainly have happier tales to tell about motherhood. I think I am just an unlucky woman (17)

This shows the level of disappointment experienced by Anowa's parents based on her choice of husband without consulting them.

Additionally, parental and community involvement in the marriage could also be seen from the concern expressed by Badua when she aptly expressed her anger on Anowa's refusal to marry one of the men they consider worthy husband as she highlights the fact that:

Any mother would be concerned if her daughter refused to get married six years after her puberty. If I do not worry about this, what shall I worry about? Besides, a woman is not a stone but a human being; she grows (16).

The above indicates Badua's concern for her daughter and the need for her to get married on time within the expected period. This concern shared by the family and the community prompted the Oldman and Oldwoman to observe that:

Oldman: Anowa is something else... she has refused to marry any of the sturdy men who have asked for her hand in marriage. No one knows what is wrong with her!

Oldwoman: A child of several incantations. She listens to her own tales, laughs at her own jokes and follows her own advice (7).

Even the Oldman and the Oldwoman are quick to make the above observation about Anowa's behaviour in relation to her choice of husband which they consider unusual in her rejection of many sturdy men. As they pointed out Anowa sees her marriage as personal and wants to be allowed the right to choose her husband. However, Anowa's penchant to personalize her marriage by taking decisions alone goes contrary to the established order which involves the parents, other members of the family and even the community.

Anowa has contrary view about her marriage which she wants done in her own way by choosing the man that suits her fancy. This prompted her to declare to the astonishment of her parents that she has found the man she wants to marry.

Anowa: Mother, Father, I have met the man I want to marry...I say I have found the man I would like to marry (14)

She states the fact that the parents have been putting pressure on her to get married. So, now that she has found the man she expects them to allow her to marry him.

Anowa: Mother, you have been at me for a long time to get married. And now that I found someone I like very much... (14)

From every indication, Anowa wants to please herself with the marriage to Kofi Ako without considering her family and other factors. She simply wants to feel happy and fulfilled and satisfy her marriage curiosity without hindrance from anyone especially the parents. However, the mother rejects Anowa's choice of Kofi Ako on the basis that he does not have a recognized means of sustaining their livelihood and the marriage as she observes that:

Badua: ...If all that is to a young man is that his family has an unspoiled name, then what kind of a man is he? Are he and his wife going to feed on stones when he will not put a blow into a thicket or at least learn a trade? (16)

From the discussion, it is clear that Badua expresses genuine concern for the well being of the daughter and the sustenance of her marriage which parents are usually mindful in the choice of husband and wife for their children. The need for a man getting married to be prepared by having stable means of income to sustain the family is reiterated to Anowa to enable her reconsider her choice which the mother sees as unfortunate and disgraceful. Kofi Ako looks a stranger in his African environment and in the marriage relationship. On the other hand, Anowa struggles to assert herself as she wants to change the misconception that a young girl cannot freely choose her husband and succeed through hard work. It is this determination to succeed and make something great out of her marriage that prompted them to relocate to Oguaa from Yebi. Anowa has personal conviction that she made the right choice of husband and that given a suitable environment which she hopes exists in Oguaa, they will succeed.

### **Child Bearing**

The importance of child bearing in African marriage was emphasized by Kofi Ako as it guarantees the future of the family through procreation of offspring. He observed that since Anowa has no child, the future seems to make no meaning to her. In reaction, Anowa insists that she has no mood and that having children is not part of her mission on earth as a wayfarer. The issue at stake becomes clearer from their encounter below.

Kofi: This is because you have no children. Women who have children can always see themselves in the future.

Anowa: Mm ... children. it would be good to have them. But it seems I'm not woman enough. And this is another reason why you ought to marry another woman. So she can bear your children. Mm. I am only a wayfarer, with no belongs either here or there (36).

The above statement seems very pathetic and symbolic of Anowa in her status as a priestess designated not to marry and bear children. She sees herself as being alone and isolated in a strange world where Kofi and her parents live with many unfulfilled expectations from her. Anowa's personalization of her marriage continues till the last scene when she confronts Kofi with the realities and contradictions of their marriage. It was in an effort to prevent further misunderstanding that Kofi proposes to send her away to Yebi with the promise of building a house for her and providing jewelries as well as many slaves to be at her service. However, this proposal may seem right from Ako's perspective but it irritates Anowa and so she rejects it and seeks for an explanation thus:

Anowa: You cannot send me away like this not to Yebi, or anywhere. Not before you have told me why. I swore to mother I was not returning. Not ever Kofi, we haven't got children! And for years now, I have not seen your bed. (61)

She goes on to accuse Kofi that he has lost his manhood.

Anowa: Kofi, are you dead? Kofi, is your manhood gone? I mean, you are like a woman. Kofi, there is not hope any more, is there? Tell me is that why I must leave you? That you have exhausted your masculinity acquiring slaves and wealth? (61)

This sudden interrogation and revelation from Anowa heightens the tension on Kofi as the reality begins to unfold against them. Consequently, Kofi Ako shoots himself and Anowa drowns herself to escape from the humiliation she was about to confront if she eventually returns to Yebi with the shame of a failed marriage. This is how Anowa and Kofi Ako ended their marriage.

## II. CONCLUSION

It is clear from the happenings of this drama that the struggles of Anowa to assert her personality brought her into collision with forces she could not contradict. Anowa made efforts to prove that through hard work she can succeed in her marriage but was unable to convince her husband Kofi to work in line with her aspiration. Anowa's determination to take decisions on issues relating to her survival in marriage contradicts the already existing order of collective action in the family and brought her into misunderstanding with the parents and neighbours. It is therefore observed that Anowa's tragic end could have been averted if she had listened to the good counsel of the elders-the parents not to marry Kofi Ako-the good-for-nothing-cassava man.

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