

Raising Their Voices: Women's Quest for Freedom and Identity in African Women's Writing

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Abstract: Whether living in the traditional or modern setting, women in Africa often confront a variety of challenges including space and role limitations, social contradictions, cultural disintegration and political struggles. This article attempts to show how women negotiate their space within such constraints. It adopts a feminist analysis of *A kind of Marriage* by Buchi Emecheta and *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Adichie to show that women's voices as well as acts of everyday resistance portray their understanding of their environment and determined effort to cultivate a new identity. The paper demonstrates that identity within marriage should not be static but a terrain through which women can reconstruct a new identity; a fellowship where they find strength among their own kind. Re-defining women's identity in African literature is a timely Endeavour as women in real life situations are continually breaking out from the societal prescribed roles and positions to cultivate new identities.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In today's society, it can be said that women and men have been consistently socialized into the spaces that they occupy and the stereotypes that have been assigned to them. Simone de Beauvoir (1989), noted that "One is not born a woman, one becomes one," where the author claims that being a woman is not a way in which one is born, but rather something one becomes. This claim exposes the formation of gender roles and also the phenomenon of gender itself as a social construct. The experience of being a woman in the modern world is a role accompanied by societal expectations, imposed from a very young age, and it is an experience that depends frequently on a woman's relationship with men. In many communities especially in Africa, men view women from a position of power, thereby affecting how women act, as they consistently see themselves through the eyes of men. On the flip side, men's socially constructed identities surround their distance from femininity and their relative position of dominance. This scenario is physically present in men's and women's language usage, the way they dress, and how people conduct themselves starting in early childhood.

Women in Africa latterly have joined women in other nations in their quest for their rights, for opportunities, relevance and recognition. This feminist quest is not imported, as many writers claim but it is a reaction of women against different forms of oppression. Though the term "feminism" originated from the West and hence English in expression, its realization is inextricably bound to the culture and peculiar backgrounds and experiences of women from different parts of the world.

African women writers usually focus their writing on resistance to all forms of patriarchal behavior and the belief that women can live their lives the way they want to and also be responsible for their own livelihoods and future. Novels by women writers therefore can be looked at as a protest against patriarchal dominance attempting to bring out the inequalities, injustices and abuses inflicted on women by a patriarchal tradition that subordinates women. The novels also portray independent women characters who go against all odds to fight for their space and promote togetherness and survival for the African women.

Many African female writers like Nwapa (1966), Emecheta (1981), Dangaremba (1988), Mugo (1988) and Aidoo (1977) among others have written stories seeking to expunge women's marginal position(s) and thus their texts are "spaces of strength within and between which they fluctuate" as opined by Nfah-Abbenyi (1997: 150). In line with this, D'Almeida (1994: 2) considers writing by women as a "weapon to destroy the ideas that perpetuate subjugation and inequality". Most literary scholars dealing with African literature such as Stratton (1994), Steady (1998), Ogundipe-Leslie (1987), Emenyonu (2004) and Oyeronke (2009) agree that works by African women writers are rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in canon formation thus making much of the African literature appear male-centred. This makes Leek (1999) argue that African women have been indoctrinated to envision the world from a patriarchal perspective. We can then conclude that to be an African woman is to be totally deprived of equality and thus African female writers have taken responsibility of redressing this mistake and redefining the meaning of being an African woman. In doing so, women writers have tried to look for a possible centre in the periphery of female imagination (Kivai, 2010). In contemporary women's writing, the authors show that African women wrestle with those problems that confront women and also shape the continent. According to Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), African feminism should endeavour to empower women and society and thus sexual politics is intricately intertwined with other struggles in the continent.

This paper focuses on women's quest for freedom and identity in societies where traditions prescribe tight jacket positions and roles for them. Whether living in the traditional or modern setting, women in Africa often confront a variety of challenges including space and role limitations, social contradictions, cultural disintegration and political struggles.

This paper is an attempt to show how women negotiate their space within such constraints. The paper will adopt a feminist analysis of *A Kind of Marriage* by Buchi Emecheta and *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Adichie to show that women's voices as well as their acts of everyday resistance portray their understanding of their environment and determined effort to cultivate a new identity therein.

Theoretical framework

This paper is anchored on the general feminist theory but more specifically conceptualized within the womanist theory as expounded by Ogunyemi (1985; 1996) and Kolawole (1997). Womanism refers to an Afro-centric form of feminism that not only takes concerns of gender but includes class, race, politics, ethnic relationships, religious intolerance, colonialism and neocolonialism in their consciousness. Ogunyemi affirms that womanism is a mother-centred ideology with its focus on caring- familial, communal national and international. Womanism arose out of a desire on the part of black women to name their experiences and perspectives within a specific socio-cultural and political context. It emphasizes understanding of sexist relationships, affiliations rather than domination, dialogue rather than division and thus it repudiates absolutism and dogmatism. Womanists figure womanhood and motherhood in culture as symbolic means of understanding our world. They stress the centrality of the African family and uphold the role of mothering in the womanist ideology. As a postcolonial idea, womanism is couched in the anti-colonial and neocolonial discourse making it a relevant theory in analyzing the two novels presented in this paper. The theory therefore helped the researcher to explore how Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* and Emecheta in *A Kind of Marriage* evolve a womanist consciousness in order to engage in the process of building a more viable environment for women to operate in.

Highlighting the complex situation inherent in Africa and the context of gender, Ogunyemi (1996: 67) says: "Black women are disadvantaged in several ways; as blacks they, with their men are victims of white patriarchal culture; as women they are also victimized by black men; and as black women they are also victimized on racial, sexual and class grounds by white women". Seen in this sense then, a black woman is a victim of interlocking forms of oppression. This implies that black women writers should voice the problems of their society and still engage in sexual politics. The core ideals of womanist interpretation are gender in the context of other issues of humanity relevant to African women. In the Womanist realm, African women's writing should deal with misrule, national politics, corruption, inter-ethnic skirmishes and cleansing, religious fundamentalism, language issue and in-lawism since such concerns are immediate and urgent to an African woman than patriarchy. Womanist philosophy directs that a black woman writer, aware of the heritage of subjugation, should empower the black man since he is equally a victim of colonial and neo-colonial oppression. In addition, a black woman writer should attack black patriarchy

and all other forms of oppression burdening the African people. Ogunyemi clarifies that womanist theory is not just an idea but also a method with uniquely African considerations and sensibilities. Womanism affirms the traditional gender structures embracing a holistic view of emancipation without downplaying the oppression of women. This theory affirms that African women are oppressed by the various forms of patriarchy, homegrown and alien and calls for their fair treatment. This paper therefore employs womanism to understand how Adichie and Emecheta imagine the gender problem and how it closely connects with the national hitches that afflict Nigeria and other African nations.

The rejection of Western feminism by African scholars terming it as part and parcel of Western cultural imperialism has seen African women map new frontiers in writing and theorizing. This paper is also motivated by the desire to explore the new spaces taken by African women writers as they strive to voice their neglect, exploitation and oppression. Over the years, African women writers have explored the subjugation of women in their societies in a variety of ways. This paper surveys the trajectory taken by Adichie and Emecheta as they tackle the subjugation of women in the Igbo society. This paper, then, is an attempt to expand the womanist criticism and underscore the argument that works by African women can be read through culture specific theories as the African women writers take the initiative to name their peculiar gender struggles.

Besides being subjected to foreign interpretations leading to misunderstanding, African female writers have also been neglected in the criticism of their work and their inclusion in the literary canon. Through their writing, the African women writers have struggled to voice their situations and kill silences as observed by D' Almeida (1994). This paper also serves to explore how women have changed their tactics in the war against patriarchy especially in the 21st century. Although Adichie and Emecheta write from the diaspora, we can argue that the experiences of their origin help them to avidly imagine and capture the problems of their people in the two novels.

In regard to evolving realities in Africa, realizing marginalization and oppression of women in the male dominated society and writing to establish women as speaking subjects, African women writers have rejected western feminism as a vehicle for their struggle. Kolawole (2004) affirms that Africans should have theories which remove the gorges without glossing over cultural specificities in order to build meaningful coalitions. Such thinking is also championed by Kisiang'ani (2005) who draws our attention on the need to decolonize gender studies in Africa. Kisiang'ani says that all forms of knowledge authored and authorized in the West should be dismantled. He argues that gender studies in Africa provide a fertile ground upon which the West uses its immense economic resources to pit the African man against the African woman. He advises on the need for gender studies to embrace a new identity.

African women writers try to map out new ideologies that recognize their humanity before they engage in gender struggles. They have protested against patriarchy and oppression, but their major focus has been negotiation, compromise and reconciliation of power since the love of a good man and a stable home is a form of refuge for an African woman. Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus* is a case of a woman determined to have her household intact despite betrayal by her husband. African women scholars and gender activists are simply anti-patriarchy but not anti-men, thus the perception of man as “dominant other” needs to be re-examined and repackaged since African men are victims of different forms of oppression as mentioned elsewhere in this paper. The demand for total societal reformation cannot afford to isolate the male character in African literature. Ogunyemi (1996) thinks that the vital unity of the African people, regardless of gender, is critical as they struggle against other debilitating forms of oppression like misrule and neocolonialism.

Feminism Universal

Throughout history feminism has always been seen as “women’s conscious struggle to resist patriarchy” (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, 1997: 121). This arises from the fact that men use the ideology and practice of patriarchy to exercise dominance and superiority and as a way of enslaving women. The wave of feminism was firstly inspired by women’s suffrage movements across America and Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a way of advocating social, political and economic reforms. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) has been recognized as one of the first ground-breaking treatise on feminist thought within European and American circles.

Daves and Graves (1995) assert that both Western and African feminisms share the common focus of identifying gender-specific issues and recognizing women’s position internationally as one of second class status and otherness. In her conceptualization of second class status and otherness, Helen Cixous presents a “hierarchical definition of ‘she’ in relation to ‘he’ in a psychoanalytical oppositional arithmetic in which ‘he’ towers above ‘she’ in every sphere of existence” (Jita Allan, 1995: 149). The crust of radical feminism (à la De Beauvoir, Millet and even Cixous) was and still is very Western in thought and outlook. Njoku (1989:195) contests that African women do not share a common identity with their western counterparts. Western feminist thought and practice therefore sees all women as being involved with the same struggles, sharing the same experiences and voicing the same oppressions meted out to them by men, to use Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s term, “we are all sisters in the struggle” (1991: 45).

Feminism in Africa

African feminism has emerged as a response to what has been referred to by Filomina Chioma Steady (1998: 1) as “the dominant voice of the feminist movement” which “has been that of the white female”. African feminism must be

responsive to the needs of black/African women and must therefore take into account freedom from structures created by manifold oppressions. It must be “free of the shackles of Western romantic illusions” because the African woman lives for many things such as a sense of sisterhood and not just cultivating herself and enjoying sex. Most significantly, “African feminism, unlike Western feminism does not negate men, rather it accommodates them. Men are central to their lives and so their continuous presence is assured”

Steady (1998: 2) calls for an African feminism which “combines racial, sexual, class, and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism thought through which women are viewed first and foremost as human, rather than sexual, beings. She defines African feminism as that ideology which advocates freedom from oppression that is based on the political, economic, social, and cultural manifestations of racial, cultural, sexual and class biases. This definition by Steady shows that mainstream feminism has failed to theorize aspects of the struggles of black women and African women which do not affect white women. For example, white women only face the struggle of fighting for sexual equality in opposition to white men. On the other hand, black women/African women must contend with oppression from their black/African male counterparts while also being suppressed economically, politically and racially by white patriarchal systems along with their men. She therefore calls African feminism “humanistic feminism” because it is dedicated to the total liberation of humanity. The majority of black women in Africa and the diaspora have developed characteristics of cooperation and rejection of male protection, though not always by choice.

Steady (1998) adds that genuine African feminism regards self-reliance, cooperative work and social organization as values which must be treasured by African women while also, rejecting over burdening, exploitation and relegation of the African woman into a state of inhumane misery. It objectively looks at women in societies which have undergone the struggle for national reconstruction and encourages them to engage in another struggle against the African men they united with to fight for the liberation of their African countries. African feminism must also embrace traditional and contemporary avenues of choice for women as it seeks to uncover other modes by which African women can access power other than the outward demeanours of submissiveness. The essence of African feminism is not antagonism towards African men, even though it prods African men to recognize the subjugation of women, but a common struggle with African men to remove the yokes of foreign domination and European exploitation. The fact that African women have and will always address their own problems is a view strongly held by African feminists who also assert that some African societies have structures which give women equality. Institutions which promote the status of African women are given recognition within African feminism and those which do not are rejected.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study uses *Purple Hibiscus* and *A Kind of Marriage* as the main source of primary data. The novels are subjected to a textual analysis guided by the tenets of womanism to establish how complementation, conciliation, collaboration and consensus are achieved by various characters in the two novels. Library research helped in gathering data on the African women's writing. A closer reading looking at the circumstances around the history of Nigeria and Adichie's biography is explored in an effort to get historical details or personal information likely to filter into the two texts. Descriptions of actions and scenes, analyses of characters and language provide data for this paper and are used to present the main arguments of the study. Through close textual reading of the two novels, changing circumstances of the characters, plot and the narrators' point of view, we investigate strategies employed by the author to map a path for emancipation of her characters. Interviews with the author carried out by scholars and pressmen, commentaries and other relevant writings are examined in line with the objectives of this paper.

Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Buchi Emecheta's *A kind of marriage* are both novels which propagate the feminist agenda of liberating African women from the bondage of patriarchy. The novels look at the struggles of women in different spheres of life including racial, cultural, economic and political issues alongside sexist issues with the ultimate goal of encouraging and empowering women to break away from those chains that bind them. Adichie and Emecheta embrace this fight in *their* respective novels by addressing the treatment of women by a patriarchal society and also demonstrating how women can liberate themselves through a partnership of women and progressive men in society. This kind of approach towards women's liberation underscores the necessity of unity and survival of men, women and children and the creation of a more gender sensitive society that accords equal treatment to both men and women.

Adichie and Emecheta are part of a body of female authors in West Africa who are not different in portraying womanist values as have their counterparts in other African and Black American cultures. While being responsible, natural as well as showing commitment to the survival of an entire people (African people) in their novels, they promote womanist values such as female autonomy and cooperation, values which make women show "outrageous, courageous or willful behaviour" (MacClintock, 1995: 2).

Scope and limitation

The paper focuses on the two novels by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *Purple Hibiscus* and Emecheta's *A kind of Marriage* which present contemporary womanist perspective on Africa. Since Adichie's novels are love stories spiced with war and political sub-plots, they give an acceptable chance to explore the issues raised by womanists in this century. These texts

have been evaluated in line with the gender discourse of our time and the politics of freedom struggle through textual analysis, given that people tell stories to express and explore ideas about their world and their position in it. Although our paper is on the two novels, reference is made to other texts which have ideas likely to enhance the study. We restrict our study within the framework of the womanist theory. The gender discourse in African women's writing and the interrelatedness of the feminine tale and the national narrative greatly informed the study. In *Purple Hibiscus* we pay attention to the different forms of oppression the author depicts and how she subverts patriarchy. On the other hand, we analyse *A Kind of Marriage* to explore other problems affecting women like the state of the women agency and rights, male privilege and cultural burdens born by women who fail to live up to societal standards especially in regard to marriage. In both texts, we investigate the author's vision in integrating men and women in the fight to end oppression and suffering of African women. The paper therefore discusses the following aspects as brought out in the two novels.

Space and role limitations

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene denies his family both private and public spaces through his intolerance of other people's opinion. This gives rise to dehumanized people whose opinion is deemed not to matter at all. The opening line of *Purple Hibiscus* indicates that "Things began to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion ... (p. 3). This lack of space is a threat to continued co-existence of the family. In addition, Ifeoma, Eugene's sister is angry about oppression and lack of freedom at both public and private (domestic) levels. In these instances and others, Adichie seems to be admonishing the seemingly helplessness and passivity demonstrated by Beatrice (Eugene's wife) and some colleagues at the university. Adichie's voice calls upon women to identify all forms of social oppression on women and go ahead and confront it. In *A Kind of Marriage*, Emecheta notes that patriarchy even denies women space in celebrating their children's achievements..."we are expected to work all day with no rest, fill our husbands' houses with children as well as bring them up whilst in the end they bear his name... what a rotten deal!" (p.30)

Lack of space is also experienced by women where they feel home to be suffocating. In *A Kind of Marriage*, Amina has to be in the kitchen all day entertaining visitors. She and her aunty can only get space if they go out of the house. Yet, their going out to patronize public areas is seen as "prostituting themselves" so that "as they drove into the courtyard, they could feel the eyes of the men boring into them" (16). Women are so marginalized that being in dignified social spaces unaccompanied by a man is "abnormal". Therefore, going to such places for Amina and Aunty Bintu is a pointer that they have a choice and thus they are exercising their freedom. Adichie highlights the episode above to show that the progressive contemporary woman has the ability to be in social gatherings unaccompanied by a man.

In reading *Purple Hibiscus*, Okuyade (2009), “Changing Borders and Creating Voices: Silence as a Character in *Purple Hibiscus*,” maps the growth process of Kambili as she struggles to make her mouth function within a totalitarian temperament of her father’s home. African women have explored the feature of silencing as a component of their oppression in literature and according to Uwakweh (1995: 75) silence is: All imposed restrictions on a woman’s social being, thinking and expressions that are religious or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or muted female structure Understood from Uwakweh’s point of view, silence of the female characters is a trope that cannot be excluded or slighted as we make sense of the African female novel.

In *A kind of marriage*, Maria had initially been socialized to keep quiet even when she realized things were not going on well at the family level because women were not supposed to question the state of affairs...”So Maria learnt to be quiet”(31). However, a little later, she had to break her silence as a form of protest... to keep her salary and that the new wife remains in Ibuza while she continues staying in Lagos (47). Financial empowerment enables her to operate independently of her husband. Emecheta here seems to be suggesting that an intelligent educated woman can reap the “benefits of polygamy” to let her husband pay the bills and take care of both families while she keeps her money.

In a subtle manner, Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* shows Mrs. Beatrice Achike, as a voiceless, lack-luster, docile wife of the successful but overtly overbearing husband, Omelora Eugene Achike. He was fanatical in all his endeavors, be it in his faith, the education of his children, home discipline or his job. In the suffocating ambience of his enormous wealth and intimidation where both his wife and his two children live in awe of him, the author quietly ushered in a domestic revolution through the wife who slowly and methodically poisoned her husband. She freed herself and her children from the yoke. Normalcy was only restored to the family after the law took its toll.

Social contradictions

The societal desire for children happens to be the avenue through which women are exploited and oppressed. Closely linked with it is the strong social demand and desire for a mother to give birth to boys to carry the family name and therein lies the contradiction in regard to how society looks at childlessness and infertility. Maria in *A Kind of Marriage* is therefore expected to welcome her co-wife and children without question, yet if it was her husband who was infertile she would have been expected to stay, she exclaims “Oh God, why do you punish women like so?” (44). The other contradiction occurs when the second wife is deprived of her husband’s affection yet she is the one who has come to save the situation; “no woman, however, illiterate deserves to be treated like that”. Due to this high demand for boys, girls are

consequently relegated to the second position which leads to their degradation and oppression. This desire for babies drives Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus* to struggle desperately to meet the umunna’s expectations. The members of Eugene’s umunna are opposed to his having two children only.

Cultural disintegration

This is seen to have been occasioned by infiltration of modern education and religion among other influences. Charles in *A Kind of Marriage*, for instance, manages to keep his second marriage secret from Maria because of distance. Each time he visits Ibuza it is on the pretext that he is out on duty because he can’t openly disclose to his wife that he has taken on a second wife. Modern influence seems to have played a big part as put by Obi Uwenno “Those Europeans have unmanned most of our men. What’s bad in a man taking another wife and telling his wife?” (47).

Political struggles/public space

Frank (1987), Emecheta (1982) and Nwapa (1981) argue that by getting education, women enter into the public sphere and favourably compete with men as equals in the job market. In *Purple Hibiscus* Auntie Ifeoma and Auntie Phillipa are educated and thus economically liberated. Ifeoma does not want to marry again after the death of her husband and when Papa Nnukwu informs her of his prayers for her to get a good man to marry her, Ifeoma discredits him because what she requires most is a promotion to a senior lecturer. She is free from male influence and determined to enjoy her freedom. Ifeoma’s forthrightness and assertiveness are as a result of the power of education. She is educated and aware when things are going wrong. Adichie uses her so that she can contrast her with the sister-in-law Beatrice who depends on her husband economically. Perhaps due to lack of a liberating education and a salaried job, Beatrice suffers all the effects of patriarchal domination perpetuated by Eugene and the Igbo culture. Adichie portrays the miracle of education to women empowerment through projecting characters who are educated and others with less or no education so as to draw parallels and give some freedom to the educated ones. The theme of women education in Adichie’s novels resonates well with Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter* where education has the potential to provide women with the possibility of crafting new identity beyond that of womanhood and acquire consciousness of empowerment that impacts on their relationship with males at the family and societal levels.

How then do women break away from the abuse and oppression? As Chukwuma (1989) notes, the worrying streak in all these is whether there are no other ways open to subsumed women to adopt. Must they become promiscuous, even prostitutes, in order to break away and be independent? Further, must they take life in order to be free?

Adichie’s *Purple hibiscus* and Emecheta’s *A kind of marriage* illustrate the evolution that occurs when women are mindful of their own strength. Like the character of Auntie Ifeoma

whose house at “Nsuka started it all”, the Achike’s were able to find courage to challenge their abusive father (Adichie, 2003). These stories matter because they aim at promoting women’s awareness towards change, by empowering them.

Way forward

What Adichie and Emecheta are advocating for is personhood. By urging women to break out of subsuming norms and situations as the marriage institution, they stand the enormous risk of being dubbed cultural deviationists for the marriage institution is sacred to culture, tradition and religion. But the truth of the matter is that a dreaded disease needs a correspondingly drastic cure. The ways our women writers liberated their women characters from the gendered yoke was to make them burst the system and be free. By the time the shock waves subside, the lesson would have been learnt.

From the above discussion, it does appear that women’s dependence on men, husbands or parents alike is largely economic. Most of these women sufferers have neither education nor viable means of livelihood. Charles Nnolim (2010) in his discussion of Nwapa’s women’s characters writes: “The lesson? Women shall never stop suffering at the hands of men. But the women’s saving grace, their last redoubt, lies in being economically independent

As mentioned above the point on education of women is worth emphasizing in the women’s quest for freedom and identity. Education imparts knowledge, discernment, exposure and self-esteem as illustrated in the examples of Maria, Auntie Bintu, Aunt Ifeoma and Auntie Phillipa. Education is a mighty step forward for women in the various nations of Africa today and the reality on the ground is that girls are encouraged to read by their parents and have various governments’ and agency’s sponsorship. There are also Adult Literacy Programs. Illiteracy is still high among older women and this poses a problem for writers reaching them through books. This non-accommodation of illiterate women in their large numbers was what Micere Mugo and Nwapa, in *Women are Different*, forcefully called “book apartheid.” In her address to a Book Fair in Zimbabwe in 1985 she spoke on behalf of “our under privileged sisters out there --- (who) have been unaccommodated by the world of books and written ideas. The basic blame lies squarely on the oppressive economic conditions and socio-political environments that they live under and which we must seek to destroy. This is the challenge that my paper poses to this distinguished community of women and men of books”.

The second enabling factor is space, location and environment. The novelists show that subjugated women on the rebound need their space, their own struggle pad. They remove themselves from their subsuming environment in order to create a free niche for their avowal. This has been illustrated in the case of Beatrice and Maria who are looking for expansive space, unlimited freedom from a violent marriage and an abusive and unfaithful husband. This journey is a prevalent motif in feminist writing. I had argued

elsewhere that the journey motif on the physical side, involves a distancing, a far remove to a new place which makes its own demands and sets its own standards. The women writers make their female protagonists burst the marriage institution when it becomes too subjugating... while some go away from their matrimonial homes, distancing themselves physically and psychologically to seek their individuality and self-realization in the wider world, others claim their space from within. Maria demands that her co-wife stays in Ibuza while she remains in Lagos and also demands exclusive use of her salary. Beatrice on the other hand chooses to eliminate Eugene to create space for herself and her children which they have been denied for many years.

The third liberating factor is women joining together in a partnership of sisterhood in what Kivai (2010) calls female bonds as antidotes to women’s suffering. Oyewumi (2001) in “*Ties that (Un) bind: Feminism, Sisterhood and other Foreign Relationships*” argues that sisterhood is a term of political solidarity which speaks of women activism. Sisterhood has been criticized by several feminist scholars and critics of African literature consider it a loaded term inadaptable by women outside the Western/white world to advance their cause and agency. As a result, men and critics of African literature have avoided the use of sisterhood as they seek to explain the common oppression under patriarchy. We have opted to use female solidarity as we explore how Chimamanda Adichie’s and Emecheta’s female characters forge helpful relationships to ameliorate their situation as they tackle the problem of patriarchy.

Forming groups to attain a purpose is the process by which traditional Africans acquired an energizing spirit as affirmed by the adage that „unity is strength.“ African communities presented a strong sense of communalism and the individual experience was better realized in a group. Oyewumi affirms that organizing to attain a political goal speaks to the issue of forming political alliances and constitutes group identity. In Adichie’s and Emecheta’s novels, cases of women coming together to challenge the effects of patriarchy or to aid one another to overcome male-created misfortunes are notable. In *Purple Hibiscus* Ifeoma forms friendship with the sister-in-law Beatrice and attempts to pull her out of a violent marriage. Ifeoma is ready to take the children to Nsukka so that Beatrice can think independently and quit domestic abuse. It is on the same scale that women at the University of Nigeria-Nsukka are concerned about the management and the problems bedeviling the institution and people like Phillipa opt out of the troubled waters. This movement out of Nsukka probably to America serves to expand the space for women to challenge domination. Ifeoma bonds well with those women she is working with and she is given information about the list of disloyal lecturers long before she is sacked. It is out of her closeness with the female students that they even announce to her their plan to marry. Beatrice is close to Sisi and it is her who gets Mama the poison that kills Eugene. This is a case of a woman helping a colleague woman to surmount oppression.

After Eugene's death, Sisi is married but spends a considerable amount of time instructing Okon; the new family steward. Kambili also forms a strong bond with Mama and at one point she comments:

Silence hangs over us, but it is a different kind of silence, one that let's me breathe. I have nightmares about the other kind, the silence of when Papa was alive. In my nightmares, it mixes with shame and grief and so many other things that I cannot name, and forms blue tongues of fire that rest above my head, like Pentecost, until I wake up screaming and sweating (305). This serves to celebrate the freedom that mother and daughter enjoy after Papa's death. The silence that grips this family can afford them some freedom that lets them breathe. Kambili supports the mother in her trying period of widowhood and can also be analysed as a trope of heralding female bonding. Kambili comes out as a character who exhibits strength before adversity and an inspiration for the much desired change.

In *A Kind of Marriage* Maria and Auntie Bintu engage in a conversation very much like the conversations that women friends enjoy. Together they dissect the story of the Ubakanmas – seeking to understand it in relation to their situation as women. Amina provides a reflective and questioning voice in the whole book challenging norms and attitudes that exist as well as explaining some of them with Auntie Bintu the sounding board for these thoughts offering modern perspectives on their subject's experiences as well as their own. Finally, they reflect on the kind of bond that Maria and Ruth form... a kind of marriage to support each other. They are women who think of themselves highly especially the young who is the kind of "women who never undervalue themselves" and especially because she has a career, which to Emecheta is "the savior of the modern woman... a career, however humble" (120).

III. CONCLUSION

African literature has been enriched by the voices of women expressing their concerns. From 1966 to the present, various inhibitions and encumbrances of women exercising their human rights have found expression in the literature especially in fiction written by women. Generally, their output has been feministic in portraying the female characters' various reactions to a subsuming life. It is seen from their various discourses that feminism is not found only among the city-dwellers and educated women but among the rural and unlettered women. It does appear that male chauvinism makes no such distinctions, both categories of women come under the same masculine yoke. The only difference is that the educated women are able to free themselves from this masculine yoke more quickly because of the economic empowerment education bestows on them. So, women's education and economic viability are emphasized as a means of women's reification. There is need also to remove the immoral and murderous options in women's strive for rights because the presence of only two genders leaves no room for

mediation so it becomes rationally expedient that both have to come together in mutuality and work out their differences

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