

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability (pp. 436-437). Irwin (1996) stated that empowerment comes from finding the power-from-within or power-to-within us and rejecting models of power that imply power-over (p. 9). In line with Collins (2000) who explained that empowerment is not by acquiring the power to dominate others but to be both centered in one's own experiences and engaged in coalitions with others.

Women's empowerment is then the process of change for women to acquire what has been denied from them, to resist domination over themselves by finding the power within themselves to empower themselves or even others. Collins (2000) stated that empowerment could occur when an individual woman's consciousness concerning how her everyday life changes. Empowerment in an individual's mind is important because it can foster into collective empowerment and encourage change in the conditions of their lives.

Empowerment is a tool to provide equality, eliminate discrimination and oppression against females. It is also important to challenge negative cultural and social definitions towards women and girls that prevalent in a patriarchal society such as in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the patriarchal culture values the male child over the female child (Bako & Syed, 2018, p. 8). Ideas and practices influenced by

patriarchy lead to unequal treatment received by women since they were a child whose rights and opportunities are denied. They are perceived as weak, inferiors, and dependent on men (Bako & Syed, 2018, p. 8).

Son preference and child marriage are common, as stated by Anozie, Ele, & Anika (2018), mainly because it is deeply entrenched in the country's custom and religion (p. 119). The absence of a male child in a family with a strong preference for son pressured the mother to become pregnant every year if she always bears a daughter. Their parents will dispose of these unwanted daughters in many ways, such as child marriage. Leeson & Suarez (2017) found that the prevalence of parental preference for sons over daughters is established the supply of and demand for child brides in impoverished societies (p. 2). The prevalence of the practices in the country make it has the largest number of child brides in Africa, Nigeria's 23 million girls and women were married as children (UNICEF, 2019). Child marriage deprives girls' right to have a better life opportunity. Women who were the child brides have no education or forced to quit school (Fayokun, 2015, p. 824). Deep-rooted patriarchal cultural practices that disempowered women need to be resisted through empowerment in an individual woman's consciousness. An individual woman can, in turn, fosters other women's consciousness. Therefore, resistance against oppression becomes possible.

Empowerment and the issue of women's oppression in Nigeria are depicted in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* novel. It is written by New York Times bestselling author, Abi Darè. The novel is an Instant *New York Times* Bestseller, the winner of the UK Bath award 2018, and a *Read with Jenna Today Show* Book

Club pick. The novel depicted oppression experienced by a fourteen-year-old Nigerian girl Adunni who lived and raised in rural Ikati village. The novel also portrayed Adunni's struggle to have her own "louding voice." She empowered herself and other children in her village to have education as her late mother always fought for her and told her that the voice of an educated woman will lead her to have a better and bright future.

Adunni was forced to stop school and become the third wife of an older man by her idle-alcoholic father in exchange for money. The man forced her to remain silent and forced to have sexual intercourse with her. Hate to share her husband with a girl whose age same with her daughter, Adunni was also oppressed by the first wife. Followed by unfortunate events, she ran away from her village Ikati to Lagos with the help of Mr. Kola. Thinking he helped her, she discovered that he tricked her. Adunni was sold to work as a housemaid for wealthy yet abusive employers. Forced to work hard without being paid and only fed once a day, she also must suffer from her employer beating. She was a daughter, wife, and domestic servant who is told to remain silent and obedient. She was oppressed, abuse, and devalued as human. However, her relationships with other girls, women, and especially her Mama encouraged her to rise, to speak up for herself and other girls. She wants to make way for other girls to have their own "louding voice" to be heard. Written in broken English, the novel represents the voice of a girl who did not speak good English but passionate about pursuing her dreams of helping others.

The issues of women's empowerment and oppression in this novel can be analyzed by deploying Patricia Hill Collins' theories of Self-Definition and Matrix

of Domination. Collins (2000) said neither empowerment nor social justice could be achieved without some sense of what one is trying to change (p. ix). Women are needed to be encouraged to resist any forms of oppression and social injustice that exist and have been normalized for a long time by pushing them to find their self-definition. In Collins' *Black feminist thought*, self-definition or self-determination is essential to empowerment, and it is key to women's survival. By employing Self-Definition, the writer will analyze the process of empowerment among Adunni and the female characters as the form of their resistance against oppression and domination.

Meanwhile, Patricia Hill Collins' theory of Matrix of domination can be applied to analyze the issue of oppression experienced by the female characters that become the reason for their empowerment. The overall organization of hierarchical power relations in society refers to the Matrix of Domination (Collins, 2000, p. 299). It has an arrangement of intersecting oppression like race, social class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, ethnicity, and age. Matrix of domination operates through interconnected structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal as its domains of power. Within its interconnected domains of power, oppression is organized and maintained over time.

There are several previous studies related to women's empowerment, and other researchers have conducted oppression. Mendenhall et al., (2017) conducted a study entitled "Chicago African American Mothers' Power of Resistance: Designing Spaces of Hope in Global Contexts" that focused on voices and life experiences of African American women living in Englewood, a neighborhood with

high levels of violence in Chicago. Deploying Patricia Hill Collins' Power of Self-Definition theory to analyze their 93 in-depth interviews data, this study highlights Black mothers' resistance against ideologies and stereotypes about their mothering, beauty, socioeconomic status through self-definition which includes descriptions of themselves, their current situations, and the changes they would like to see in their neighborhoods and the larger in U.S. society.

The second study is entitled "Resisting the Matrix: Black Female Agency in Issa Rae's *Awkward Black Girl*." Scholarly research conducted by Hadiya Layla Jones in 2015. Issa Rae's 2011 web series entitled *The Misadventures of the Awkward Black Girl* is explored as a case study of the larger phenomenon of black women who were presenting more complex representations of Black womanhood through the creation of their images in an attempt to increase Black women's visibility in the media. This study applied Patricia Hill Collins' theories of Controlling Images and Matrix of Domination that highlights the limitation of black women representation in the media. Through exploring the themes of anger, sexuality, and beauty/desirability, the writer argued that *Awkward Black Girl* works outside of Controlling Images through its multi-dimensional representation of a black woman who is allowed agency and humanity. It also found that through *Awkward Black Girl*, Issa Rae attempts to resist the Matrix of Domination by reclaiming power by challenging the lack of agency typically portrayed by black female characters.

The third study is entitled "Women Empowerment in Nigerian Drama: A Contextual Study of Irene Salami-Agunloye's Heroines," conducted by Odi in 2018.



Published by the *International Journal of Language, Literature, and Gender Studies (LALIGENS)*, through her heroines, this study revealed how Salami-Agunloye addresses the issues in society that dominated by the convictions, doctrines, and ideologies of male domination. Salami-Agunloye was celebrating women's strength, valor, and capacity to excel in their given space, respect, and recognition for them to act.

The last previous study is published by the *International Journal of Arts & Sciences* entitled "Career Development as Women's Empowerment in Adimora-Ezeigbo's Selected Prose Works" by Nonyelum Chibuzo Mba in 2015. Deploying Womanism as theory, this study examines the career development of the female characters in selected works of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo as feminists strive to uplift womanhood through writing and research programmes. The study found that most of the female characters are creative artists. The female characters are capable of utilizing their talents to remain them as self-fulfilled through their satisfaction and self-worth.

Different from previous studies above, this study will discuss women's empowerment that reflected in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by applying Patricia Hill Collins' Self-Definition to analyze empowerment among the female characters and to analyze their oppressions, Collins' Matrix of Domination will be employed.

## **1.2 Research Question**

How is women's empowerment reflected in Abi Darè's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*?

### **1.3 Purpose of The Study**

This study aims to analyze how women's empowerment is reflected in Abi Darè's *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by applying Patricia Hill Collins' theories of Self-Definition and Matrix of Domination.

### **1.4 Scope of The Study**

This study focuses on the narrations and dialogues that indicate women's empowerment reflected through the female characters' experiences of oppression and their struggle against oppression in Abi Darè's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*.

### **1.5 Significance of The Study**

This study is expected to benefit other researchers who want to conduct further related studies as references. For readers, it is expected to deepen their understanding of women's empowerment and Patricia Hill Collins' theories of Matrix of Domination and Self-Definition.

