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Sisterhood and Solidarity Among Women in Adimora- Ezeigbo's *Do Not Burn My Bones and Other Stories*

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Abstract

This paper investigates the concept of sisterhood as a manifestation of mutual affinity and solidarity among women, emphasizing its role in fostering collective action toward shared goals. Employing qualitative and descriptive research methods and grounded in the theoretical framework of womanism—an African-centered approach to feminism—this study explores the nuanced ways in which women support one another in Adimora-Ezeigbo's Do not burn my bones and other stories. The findings reveal the existence of an often-invisible bond that motivates women to intervene in each other's challenges, with solidarity expressed through both implicit and explicit forms. The analysis demonstrates that women possess an inherent propensity to form supportive friendships, which are vital sources of comfort and resilience in the face of adversity. The study further argues that women, as embodiments of empathy and benevolence, often transcend cultural, social, and even continental boundaries to ensure the well-being of their peers. Particularly, the research highlights the forms that sisterhood assumes in the African literary context, which includes innate friendship; bond, support and resilience; matrifocal benevolence and affection and affiliative kinship, altruism and sharing.

Keywords: *Sisterhood, Solidarity, Africa, Stories, Womanism, Women.*

INTRODUCTION

Sisterhood can be conceptualized as a sense of mutual solidarity and affinity among women. It emphasizes the collective agency and collaborative efforts of women in pursuit of common goals and shared objectives. Delia and Tri define sisterhood as "A friendship that exists within a group of women who have the same problems, oppression and not judge others" (47).

The concept of sisterhood borders on a gynocentric camaraderie, feminine actualization, solidarity, sexual and non-sexual affection, friendship, and support for women by women. The term gained prominence, particularly during the second wave of feminism, after an American feminist, Robin Morgan, coined it in her ground-breaking work, *Sisterhood is powerful* (1970). The origin of sisterhood as cited by Collins (1989) is traced to "shared domination and oppression" (Govender et al. 5).

This entails that the advent of patriarchism in diverse cultural contexts has, perhaps, provided an alternative means through which girls and women understand themselves better, bond, love, and empathize with one another in social relations. Jing (202) argues that since women are not reckoned as equal to men, they have alternatively found their true peers in fellow women.

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Similarly, Ahmad et al. submit that advocates of sisterhood have similar experiences and roles, although in varied outfits (417). It is a relationship with mutual reinforcement and understanding (Delia and Tri 47).

Sisterhood enables women to collectively navigate challenges, struggles, build resilience, self-identity, common goals, emancipating themselves from male hegemony and heteronormative biases; providing the opportunity for women to show self-love and create familial relationships among themselves.

Bradotti (415) notes that feminism is better understood through an awareness of sisterhood among women. In this vein, sisterhood enables women to construct and co-construct feminine beliefs, ideologies, values, and pursuits reflecting women's experiences and perspectives. This highlights the importance of women's solidarity and collective identity in shaping feminist thought and action.

Sisterhood contends for the unity of women to fight a common course, apparently affirming that just one woman cannot tackle oppressors (Ahmad et al. 414). Hence, it emphasizes solidarity (Ahmad et al.414, Rodak, 120). Notably, sisterhood strongly underpins the valuable essence of collective efforts and seeks to dispel prejudices related to gender and sex hurled at women. The nature of sisterhood is expressed through mutual caring, intimacy and shared activity (Delia and Tri 48).

Sisterhood occurs among women without blood ties. However, there have been dynamics in upholding the ideology of sisterhood. Several scholars opine that women portray class, age and race dichotomies while relating to fellow women (Ahmad et al. 416). Nevertheless, the idea of dismantling patriarchal dominance, which drives the feminists 'course, provides a level ground for sisterhood.

Sisterhood in Academia and the Literary Texts

Scholars have explored sisterhood and solidarity in different contexts (Jing 2012; Mackinlay & Bartleet 2012; El Arbaoui 2023; Hinz 2024; Govender et al. 2024; Erivona 2025). In this vein, Mackinlay and Bartleet (2012) and Govender et al. (2024) unveil sisterhood in the academic domain, its precursors and the benefits it has yielded. Positioning the discourse from the researchers' subjective experiences as women academics, they aver that female scholars are confronted with institutionalised gender barriers and inequality. Hence, sisterhood in this context dispels loneliness and infuses encouragement and collaboration in research (Govender et al. 4).

The authors opine that sisterhood is companionship to scale through prejudices and marginalization witnessed by black women academics (Govender et al. 1). In a similar study, Mackinlay and Bartleet state that friendship and sisterhood can be a method in ethnographic research (75) as women researchers often find themselves alone in a remote environment. For Mackinlay and Bartleet, their connection stemmed from travelling together and the similarity of research focus. These birthed friendship and sisterhood, albeit each of them embarked on independent research in the field (75). This position aligns with that of Govender et al. that sisterhood emerged because of working together in academia (4).

From a literary perspective, sisterhood has been examined in diverse cultural contexts. Jing (2012) examines sisterhood in Chen Ran's and Amitan's fictions, engaging the postmodern feminism and cultural study approach. The research compares the similarities and variations in the construction and manifestations of sisterhood in two works of fiction from different cultural

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contexts. While Chen Ran is a Chinese writer, Amitan is from the West. The findings of the study reveal that sisterhood provides a substitution for maternal love, solace in crisis periods and heals the wounds inflicted by male hegemony.

Another way sisterhood is portrayed is through the shared dreams and secrets among women, particularly realized through the female protagonists who discuss their dreams, hopes, and secrets with other female characters. Thus, sisterhood enables women to identify, recount their experiences, strengths, desires, and power of resistance. Sisterhood, according to Jing (209), helps women negotiate a feminine identity, which may include sexual initiation into gender deconstruction, although misunderstandings may arise from the intrusion of heteronormative individuals.

Through the lens of sisterhood, in African literature, El Arbaoui (2023) views sisterhood as a conduit for challenging patriarchal dominance in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*. Using a postcolonial and feminist theoretical paradigm, the study argues that sisterhood can be a powerful tool for contesting feminist suffering, injustice, and segregation. By banding together, women can resist male dominance and gain freedom from oppression. El Arbaoui notes that sisterhood helps surmount male chauvinism, traditional polygamy, colonialism, and other forms of masculine manipulation (85).

This highlights the significance of female solidarity in African contexts. The importance of sisterhood in the context of female child marriage has been examined in Phebe Jatau's *The Hounds* and Maryam Bobi's *Bongel* (Erivona, 2025). Applying Nego-feminism, the study notes that despite child marriage being a prevalent practice driven by patriarchal tyranny and dominance, sisterhood serves as a vital survival strategy for the child characters. This bond strengthens them to cope with the traumatic effects of the abuse in their marriages, enabling them to pursue their dreams and ultimately emerge as heroines.

Hinz (2024) examines the role of affiliative kinship in Chika Onaigwe's *on Black Sister's Street*. The term suggests that the females, through sisterhood, can create family-like mutual bonds, relationships, and communality in the context of prostitution and exploitation. The study reveals that through sisterhood, the dominant discourse of Black women as prostitutes and sexual object for the masculine gender has been challenged, adopting affiliative kinship as a survival strategy for the female characters. The characters engage in familial relationships, support, and mutual understanding by sharing their experiences as sisters. Building upon the established background, this inquiry examines the manifestations of sisterhood and solidarity among women as depicted in Ezeigbo-Adimora's *Do not burn my bones and other stories*.

The Womanism Theory

This work employs womanism, which is an African expression of feminism. The term womanism originated from Alice Walker's work, *In search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose (1983)*, which is her collection of essays. Further, she defines a womanist as:

> A black feminist or feminist of color… usually
> Referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous
> Or wilful behavior. A woman who loves other women
> sexually and/ or non- sexually. Committed to survival
> and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not
> a separatist, except periodically for health… Regardless:
> womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. (xi-xii)

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Womanism emerged as a result of the pitfalls of feminism in addressing the peculiarities of black females. Apparently, feminism turns out to be Eurocentric (Molehe et al. 16799). It is significant because it portrays the black/African female's experiences (Sotunsa 97, Molehe et al. 16798). Womanism affirms that black women experience racial, classist, and sexist oppressions. According to Nolas -Alusa "womanism is a hybrid term which tends to reconcile feminist issues with matters peculiar to women of Africa and the black diaspora" (167). Furthermore, Adam posits that "womanism is a position of compromise between the sexes" (154). It is complimentary in nature in that both sexes have significant roles to play in ensuring that each other's needs are effectively met.

Similarly, Molehe et al. corroborate this partnership and submit that both men and women act as role players (16799). The foregoing entails that womanism differs from the Western stance of feminism that seeks to sever ties with the male folk, rather it encourages unity of both sexes towards the achievement of mutual goals (Amaefula 296). Moreover, it advocates for the acceptance of women and their contributions at home and in society (Adam 154). Significantly, womanists applaud motherhood alongside emphasizing the fair and humane treatment of women. Additionally, womanism affirms that motherhood is to be esteemed and not despised (Sotunsa 22). Similarly, it focuses on achieving self–definition and self-actualization for black women. Notably, womanism has become a model that encompasses coloured females in the United States and Africa, including those in countries of Latin America (Molehe et al. 6799).

Sisterhood as Solidarity among Women

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Do not burn my bones and other stories* is a collection of eleven short stories. The stories explore solidarity among African women and the relational dimensions of the feminine gender. Beyond the patriarchal hegemony and male gender dominance as communicated in African literary texts (see Bakuroo 2017; Elkateb & Amara 2024; Umeh 2024), the stories analysed in this research depict a gynocentric constructive representation of the female characters. Such representation situates the feminine gender as inherently friendly, audacious and daring, socially bonding, forbearing and sharing. These have been categorized and extensively discussed under four predominant themes below.

The Innate Propensity of Feminine Friendship

'Metaphor for Happiness' examines the relationships that exist among women through the lens of some characters. The character Ngeli Okochi reacts roughly towards Belinda Mgboji for merely pricing some mangoes at the Fiditi fruit market. The latter is pushed down by the former, who monopolises the purchase of the entire pile of mangoes, albeit reacting inappropriately. Coincidentally, the two women meet again at a corner of the market where TECNO Company is advertising phones, with acrobatic performers who thrill as well as entertain people. Unconsciously, as women innately desire friendship and support from one another, Ngeli impulsively talks to Belinda about the acrobatic performers. She says: "this display can make even poor people want to buy the phones these youths are advertising. They dance so well" (26). To this, Belinda gives no answer instead she withdraws, surprise that the woman who nearly pushed her down because of mangoes could be communicating to her.

Surprisingly, the same Ngeli lends Belinda a helping hand at the market car park, as she sends her driver to help her fix her flat tyre. Also, she drops a bag of mangoes in Belinda's car when her tyre is being fixed. These kind gestures counter the harsh treatment the former demonstrates towards the latter. This reflects a feeling of bond between the two women:

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tenderness and kindness. Ngeli shows concern for Belinda and goes the extra mile of delaying herself from leaving the market until Belinda's car is fixed. Not only that, but she also displays support for Belinda rather than driving off and suggesting she calls her husband to come fix the flat tyre. Ngeli decides to be the source of help. In addition, she shows remorse and repentance over her callous action toward Belinda. Thus, the bag of mangoes Ngeli drops for Belinda symbolizes repentance and pacification.

The mangoes are more than the quantity that Belinda would have purchased. Ngeli's solidarity towards the latter is such that she comes over to Belinda's car as the tyre is being fixed, she introduces herself thus: "I'm Ngeli Okochi …sorry about your tyre. These things happen at the most awkward times, she said, gesticulating with her right hand while her left hand was out of sight, almost behind her" (27). Again, Ngeli's choice to help Belinda affirms that she shares a bond with her. Apparently, this incident reflects women supporting one another in difficult situations.

Moreover, a display of sisterhood plays out between Belinda and her neighbour Bunmi. The former having experienced love and support from Ngeli, metes same to Bunmi. Previously, Belinda refuses to share an empty plot of land in her compound with Bunmi for planting. Instead, she monopolises it for her vegetable garden. The turn of events humbles her and without any choice, she agrees to have the land divided to accommodate Bunmi. She tells her: "Bunmi, you can have a portion of the land for your vegetables. That's what I came to tell you" (28). These words are followed by the hugging of the two women, which depicts oneness and mutual course, characteristic of sisterhood. This is captured thus: "Happiness spread a mantle of peace over the two women, like a river overflowing its bank at the height of the rains" (29).

Sisterhood as Bond, Support and Resilience

Another story, 'New skin', explores black females' experiences, bond, support and resilience. Lotanna's experience is unique in that she loses her parents in a fatal road accident as a first-year law student. She sails through the university as well as the law school through the benevolence of Chief Amajo, her father's business partner. Further, she is deceived by her boyfriend, who, being married, hides his marital status and engages in extramarital affairs with her. She is forced to flee the students' hostel where she lives, and is on the run from her boyfriend's wife. She seeks cover and shelter, which thankfully her colleague and friend Tola provides. Lotanna is accused of being a prostitute and thereafter pummelled by her boyfriend's wife. This is captured thus:

The words still rang in her ears. Would she ever forget the insult? You're a prostitute. I'll teach you a lesson you'll never forget. That was not all; hot slaps on either side of her face and a few kicks accompanied the insults. She could not understand why the kicks were aimed at her belly. No matter how much she tried to protect that part of her body, the kicks managed to always land there. Tum, Tum-heavy blunt blows.

It was dreadful. She thought she was going to die. She saw the weird but calculated movements of the woman's right leg as it shot forward each time like an arrow. The tips of what she regarded as a human missile were painted crimson. The long nails of the five toes were blooded. Lotanna was helpless because her attackers were two and had caught her unawares. Even before the fight began, she conceded defeat. All she could think afterwards was that she was lucky to be alive (31).

Tola displays help and solidarity to Lotanna's predicament; she accommodates Lotanna after the painful incident. Furthermore, Tola, concerned about Lotanna's health, suggests she

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sees a doctor following the battery by Mrs Obadia, wife of her boyfriend and her accomplice. Tola asks: "And you didn't see a doctor after all that beating, all that punishment? That is not wise Lota" (37). The character of Tola depicts female folk as able to handle interpersonal commitment, loyal, relationally resilient and empathetic. Tola advises Lotanna on how to navigate her predicament. She tells her to block her boyfriend's phone number since he has deceived her by hiding his marital status. Tola also offers to help with finding her a job and going for a medical check-up. She says:

> Don't worry …I'll ask my dad and mum to help find you a job. They know people and places in Lagos and Abuja. They are lawyers. My two siblings and I are following their footsteps. Ours is a family of lawyers. … Last week I heard my dad say that the Ministry of Justice is recruiting young lawyers. He might put in a word for you. A girl as smart and friendly as you should not look for job or struggle to get one. That's what I think… tomorrow is Saturday, and I won't be going to work. So, I'll take you to our family dentist in Yaba. You need to have your teeth examined; the shaky ones, I mean. Afterwards, we'll see our family doctor for an examination to ensure you have no factures or sprains that will cause problems in future (38).

Tola's intervention in Lotanna's case births a new version of Lotanna, aiding in her healing from the trauma of the physical assault. The change and newness in her life are illustrated thus: "She was so excited. She was happy. Things were changing for her. Her prayers were answered, and there were prospects for a new life, all thanks to Tola" (40). The above excerpt points to the fact that help and concern often demonstrated by women to their fellow women's difficulties is therapeutic. Following the theoretical thrust of this discourse, which is womanism, Walker posits that a womanist is a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non -sexually… (1983: xi-xii).

This is explicit in the case of Tola and Lotanna, the former reflects a non-sexual love towards the latter; therefore, she willingly offers to be of assistance to her. Moreover, womanism explicates female bonding, which is similarly explored between Tola and Lotanna. The duo bond through their acceptance of each other's friendship and provision of solace to the traumatized Lotanna, both engaging in house chores together as illustrated: "Let's clear the table, and we'll do the dishes later" (39). Additionally, Tola invites Lotanna to accompany her to the Silver Bird cinema, which, without mincing words, portrays a mutual bond between them. Accordingly, Bedrov and Gable aver that bonding is valuable as it provides support for individuals in good or bad eventualities of life (1).

Significantly, womanism aims to achieve self–definition and self-actualization for black women, as is glaring in the case of Lotanna. Her friendship and affinity with Tola fortify her to jettison the past experiences and forge ahead to define and renegotiate her personality. Suffice it to say that womanism is geared towards self-identity and awareness. In this vein, Tola makes Lota recall and realise that she was among the brilliant ones during their university days and with this, she can secure a lucrative job as a barrister.

Sisterhood as Matrifocal Benevolence and Affection

The story 'one frontliner is enough' illustrates sisterhood as depicted through motherly kindness, goodness and affection. Bessie, an English woman, demonstrates care and concern for Matilda, an African woman who is unemployed following the COVID-19 pandemic. The latter decides to seek help from the former. Surprisingly, Matilda is welcomed by Bessie, who

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invites her to join in picking strawberries. Bessie extends love to Matlida and her daughter despite not knowing them. She perceives her as one who shares a mutual bond with her; therefore, she breaks cultural boundaries. Bessie shows that women helping fellow women is not a cultural norm; rather, it is an innate tendency.

The love and care portrayed by Bessie is captured thus: "I'm picking strawberries". Bessie said, bending down again. Join me and pick as much as you want. This portion is my allotment, and it's big. Over there are my apple and plum trees." (46). Bessie further offers Matilda an extra bag for the fruits and vegetables, which allows her to pick more fruits. She tells her: "There's an extra bag there… You can use it. It's okay to have it. You and Alice can have the fruits you pick" (46).

Consequently, Matilda reciprocates Bessie's kind gesture; she offers to assist in weeding her allotment. Thus, Matilda's action depicts love as well as care for Bessie, which exhibits a sense of mutual affinity where both benefit from each other. Apparently, sisterhood is a mutual relationship which exists among women, such that one benefits from another. Surprisingly, Matilda's offer turns out to be Bessie's need longing to be met and with which she responds thus:

> That's very kind of you. Yes. Let's get together in two days. I could do with some help. I'm having a little trouble with my back just now…. Thank you, Matilda. Working in the allotment sometimes makes my back painful, so I will appreciate any help you can give. When you come, we'll pick the last of the blackcurrants. And you can have more lettuce and other green leaves and whatever else you need' Look at those branches full of plums, not yet ripe, and the apple trees heavy with fruit. You can have some of them when they are ready. I have plenty of apples and potatoes this year and a lot of leaks for the autumn and winter. You're welcome to share (47).

More so, Bessie's benevolence is such that she promises to share with Matilda fruits and vegetables she will harvest in the future. She extends her kindness to the future, which ensures that Matilda has food to feed her family. Evidently, "Matilda awed by the stroke of luck that brightened her life. She marvelled that something, which started as a wish, turned out to alter and enrich her life" (47).

Moreover, family relationships and the importance of motherhood are central in womanism (Sotunsa 22). Sotunsa avers that "womanists celebrate motherhood while insisting that women be treated with more respect and that motherhood be valued rather than derogated" (22). Being a womanist, Bessie considers Matilda's family and reckons with the fact that she is a mother. Therefore, she responds to Matilda's daughter's compliments and request for fruits and veggies, despite Matilda reprimanding her daughter for such. Bessie understands the difficulty in providing for a family at a critical time, as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alice's admiration of Bessie's allotment filled with fruits and veggies imparts the understanding to Bessie that the family lacks such provisions. She responds to Alice: "Sure you can have some strawberries, Alice. Why not? I couldn't finish all these alone. I always give away some to friends and neighbours" (45). Suffice it to say that Bessie's offer of an extra bag to Matilda to take more fruits and vegetables reflects and aligns with womanist inclinations. This action resonates with her commitment to family as she believes that the latter needs them not just for herself but also for her family.

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Sisterhood as Affiliative Kinship, Altruism and Sharing

The concept of affiliative kinship, in which individuals, who are not related by blood, become a family, providing love, care and support for one another, and making selfless sacrifices is explored in the story, 'The dove revenge'. The narrative depicts a graphic representation of familial care and concern shared between two women, Yemisi and Amaka, who are not biologically related. The latter being sensitive in the discussion about sexual intimacy decodes a sudden change in Yemisi's mood. Thus, Amaka switches to another subject, demonstrating her sensitivity and concern for her friend Yemisi. This is due to the weird coldness that pervades the latter's marriage, resulting in the absence of sexual intimacy for six months.

Similarly, Amaka shows concern and empathy towards Yemisi when the latter forgets her instructional charts meant for her teaching practice. Amaka's insistence on Yemisi going back home to get the charts reflects her character as selfless. Amaka, rather than portray indifference to the challenge, advises her friend to plead with Doctor Williams, their teaching practice supervisor, to dash home for the charts. Amaka's disposition depicts sisterhood as well as solidarity. This implies that Amaka acts as a morale booster to Yemisi and says: "You have to go now? Luckily, your house is not far.

You can go and come back under an hour. Can't you?" (88). Additionally, Doctor Williams granting permission to Yemisi to go and get the charts equally signifies support and concern for her fellow woman. Despite the social strata dichotomy between the two women, she considers Yemisi without prejudice. Further, Doctor Williams' response portrays support to see that her supervisee excels as well as completes her academic programme. She says: "Okay, Yemisi, off you go but come back as soon as possible. I'll start with Amaka after seeing the principal" (88).

Moreover, this incident reflects the tenets of womanism self-definition and self-actualization for black women. Yemisi's insistence and willingness to go back home and get the charts, alongside the support from her supervisor, both accentuate her efforts towards self-actualisation and the fulfilment of completing the postgraduate diploma programme. On the other side, support for family relationships, Dr Williams reckons with the fact that Yemisi is married and may have had concerns about her family to grapple with. Thus, she stands by her, encourages her and says: "You're just back in time… Let's go and get it done" (90). These words of encouragement boost Yemisi's confidence. Thus, "Yemisi knows that it will be all right. She smiles and waves gratefully to Amaka" (90). Similarly, sisterhood as altruism and support are evident from Amaka's acceptance to help collect Yemisi's postgraduate diploma certificate due to the latter's relocation to the United Kingdom. Also, she agrees to update her on events in Nigeria. Amaka undoubtedly reflects the picture of a sister to Yemisi. This is captured thus:

> The only other person who knows her plan is Amaka. Amaka will be her eyes and hands in Nigeria and handle anything that requires her attention or bring it to her knowledge until she finally severs her connection with the country. She has arranged with Amaka to help her collect her Diploma certificate whenever it is ready and released (95).

Also, the story 'The sewing machine' captures the support and bond between two women, Anna and Nnonye. The latter comes to support Anna on her settlement day with the family she served. Hence, Nnonye helps in the preparation and tidying up after the occasion.

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Her presence and support are captured in these lines: “Let’s get to the kitchen to make sure everything is okay. She walked out of the room, followed by Nnonye ... There were pots and pans, plates and cutleries to wash and other things to put away. Nnonye stayed to assist” (100-105) Similarly, in another story, ‘A day like no other’, some women empathize with Mama Ejima over her wares that were poured away because of the activities of market inspectors. They try to console her, but she throws herself on the ground, weeping over her destroyed half bag of rice, which she borrowed money to purchase. Not only that, her status of being a widow with children to cater for contributes to her weeping uncontrollably. A plump woman asks her: “Is it because of your market that poured on the road that you want to kill yourself? ...Get up and see what you can salvage from the damage” (124). The consolation and support the women offer to her portray solidarity and their concern for her welfare. Interestingly, the market inspectors leave, but these women stay to console Mama Ejima; to them, they share a fictive bond with her. Drawing from the above, Bedrov and Gable corroborate that women prove more effective in supplying social support when juxtaposed with men (1). Furthermore, two women help to scoop the rice into Mama Ejima’s wheelbarrow while comforting her. Significantly, the women go the extra mile to proffer solutions to Mama Ejima’s predicament. Also, Mmachi defies all odds to sacrifice money meant for her family to enable Mama Ejima to pay back the money she borrowed.

Mmachi tells her:

> You cannot go on like this… Think of your family. Your children. What will happen to them if you harm yourself?... Look at your hair. They are in an awful state. Get up before you make your situation worse. She took Mama Ejima’s hand to help her sit up… How much did you borrow from the money lender? Mmachi asked quietly… I will give you the money. You can buy another half bag of rice and sell it to pay up your debt (125-126).

It is evident that Mmachi willingly endures personal inconvenience to bring happiness to an individual with whom she perceives a meaningful bond. Notably, the financial resources that Mmachi allocates for this purpose were originally intended to provide for her family's sustenance. Furthermore, Mmachi, herself a widow like Mama Ejima, demonstrates solidarity by endorsing Mama Ejima’s pursuit of self-actualization and economic independence through securing a means of livelihood. Therefore, Mama Ejima reciprocates Mmachi’s benevolence, and this is illustrated thus:

> Mama Ejima jumped to her feet crying and laughing at the same time. More tears flowed down her face, but her eyes were also full of joy and her heart singing. She wanted to hug Mmachi, but she realised how dirty she was and withdrew her arms quickly. Instead, she knelt and held Mmachi’s legs, thanking God and blessing her benefactor. ‘God will bless you. You will never lack any good thing. She prayed. Then, she burst out singing (126).

The excerpt above depicts sisterhood as a fictive kinship, in which the feminine gender is an archetype of genuine familial affection, sisterly care, selfless sacrifice and oneness. In this vein, women are depicted as always willing to help a fellow woman surmount their challenges, providing unflinching support to a hurting sister. The support Mama Ejima elicits from Mmachi and the other women makes her emotionally submerged in the euphoria of their kindness, their palpable love and sisterhood.

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DISCUSSION

Sisterhood and feminism are mutually interdependent terms that explore the relational affinity, ideological dimensions, and gynocentric paradigm towards the liberation and emancipation of women and girls from the biases of cisheteropatriarchy. The idea of sisterhood includes sexual attraction and solidarity in lesbian relationships (Jing, 205). However, sisterhood, particularly in the African context, is deployed as a survival strategy (Hinz 2024; Erivona, 2025).

It is also an affiliation for resisting patriarchal dominance (El Arbaoui, 2023). Further, the findings of this study add to the existing body of literature by showing that sisterhood in the African literature studied, provides inherent matrifocal benevolence and affection, in which every woman is another's keeper and a mother to every child, and everyone is another's responsibility; hence, sisters look out for one another. This corroborates Jing (2012), who states that sisterhood substitutes maternal love.

Also, this study shows that sisterhood provides an affiliative kinship; a mutual familial love, and support given in sisterhood as members of the same group. This finding is supported by Hinz (2024), who avers that sisterhood helps women share their subjective experiences, providing family-like support and love to one another. Another important aspect of the findings of this research, as depicted by the characters, is the innateness of friendship in sisterhood in the African context. In this vein, sisterhood supports a communal life in which grudges and malice are set aside to remedy unfavourable situations and build friendship.

CONCLUSION

This work underscores the pivotal role women play in fostering solidarity and support across diverse cultural and social landscapes, particularly in times of adversity. The findings reveal that the ethos of sisterhood transcends racial and continental boundaries, manifesting in women's willingness to intervene and make sacrifices to alleviate the hardships faced by their peers, especially in contexts of poverty.

Empathy emerges as a salient and often intrinsic characteristic, driving women to provide support and encouragement amidst various challenges. Furthermore, the research highlights the active efforts of women to empower one another towards self-definition and self-actualization, with a pronounced emphasis on promoting financial independence through educational and entrepreneurial initiatives.

These collective actions exemplify the core principles of womanism, as discussed throughout this paper, and illustrate the enduring commitment of women to the advancement and well-being of others within their communities.

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