

THE FEMALE MAIN CHARACTER'S STRUGGLE AGAINST GENDER-BASED SUBORDINATION IN ABI DARÉ'S *THE GIRL WITH THE LOUDING VOICE*

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Artikel History : accepted : March 10, 2023 revised : May 10, 2023 approved : June 09, 2023

ABSTRACT

This research discusses the struggle of the main character to get freedom in the novel *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by Abi Daré. The objective of this research is to reveal the gender-based discrimination in the form of subordination experienced by the main character. In addition, this research also shows the main character's efforts to terminate the subordination and free herself from it. This qualitative research uses descriptive analysis method as well as library research through feminism perspective. The research finding reveals that the main character experiences gender-based discriminations in the form of subordination but eventually succeeds in getting her freedom.

Keywords: *freedom, subordination, feminism, struggle, female main character.*

BACKGROUND

In daily life, we know gender as a difference between men and women in the form of responsibilities, rights, and behaviors inherent in both of them that are formed from the culture learned since childhood. Gender also refers to the formation of roles between men and women to build suitable gender relations in society.

The term gender was introduced by social scientists to describe the differences between women and men. Born as God's creation and cultural imprints are learned and socialized from childhood. This distinction is very important. This is because human nature and non-nature (gender) are often confused. Differences in gender roles help us to rethink the role assignments that have been considered inherent in female and male humans to build a dynamic picture of gender relations and to do justice in the reality of society. Differences in the social concept of gender have led to differences in the roles of women and men in society.

In general, the existence of gender has made differences in roles, responsibilities,

functions, and even space for human movement. Gender seems to be inherent in our views, so it is easy to forget that gender is permanent and eternal because it is a permanent and eternal biological property of women and men.

Puspita (2012) states that the word "gender" can be interpreted as differences in roles, functions, status and responsibilities of men and women as a result of socio-cultural formations (constructions) embedded through the socialization process from one generation to the next. Thus, gender is the result of an agreement between humans that is not natural. Therefore, gender varies from one place to another and from one time to the next. Gender is not inherent, changeable and interchangeable from one human to another depending on time and local culture.

The patriarchal culture inherent in community groups uses these differences as indicators of behavioral adequacy and inhibits access, control, participation, and rights to benefits and resources in life. This can be evidenced by the existence of some people who feel taboo if men are in the kitchen, taking care

of housework and women who pursue education to get a decent job.

Women are often an interesting topic of conversation in various media. Apart from highlighting the personality and role of women in life, the freedom of expression as women that they should get is often not as expected and as it should be. It is also often associated with gender injustice in society. As Mansour Fakih (2008:12) stated that gender injustice is manifested in various forms of injustice, including economic marginalization or impoverishment, subordination or insignificance in political decisions, stereotype formation or through negative labeling, violence, longer and more workload (burden), and ideological socialization of gender role values.

Discrimination against women that still often occurs in various areas of society has made several figures voice the women's resistance movement to fight discrimination and achieve gender equality for the sake of survival for women to be better. One movement that fights for gender equality and justice is the feminism movement. As stated by Skolnick, A. S. (1987) & Porter, Roy (1987), the feminist movement is a social conflict movement driven by the pioneers of feminism with the aim of breaking down old values (patriarchy) that have always been protected by the strong structural functional tradition. The modern feminist movement in the West began in the 1960s, when the collective consciousness of women as an oppressed group emerged.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is classified as qualitative research as it uses qualitative data such as narrative literary works, theories, and understanding to support the analysis. Bogdan and Taylor (1975:5) define qualitative research as research methods that produce descriptive data in the form of spoken or written words from people and observed behavior. This approach focuses on studying individuals and settings holistically, without isolating individuals into

variables or hypotheses, but viewing them as part of a whole.

The methodology utilized in this study is a library research approach, incorporating primary data from the novel *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by Abi Dare and secondary data from academic sources such as books, journals, and scientific writing. The novel is analyzed by examining its intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Intrinsic elements include character, characterization, conflict, and setting, while extrinsic elements focus on gender-based subordination experienced by female characters in the novel. The analysis is reinforced by incorporating relevant literary sources such as theories, definitions, and other relevant literature related to the research topic. Lastly, the study concludes with a presentation of the research findings and conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Adunni, the main character of *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, resides in a low-income Nigerian village with her father and two brothers. Her mother, who passed away, had urged Adunni not to marry young. However, due to economic hardship, her father ignored this and arranged for her to marry an elderly taxi driver named Morufu, who already had two wives and numerous daughters. Morufu desired Adunni solely for her potential to bear him a son, who he believed could receive an education and a job. He believed that women's only role was to marry, tend to household chores, and not pursue education like men.

Adunni received news that she would be wed, but refused because she aspired to become a teacher and continue her studies. However, due to financial constraints and societal pressure, Adunni was unable to resist and eventually married Morufu. Despite this setback, Adunni persevered in her quest for education and struggled to break free from her life as a wife and pursue her dream.

The main character of *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by Abi Dare is clearly Adunni, as evidenced by her prominent role in the story and frequent conflicts with other characters.

Physiologically, the main character of *The Girl with the Louding Voice* is a 14-year-old girl described as having dark skin and a sturdy build. Following her mother's death, Adunni assumed her duties in the household, including cooking and cleaning, which contributed to her physical strength due to the repetitive nature of these tasks.

Viewed through sociological dimension, Adunni's background is characterized by low-income and lack of social status. She grew up in Ikati, a village depicted in the novel, where economic conditions are similarly challenging to her family. Education is not highly valued for girls in the village due to their perceived inferiority compared to boys in academic and vocational pursuits. This attitude towards gender roles is a central issue in the novel. In Ikati, it is common for girls Adunni's age to be wed at a young age, and underage marriage to men with multiple wives is not an uncommon practice. This belief is rooted in a social system where men hold the dominant position of power in the community.

Psychologically, the main character is depicted as a responsible and determined young girl. After her mother, who was the family's foundation, passed away, Adunni, who had stopped attending school, refused to let her education go to waste. Instead, she taught her younger brother Kayus the things she had learned at school, feeling responsible for his future since he was unable to attend school. When her father, who was unemployed, suggested that she marry to make ends meet, Adunni stood her ground and convinced him not to marry a man she did not love, although she eventually agreed to the marriage. Adunni's unyielding nature also came to the fore when she fled from her husband's home and secured work in the city of Lagos.

The forms of oppression experienced by the main character are divided into three types. Subordination is a type of oppression that serves as the primary conflict in this novel. It changes the main character's life and triggers other conflicts that persist throughout the story. The main character experiences subordination when her father compels her to marry an elderly taxi driver. Since her school days, Adunni has been passionate about education and dreams of becoming a teacher. Unfortunately, she had to sacrifice her ambitions for her family's financial well-being. Morufu offers to assist Adunni's father on the condition that he marries Adunni, despite already having two previous wives.

Gender injustice manifests in the form of stereotypical views prevalent in Adunni's environment, where women are exclusively perceived as suitable for tending to their husbands and household chores. In terms of education, priority is given to sons as they are considered better suited for future work. Consequently, the prevalent belief in the environment is to marry girls at a young age, as was the case with Adunni. Due to these negative labels, Adunni faced difficulties in seeking her friend's assistance in persuading her father against her forced marriage to the elderly driver. According to her friend, marriage is regarded as a positive occurrence and a blessing in their village. Adunni's friends, influenced by the negative stereotypes surrounding women and underage marriage, lack aspirations beyond becoming wives, caring for children, and performing domestic tasks. In contrast, Adunni values her education and nurtures her aspirations.

Physical oppression takes shape in the form of violence when Adunni secures employment with a wealthy couple in Lagos city. Her employer, whom she refers to as Big Madam, exhibits rude and arrogant behavior. Big Madam does not hesitate to physically strike Adunni for her mistakes, often using her as an outlet for her frustrations. Moreover, Big Madam imposes restrictions on Adunni's meals,

forbidding her from eating at the house, and imposes unreasonable working hours. Initially, Adunni agreed to work under the assumption that her employer would support her education if she behaved properly. However, her expectations were shattered as she became a victim of abuse at the hands of her employer. It is ironic that despite Adunni's utmost efforts to behave well, she still faced physical mistreatment.

The oppression in the form of sexual violence was also experienced by Adunni. When Adunni became the wife of Morufu, Adunni, who was still a minor, was forced to serve Morufu's sexual needs until her body was injured. After she worked in Lagos city, the husband of Big Madam who she used to call Big Daddy also sexually abused her such as hugging Adunni forcefully and several times trying to force his way into Adunni's room. Luckily, she was saved by a chef who worked with Big Madam named Kofi.

Adunni suffered abuse from Morufu's first wife while being his spouse, yet she felt a sense of relief from Morufu's second wife, Khadija, who was a kind woman and provided support. While Khadija was eight months pregnant, she asked Adunni to take her somewhere, leading to an external conflict arising when Adunni discovered the baby Khadija was carrying belonged to another man. Adunni did not want to be involved, but Khadija had already taken her to meet the baby's biological father, revealing the secret she had been keeping. Despite being heavily pregnant and experiencing painful contractions, Khadija took Adunni to meet the man, but he rejected her, leading to Khadija's death.

Adunni found herself in a complex situation, being only fourteen years old. Her immediate instinct was to return home and confide in her father about the events that had unfolded. However, instead of expecting her father to believe her, he dismissed her concerns and accused her of exaggerating by not

informing Morufu and leaving Khadija behind. In an attempt to resolve the situation, her father decided to visit Morufu's house, urging Adunni to stay home and assuring her that everything would be alright. This created an internal conflict within Adunni. While her father tried to offer reassurance, she could not help but recall how conveniently he had forgotten his promise to not force her into marriage, just like the other girls in their village. Adunni doubted whether her father could truly ensure her safety if she remained silent and obedient. As a result, she made the decision to run away and worked in Lagos.

While striving to attain education and freedom from oppression, Adunni encounters Ms. Tia, a highly educated woman, while working with Big Madam. Adunni seeks Ms. Tia's assistance after Kofi helps her obtain a scholarship form for a workers' school. Adunni shares her story with Ms. Tia, who sympathizes with her. Ms. Tia agrees to teach Adunni how to write an essay for the workers' school form. Adunni also improves her English during this period. Adunni's improved language skills bring about a change in the novel's writing style from broken English to proper English. Ms. Tia and Kofi are external factors that assist Adunni in breaking free from oppression and pursuing education. Adunni's mother's message, which reminds her to continue her education and gain a powerful voice, serves as an internal factor. This study highlights the significance of external and internal factors in Adunni's liberation and educational achievement.

The title of the novel serves as a symbol in the story. The term "louding voice" literally means a loud voice, and it symbolizes the act of refusing to be silenced by society. The main character of the novel desires to have a louding voice in order to pursue positive endeavors, such as receiving an education. If she succeeds in becoming a teacher, she plans to help other women who lack opportunities like she did. Furthermore, the character of Adunni also

symbolizes women's resistance against gender-based oppression.

In this novel, Adunni's oppression comes to an end when she is awarded a scholarship to a workers' school. This coincides with an attempted sexual harassment by Big Daddy, which is discovered by Big Madam. As a result, Big Madam realizes that her harsh treatment of Adunni was influenced by her own desperation when facing Big Daddy's abusive behavior towards her. Adunni, who was powerless, became an easy target for Big Madam's anger. However, after discovering that Adunni had been secretly studying with Ms. Tia and had obtained a scholarship, Big Madam finally allows Adunni to leave her house and pursue the life she desires.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted through the study of the main character in the novel *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by Abi Daré, the results obtained are; Adunni is the main character of a fourteen-year-old child who undergoes gender discrimination in the form of subordination and seeks to resume her education.

The form of subordination experienced by the main character is the forced marriage performed by Adunni's father, which causes Adunni to be unable to realize her desire to continue her studies and become a teacher. In addition, while in marriage with Morufu, Adunni was prohibited from rejecting or protesting Morufu's actions because Morufu positioned himself as the "king" in their family.

The main character is portrayed as a strong and resilient woman amidst the patriarchy that dominates her environment. The heroine also experiences gender discrimination which makes her an independent figure and struggles to get the freedom of the life she wants. Likewise, the attitude shown by other female characters. Women are not portrayed as meek, submissive

and passive. Instead, the main character has a brave and independent attitude. She looks for ways to get out of her husband's discrimination.

The efforts made by the main character in freeing herself from the shackles of a life dominated by discrimination are to escape to the city of Lagos and get a job, while working the main character has a friend who helps her get a school scholarship for female domestic workers. The main character also tried to increase her knowledge in the library in her employer's house until she met a character named Ms. Tia who she made a reference in making good and correct English essays to finally get the scholarship she wanted. In her quest for freedom, the main character is supported by internal and external factors.

Internal factors that influence the main character's success in achieving freedom are the mother's message that motivates her to continue her education because according to her, education is a "loud voice" that can make the main character heard by many people. That way she can choose her own path without discrimination from people around her.

The conflicts she experienced before her escape to the city of Lagos influenced her fighting spirit to seize the opportunity to continue her schooling. The main character's awareness of the importance of education, justice for girls her age, and freedom to choose a life path also made her determination to work towards freedom.

External factors that influence the main character's success in achieving freedom are when she works as a maid in the city of Lagos and meets a chef named Kofi. Kofi gave the main character a lot of knowledge that was previously unknown to the main character, he also gave the main character a scholarship form for a school for female domestic workers. In the midst of trying to get the opportunity, the main character meets Ms. Tia who is finally willing to be a reference in making the main character's English skills better. Ms. Tia helps the main

character improve her vocabulary, pronunciation, and writing skills.

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