

**ROARING INTO FREEDOM: FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE RECLAMATION OF VOICE IN ABI DARES'S *AND SO I ROAR***

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**Abstract**

*This study addresses the limited scholarly attention to how feminist consciousness is narratively constructed through voice reclamation in contemporary African fiction, particularly within the intersecting forces of patriarchy and postcoloniality. Existing studies largely foreground themes of oppression but often neglect the linguistic and narrative mechanisms through which marginalized women negotiate and rearticulate agency. Focusing on *And So I Roar* by Abi Daré, this study examines how the protagonist reclaims her voice as a form of resistance within constraining socio-cultural structures. The study aims to analyze how narrative voice, agency, and self-representation function as strategies that move the protagonist from enforced silence to empowered speech. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research applies feminist textual analysis and close reading to identify narrative strategies, linguistic patterns, and symbolic acts. The analysis is informed by feminist literary criticism, subaltern feminist theory, and feminist linguistics. The findings reveal three key patterns: (1) narrative voice as resistance to patriarchal silencing, (2) agency expressed through storytelling and linguistic self-assertion, and (3) the transformation of personal speech into a collective political voice. These strategies position voice reclamation as both personal empowerment and a critique of patriarchal and colonial marginalization, contributing to African feminist literary scholarship and advancing discourse on gender justice.*

**Keywords:** *Abi Dare, feminist consciousness, Narrative resistance, postcolonial African literature, subaltern feminism, voice reclamation*

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**INTRODUCTION**

In contemporary postcolonial African literature, the search for female self-realization has emerged as a significant narrative concern, reflecting broader struggles over voice, identity, and social agency. Within many literary representations, women who were historically silenced by patriarchal social structures begin to reclaim their voices and articulate their experiences through acts of storytelling and resistance. Such narratives challenge entrenched cultural and socio-economic hierarchies while

reimagining spaces in which women can assert autonomy and redefine their identities (Arbaoui, 2023).

*And So I Roar* by Abi Daré contributes to this expanding literary discourse by portraying how deeply rooted patriarchal systems continue to shape women's silence as well as their strategies of resistance in postcolonial societies. The novel presents the protagonist's journey toward self-realization as both a personal awakening and a symbolic challenge to enduring structures of gendered oppression. In this way, the narrative becomes a powerful representation of a broader feminist struggle to dismantle patriarchal constraints and to create spaces in which women may reclaim their voices and reassert their stories.

Feminist criticism, being a strong tool for literary analytics, purports to research the degree to which literature, cultural products, and the arts echo, mirror or refute patriarchal structures and the socio-cultural order of gender. The feminist criticism of today integrates intersectionality as a priori which, (Collins, P. H., da Silva, E. C. G., Ergun, E., Furseth, I., Bond, K. D., & Martínez-Palacios, 2021) is the synthesis of multiple systems of oppression and/or discrimination, comprised of race, class, and various forms of socio economic and political capital. This new interest among scholars has led to more detailed interpretations that focus on the real life experiences of women who have been overlooked. The spectrum of feminist critique is further widened by dismantling silos of criticism that focus solely on social structures or solely on cultural structures. The contribution of feminist criticism in the social and cultural spheres explains the role of theory in dismantling oppressive and restrictive social orders and amplifying voices that has been muted or overlooked in recent times.

In addition, contemporary feminist critique engages with digital culture and new media and possesses a unique understanding of how those technologies enable gender discrimination and how they can serve feminist activism and community building. This lively domain critiques attention-seeking online violence, representation, and the commercialized feminism of the digital landscape. By working in these areas, negative social change is made possible through feminist criticism, which is a necessary means of understanding and challenging the enduring structures of power and control in a socially constructed hierarchically gendered society (Gill, R., & Orgad, 2018). This increasing attention from scholars has led to more detailed studies that focus on the real

experiences of women who have been overlooked in the past. The feminist discourse of postcolonial African literature in recent years embraces the literature's feminist discourse silencing of women and the fracture of their self-assertion in deeply rooted patriarchal structures.

For a long time and in literature, the economic, social, and cultural discourse in Africa, and in most African societies, the women's voice and the discourse surrounding their economic, social, and cultural rights, have been subdued (Bonou-Gbo, Z., Alfred, K., Agboadannon, D., & Marley, 2023). The contemporary texts aim to narrate and claim the lost and suppressed self and identity of African women and to interrogate and showcase their systemic silencing (Arbaoui, 2023). But even with the expansion of African feminist research, there are still few studies that focus on collective empowerment in Daré's second book.

The novel places itself within an increasingly growing body of African feminist literature that interrogates the crossing point of gender, power, and identity (Arbaoui, 2023). According to El Arbaoui, African women writers are actively transcending androcentric representations through the crafting of narratives that centre female experiences and resist patriarchal norms. This is a literary movement that amplifies women's voices and reconceptualizes their roles beyond traditional confines (Arbaoui, 2023). Abi Dare's *And So I Roar* does not only expose the multifaceted oppression faced by women but also offers a nuanced portrayal of resistance and the quest for empowerment and autonomy (Arbaoui, 2023). The socio-political backdrop of postcolonial Africa complicates the construction of female identity because the linguistic and cultural constraints imposed therefore denote the wider struggle for autonomy and recognition (Bonou-Gbo, Z., Alfred, K., Agboadannon, D., & Marley, 2023). The kaleidoscopic narrative by Abi Dare employs this complexity to expose the symbolism of language and voice as instruments of empowerment and resistance through her feminist imagination.

A number of scholars have critically considered Abi Daré's debut novel, *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, from a variety of vantage points, including feminist and linguistic positions. Saputri & Harianto II (2023), for example, foreground education as one of the main sources of empowerment for the protagonist because knowledge allows her to resist and overcome the patriarchal structures in her community. Owwoeye (2025)

take up Adunni's own linguistic strategies, showing how her use of language acts as resistance and articulation that enable her self-realization and autonomy. These contributions cumulatively highlight how the issues of language, gender, and power interlink within the novel. While these critical examinations of Daré's first novel continue to grow, scholarship on her second work, *And So I Roar*, remains scant. What is more specific is the critical lapse regarding how *And So I Roar* presents collective empowerment and feminist consciousness, especially in terms of community solidarity and collective struggle against structural oppression. Filling this gap will help further an understanding of Daré's feminist narrative strategies and the development of her themes.

Literature has been a very powerful medium for feminist imagination, thus helping authors like Dare achieve their goal of challenging androcentric narratives and magnifying subaltern female voices (Arbaoui, 2023). Such works, by exploring the intersectionality of gender, culture, and postcolonial realities, help reshape the discourse on African women's identities and their roles in society (Bonou-Gbo, Z., Alfred, K., Agboadannon, D., & Marley, 2023). Understanding how a female character controls her speech and silence as part of her broader search for identity in postcolonial African literature requires an understanding of language and expression (Bonou-Gbo, Z., Alfred, K., Agboadannon, D., & Marley, 2023).

The paper explores how Abi Daré's feminist imagination transforms forced silence into empowered speech, focusing on how the protagonist overcomes interlocking gendered, cultural, and economic barriers toward self-empowerment. This study will add to the growing field of African feminist literary studies by offering a critical feminist analysis that fully explores the themes of voice, agency, and silence in Daré's book. It so aims to highlight the relevance of literary representation toward creating social awareness and change regarding women's rights and identities in contemporary African societies (Arbaoui, 2023). In contrast with Daré's first book, *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, which has become the subject of innumerable scholarly works on women's empowerment, the expansion of the story into a broad feminist consciousness in *And So I Roar* has received less attention. This research examines, using a qualitative feminist literary analysis, the ways in which language and narrative devices expose the protagonist's transition from silence to speech. The study also

provides a novel viewpoint on how silence turns into a political arena for identity reclamation by fusing feminist consciousness theory with narrative analysis.

## **METHOD**

This paper employs a qualitative descriptive approach, underpinned by a feminist textual analysis, in investigating how *And So I Roar* stages feminist consciousness and voice reclamation. The qualitative feminist approach becomes apt since it foregrounds women's lived experiences and discursive construction of gendered subjectivities. The primary materials used are excerpts of narration from the novel.

Close reading is used to identify narrative patterns, metaphors of silence and voice, and symbolic gestures as indicating feminist awakening. This analytical strategy is informed by feminist narratology, which underlines the fact that narrative perspective reveals how women negotiate with power. Secondly, it also incorporates insights found in feminist stylistics, examining linguistic choices that encode gendered hierarchy and resistance.

This paper applies the feminist textual approach to strengthen the interpretive framework. According to Purwarno et al. (2021), there is an underlining that literature reflects and resists gendered power structures. Furthermore, the narrative techniques of fragmentation, repetition, and dialogical assertion are seen as the tools women writers use in resisting the domination of a patriarchal world (Krishnaveni, R., Lalitha Devi, B., Ramprasad, L., & Gunasekaran, 2025). According to linguistic feminism, narrative voice is one site of agency within which women challenge oppressive discourse through changes in focalization and assertion of speech (Cao, 2025).

This is further reiterated by the methodological orientation of the insights from Marxist–Feminist literary theory, arguing that literature reveals the ways in which patriarchy intersects with material and class-based structures in shaping women's oppression, as maintained by Alem & Guadu (2023) feminism cross-cutting frameworks act as an all encompassing lens in the attempt to understand how the protagonist's voice can emerge vis-à-vis socio-cultural, economic, and ideological conditioning. Finally, data selection follows a purposive sampling procedure whereby only quotations that directly express gendered oppression, awakening of feminist consciousness, or acts of resistance are included. Each of these selected passages is categorized thematically in

accordance with Tamale's 2020 decolonial African feminist framework. Analysis employs iterative reading cycles to: (1) find surface meanings; (2) find underlying ideological patterns; and (3) synthesize the findings into thematic interpretations. This multi layered approach ensures a thorough theoretical and textual analysis of the protagonist's shift from silence to agency.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

This section presents the findings derived from the textual analysis of *And So I Roar* by Abi Daré. Guided by the decolonial African feminist framework of Tamale (2020), the analysis identifies two dominant thematic patterns in the narrative: (1) the emergence of feminist consciousness and (2) the reclamation of voice as a form of resistance. These themes reveal how female characters gradually recognize and challenge the structural forces that limit their autonomy.

Merging textual evidence with Tamale's decolonial feminist perspective, this analysis has indicated that *And So I Roar* does not only illustrate the brutal reality of gendered injustice in Nigeria but also illuminates how women create resistance, build solidarity, and regain agency. In so doing, the book embodies Tamale's vision for African feminism as a movement committed to the dismantling of deeply entrenched systems of dominance and to the harnessing of silence toward women's individual and collective liberation.

### **1. The Emergence of Feminist Consciousness**

The novel vividly portrays the awakening of feminist consciousness among girls who recognize their marginalized status in a patriarchal society.

#### **Data (1)**

*“Khadija died because she was a girl. In our community, many of us girls are a nobody.”*

This quotation reveals the internalized understanding that girls hold the lowest position in their community. The statement that “many of us are a nobody” shows the early stage of feminist consciousness, the point at which the oppressed recognize their marginalization as being structural. In Marxist Feminist terms, this recognition attests to how gender oppression works in conjunction with class oppression: girls are not only

socially devalued but also materially deprived because the community's socioeconomic system does not grant resources to support them.

As Duan (2022) establishes, patriarchy is an ideological system that justifies unequal treatment against women, especially those of lower socio-economic classes. This agrees with the socialist feminist arguments that women's oppression emanates from both material deprivation and ideological subordination

**Data (2)**

*“...it is us girls that are suffering the most. Today it is our turn. My turn. Your turn. Next full moon, another girl’s turn.”*

This articulation of a cycle of suffering does mark a shift from individual awareness to collective feminist consciousness. It is here that the speaker identifies how every girl, not just one, becomes a victim of structural violence. Such cyclical patterns reveal a gendered system of exploitation in which girls' sufferings are being normalized and predictable.

From a Marxist Feminist perspective, this represents the reproduction of patriarchal ideology within a broader socio economic structure. Oppression is not an accident, it is systemic. Ideology works to naturalize inequality with such efficiency that suffering can be regarded by individuals as "an expected destiny." Analyzing feminist stories of resistance, explored how patterns of repeated violence were used to expose the depth of patriarchal domination.

**Data (3)**

*“The real truth is this: Khadija did not die in the hand of really anybody... She died because we don’t have good hospitals... She died because she was a girl.”*

This quote indicates a linkage between gender subjugation and structural deprivation, and it is evident that Khadija's death has political overtones, which make it anything but an accident. The speaker indicates that if high-quality healthcare was not such an act of deprivation, then women, particularly poor ones, would not suffer. This indicates an advanced form of feminism, which recognizes not only brutality toward women in terms of female subjugation but also realizes that such subjugation is structured into economic and organizational systems and not based solely on personal interactions.

Duan (2022) indicates that patriarchy, an ideological system, has camouflaged women's subjugation by converting it into fate and/or personal tragedy, which indicates

Khadija's death and its stratification in this context. The role of women's material subjugation and its connections with gender postulated by has specifically been noted in terms of its connotations with healthcare, focusing primarily on Khadija's death and its structure into healthcare systems found in the novel.

**Data (4)**

*“Know this, your lucky is not because you are better... but because life make a choice for you to be born in another place at another time.”*

This assertion explicitly defies the tenets of meritocracy, highlighting that privilege is a result of systemic predispositions, such as geographical, economic, and gender-based ones. The speaker exhibits an intricate level of feminist understanding that individual success and pain are defined, not by individual value, but by systemic conditions. Duan (2022), supports that one manner in which patriarchy maintains its structure and power is by creating and perpetuating ideological beliefs that support and excuse inequality, such as that found within meritocracy in this text. The impact of gender inequality and class intersecting, such that one can claim to be "born in another place," is considered an integral part of women's identity and systemic predisposition, as Fielder (2016) writes that capitalist ideologies support individual accomplishment rhetoric, thereby hiding gender and class predisposition to individual outcomes.

**Data (5)**

*“Think of the girls and women... dreaming of big things... not knowing if their country will kill their dreams before they wake up.”*

This text represents the transition from local feminist insight to international feminist awareness. The speaker extends the understanding of oppression from individual and local insight to an international one, appreciating that pain and subjection based on gender are international issues. This internationalization of feminist thinking is in line with what discusses the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism, through which larger economic and political systems suppress women's aspirations. Duan (2022) asserts that in support of the idea, patriarchal ideology is not nation-based but international in nature, affecting social practices and regulating freedom for women around the globe. Fielder (2016) supports that inequality and oppression are perpetuated by capitalist systems in all parts of the world, and thereby explains why women's conditions in various countries face common oppression. The text, therefore, echoes

Marxist Feminist ideas that resistance against gender inequality has to be international, not local or individual.

## **2. Reclamation of Voice as Resistance**

### **Data (6)**

*"The only way I can keep on living, to make sure my voice will not die with me, is to find a way to write something like a book."*

This quote epitomizes Adunni's cognizance of writing as a survival technique and a form of resistance. Herein, writing operates both as an individual and collective tool: it allows her voice to live on beyond her physical life and gives voice to the girls in order for them to rise above their subjugated states. By writing, Adunni exercises some extent of control over her narrative and resists the silencing powers of patriarchy. This can be considered the hallmark of a conception of voice as agency within a feminist literary perspective, where women from the margins attempt to utilize textual production as a means of resisting systemic oppression. As Utari et al. (2022) have identified, women writers often use writing as a strategy to articulate resistance and to engage in combat against structural injustices—a thing that testifies to the way literature can become a conduit for social critique and empowerment.

### **Data (7)**

*"I can have a louding voice even if I buried in the silent of the dead."*

This emphasis on voice as symbolic and capable of outliving its physical subject underscores that, even buried, her "voice" is a narrative legacy. From a feminist theoretical perspective, this exemplifies the fact that women who are marginalized in society can maintain agency through the symbolic construction of voice, not just physical presence. A similar phenomenon is highlighted Sholihah & Hikam (2025) in their feminist discussion of the novel *Gadis Kretek*: they mention how "silenced women's voices" in literary texts are able to re-emerge symbolically as a means of resistance. Adunni's voice becomes a symbol of longterm resistance that outlives physical death, affirming that the narrative of representation in women will live on as an ideological and symbolic legacy.

### **Data (8)**

*"That way, I can be teaching them, make them hear my voice, even if I am buried deep inside a grave."*

Adunni imagines her voice serving an educative function even after she dies; thus, she wants to "teach" through her narrative long after she has died. That she takes this view is indicative that reclaiming voice in narrative is necessarily pedagogical: it should impart knowledge and inspire other women beyond the writer's lifetime. In this light, such a view corroborates the theory of feminist pedagogy for instance, Melinda & Supriatna (2024) argue in *Journal Education Innovation* that feminist pedagogy emphasizes equality and empowerment within the regular chain of social education, where learning becomes the site of resistance against patriarchy. By all means, making Adunni's voice a posthumous teacher illustrates that women's empowerment can be realized by an intellectual legacy, not just an act in the real world.

**Data (9)**

*"What can I do? Roar. I hear in my head, Ms. Tia's voice, like the roaring of a lion in the deep in the forest."*

The metaphorical "roar" signifies the internalization of mentorship and collective female strength. Ms. Tia's voice is representative of experienced women in mentorship, which enables Adunni to confront oppression and claim her own agency. In feminist theory, mentorship and solidarity are some of the more prominent means by which women navigate and resist patriarchal structures according to (Yuniarti, 2016). This illustrates how intergenerational support and symbolic guidance strengthen individual voice reclamation.

**Data (10)**

*"Adunni seizes the megaphone from the frail chief priest, causing him to teeter toward the chiefs."*

Adunni's act of taking the megaphone is thus symbolic of reclaiming the communication space hitherto dominated by patriarchal authorities who were consistently holding megaphones. The megaphone is symbolic not only as a physical tool but also as speaking and controlling traditional discourse. With this megaphone, Adunni gives evidence that women can claim the right to a public platform and contest hierarchical orders. Such a perspective is in tune with local feminist literary studies. It is within the megaphone that this symbolic transformation of powers occurs: women not only earn their voice but also gain legitimacy within the public sphere. This reflects a

wider structural empowerment through literacy and gendered expression within the narrative community.

## Discussion

The findings illustrate how the narrative constructs feminist awakening and vocal resistance as interconnected processes. When interpreted through the decolonial African feminist framework proposed by Sylvia Tamale, the novel reveals the complex interplay between patriarchy, colonial legacies, and socio-economic inequality in shaping women's experiences in Nigeria.

First, the emergence of feminist consciousness in the narrative reflects the structural nature of gender oppression. The recognition expressed in the characters' statements about Khadija's death and the cyclical suffering of girls demonstrates how gender inequality operates as a systemic condition rather than an isolated event. This aligns with the arguments of Duan (2022), who describes patriarchy as an ideological system that legitimizes unequal treatment of women, particularly those from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds. Similarly, Fielder (2016) highlights how capitalist and patriarchal structures intersect to reproduce inequalities by framing privilege as individual achievement rather than structural advantage.

Second, the narrative emphasizes the role of voice as a critical site of resistance. Adunni's aspiration to write and preserve her voice reflects a broader feminist strategy in which storytelling becomes a means of reclaiming agency. Studies such as Utari et al. (2022) demonstrate that women writers frequently employ narrative expression as a tool to challenge systemic injustice and articulate marginalized experiences. In this sense, the act of writing within the novel functions not only as personal empowerment but also as a form of political resistance.

Furthermore, the symbolic power of voice in the narrative resonates with broader feminist literary discussions about the recovery of silenced voices. As noted by Sholihah & Hikam (2025), literary texts often provide spaces where suppressed female voices re-emerge as forms of ideological resistance. Adunni's belief that her voice can survive even after death illustrates the enduring power of narrative as a vehicle for social critique.

The mentorship relationship between Adunni and Ms. Tia further reinforces the importance of solidarity and intergenerational support within feminist movements. Yuniarti (2016) emphasizes that mentorship and collective support are essential mechanisms through which women navigate patriarchal constraints and develop strategies of resistance.

Finally, the scene in which Adunni seizes the megaphone symbolizes the reclaiming of public discourse traditionally controlled by patriarchal authorities. This symbolic act reflects broader struggles for women's participation in public spaces and intellectual discourse which highlights how literacy and narrative expression function as pathways toward gender equality.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that *And So I Roar* portrays feminist consciousness not merely as an internal awakening but as a collective and political process. By illustrating how women recognize structural oppression, reclaim narrative voice, and build solidarities, the novel embodies Tamale's vision of African feminism as a movement committed to dismantling systems of domination while fostering individual and collective liberation.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *And So I Roar* extends beyond a narrative of individual struggle by exposing how patriarchy operates through the intersecting forces of colonial legacies and neoliberal exploitation in Nigeria. Using Tamale's (2020) African feminist framework, the findings reveal that oppression is systemic, embedded in the regulation of women's bodies, labor, voice, and mobility. Through characters such as Adunni, Tia, and Khadija, the novel illustrates how economic constraints, ideological conditioning, and class structures sustain gender inequality. Two key themes emerge: the development of feminist consciousness through the recognition of shared, structural suffering, and the reclamation of voice as a form of resistance.

These findings suggest that feminist awareness arises when women reframe personal pain as a collective and systemic condition. The act of voice reclamation through storytelling, writing, and public expression functions as both resistance and transformation. Adunni's "roar" exemplifies a shift from silence to agency, aligning with African feminist calls to reclaim epistemic and discursive power.

This study contributes to African feminist literary scholarship by highlighting how narrative strategies construct feminist consciousness and resistance in contemporary African fiction. It reinforces the role of literature as a site of epistemic reconfiguration and socio-political critique.

This research is limited to a single text and a qualitative interpretive approach, which may restrict the generalizability of its findings across broader African literary contexts. Future studies should adopt comparative or corpus-based approaches to examine patterns of voice, agency, and resistance across multiple African texts. Expanding methodological frameworks will deepen understanding of how African feminist narratives evolve within shifting socio-political landscapes.

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