

Victims and Villains of Feminist War: A Masculinist Reading of Chinweizu's *Anatomy of Female Power*

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Abstract: Gender issues have ignited great debates and contestations in Africa and the West over the years. Mainstream feminist ideologues present the society as a patriarchal system where the men-folk institute and maintain structures that ensure their domination of the women-folk. They argue as if men at a point in human history connived among themselves and carried out a coup through which they dethroned women and took control of the society's socio-economic and political structures. Such feminist analogies project women as victims of men's paternal structural orchestrations. This study while capitalizing on the views enunciated in Chinweizu's *Anatomy of Female Power* appraises his vocal masculinist dissenting view which sees the society as being sublimely matriarchal with men as victims of matriarchal chicaneries; thus positioning women as villains in the gender war. Applying the masculinist approach, the paper posits that women seem not to be aware of their enormous latent powers. Reviewing Chinweizu's onerous role in balancing the gender discourse, it highlights some clandestine matriarchal machinations identified by Chinweizu while noting that women should utilize more of their nature-given powers rather than going about complaining and seeking powers where there seems to be none.

Keywords: feminism, masculinism, patriarchal, matriarchal, gender war, Chinweizu

INTRODUCTION

A renowned English writer, William Golding, once said that "women are foolish to pretend they are equal to men; they are far superior and always have been." This is the premise upon which Chinweizu, a notable Nigerian polemicist wrote his book entitled *Anatomy of Female Power*. In this classical treatise, Chinweizu (1990, 3) writes that women have ruled the men who rule the world. As he puts it, "if the essence of power is the

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ability to get what one wants, then women are far from powerless. Women do get and always did get whatever they want....That women operate methods which often differ from those available to men, does not in any way mean that women are bereft of power.” It is obvious then that women have enormous powers that one may then wonder the kind of power they seek again. Writing in a similar vein, Ezeigbo (2021, 26) opines that “leadership has been described as influence. If leaders influence people and have the skills to command people’s respect, then women invariably attain this status in the home, where they occupy an important position.” The main point highlighted by Golding and Ezeigbo above is that women have and are wielding enormous powers.

Surprisingly, these women who are projected above to have enormous powers are also seeking for greater powers through feminism. The world seems to have given in to feminists and their stories of how men are subjugating and enslaving women in various societies. Women have through so many means pushed forward this notion that portrays them as the oppressed, the marginalized, the subjugated and the ‘weaker sex.’ They have utilized all available social and political means to confront these perceived anomalies in the name of women liberation. According to Cornwall (1997, 10) “old style feminist theory dealt with [men] at one stroke: men were classed as the problem, those who stood in the way of positive change.” Most feminists perceive men as the stumbling block on their way to progress and emancipation. However, men are now writing back to the female folk. Men who have been serially alleged by feminists to be the oppressors and subjugators of women are now shaking-off these appellations. They now perceive themselves as the ones who are under serious attack. They see themselves as the real ‘weaker sex’ and those who are oppressed and vanquished in a matriarchal world that is wrongly perceived to be patriarchal. Likening themselves to be at the weaker position, they are writing back to the hegemonic propagators of feminist ideologies; they are attempting to put feminism in its proper historical, social and psychological perspectives. They are not writing back to harm women but to encourage them to unleash their enormous inherent potentials. Thus the task to be carried out in this paper is to expound and interrogate some masculinist responses to feminism, especially as enunciated by Chinweizu in his treatise *Anatomy of Female Power*.

FEMINISM

Feminism is a term that “describes political, cultural and economic movements that aim to establish equal rights and legal protection for

women” (Drucker 2018, 2). According to Angelo Nicolaidis (2015, 191), feminism is based on the “realization of equality and fairness for women in all spheres of life, both private and public, and the ending of oppressive patriarchy in all its guises and in all its practices and seeks to transform societal institutions.” That is why feminists work hard to upturn the social order which they claim are anti-women. However, in his book *Anatomy of Female Power*, Chinweizu, sees feminism as a carefully orchestrated ploy by women to perpetually hold men down and keep exploiting them. Writing from the masculinist angle, he insists that feminism, in all its ramifications, is a movement that is aimed at further suppressing men who are already utterly vulnerable to numerous hidden oppressive machinations of women. He reasonably disagrees with the feminist view insisting that rather than being the villains in the gender war, men are the victims while women are the most powerful traducers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MASCULINISM

As Hakala (2016, 1) notes, “the term ‘masculinism’ derives from its French usage as constituent of antifeminism. ‘Men’s movement and ‘fathers’ right movement’ are used interchangeably in English.” It “emerged in the 1980s in relation to the second-wave feminism ...[and masculinists] engage in lobbying and the raising of awareness in order to, according to them, restore men’s rights”; masculinism “defends the notion that women now dominate men who are called on to revolt, organise resistance, restore lost virile identity and demand rights (Bard 2020).

Unlike feminists who seek for the equality of men and women, “most masculinists believe that human beings are divided into two naturally different and complementary sexes. And it is this complementariness that justifies hierarchy of the values, attitudes and behaviours associated with each of the sexes” (Blais and Dupuis-Deri 2012, 26). They recognise that men and women are physiologically and emotionally wired to perform certain roles thus affirming the belief that there is a supposed difference between men and women. This means that ‘masculinism’ is a ‘men’s movement’ just as ‘feminism’ is a ‘women’s movement.’ It is an antifeminist movement and Chinweizu is seen as a masculinist with strong antifeminist dispositions. Thus, this paper extrapolates on the resistant or oppositional essences of his postulations in *Anatomy of Female Power*, especially as it concerns the key positions of feminists who regard men as oppressors who are the cause of all women’s travails, thus they hugely segregate against them and seek for their downfall or their eventual dethronement.

WOMEN AS WIELDERS OF REAL POWER

Most feminist studies give prominent attention to the claimed roles of men or patriarchy in the gender structure. The pattern has been to analyse activities of men which are said to be holding women down or are encouraging the denial of their basic rights. In such analysis, women are said to be at the receiving end, they are regarded as the victims when it comes to gender orchestrations while the men are the villains. Since the emergence of feminism, the views of pro-feminist scholars and writers have dominated the discourse on gender thus strongly and deeply entrenching their belief system and dispositions. Majority of them are women while others are men who are sympathetic to the cause of women. The dominant voice has been that which constantly insists that men are subjugating women and they use both creative works, political enlightenments and scholarly treatises to push forward the positions of their arguments. In a way, they have ‘colonized’ feminist discussions. However in this study, efforts will be made to apply masculinist theory to give the views of antifeminist scholar like Chinweizu, who look at feminism from a different prism.

Introducing the premise for his treatise in *Anatomy of Female Power*, Chinweizu (1990, 9) states that:

In the last couple of decades, feminist propaganda has sought to persuade the world that women are powerless in society and that men are natural oppressors of women, it claims that wives are subordinates to their husbands in the home; and that, outside the home, men have excluded women from political, economic and cultural power.... And for proof they point to the public structures of political, economic and cultural power, and show that these are almost exclusively occupied by men.

Arguing on the contrary, the author says that women are powerful because they control and monopolize most important domains, spheres and frontiers of life and even when men wield some powers, it is as if they are holding it in trust for women because women are the ones who benefit the most.

If the essence of power is the ability to get what one wants, then women are far from powerless. Women do get, and always get what they want—be it riches, or thrones, or the head of John the Baptist, or routine exemption from hardships and risks which their men folk are obliged to endure. That women operate by methods which often differ from those available to men

does not in any way mean that women are bereft of power. (Chinweizu 1990, 11)

He insists that “in human society, it is not male power but female power which is supreme... [because] women control scarce resources, commodities and opportunities; and they distribute them... They exercise power through education, propaganda, directives, suggestions, rewards and punishment. They wield instruments of persuasion and coercion” (Ibid, 9). Putting it quite succinctly he notes that “male power is naturally tributary to female power... Because every man has as boss his wife, or his mother, or some other woman in his life, men may rule the world, but women rule the men who rule the world... Thus contrary to appearances, woman is boss, the overall boss, of the world” (Ibid, 12). To buttress this, Chinweizu highlights some ploys that women have employed to maintain their subterranean stranglehold over men. To him, women are really powerful and female power is in no doubt real:

Female power exists; it hangs over every man like a ubiquitous shadow. Indeed, the life cycle of man, from cradle to grave, may be divided into three phases each of which is defined by the form of female power which dominates him: motherpower, bridepower, or wifepower. (Ibid, 14)

By masterfully utilizing the authority that each of these positions bequeaths them, women indirectly lord it over men wittingly, with less fanfare or noise. As illustrated by Chinweizu, some peculiar weaknesses of a man at every stage in his life are sagaciously cashed in by the woman in his life at that moment to exploit and hoodwink him:

Motherpower is established over him while he is still an infant. Bridespower holds sway over him through his great need for a womb in which to procreate... Wifepower is established over him through his craving to appear as lord and master of some women’s nest (Ibid.)

These situations are manipulated by women to gain undue advantage over men but apart from these, Chinweizu also lists some conditions that enable women to get what they want from men:

Women’s control of the womb; women’s control of the kitchen; women’s control of the cradle, the psychological immaturity of man relative to woman and man’s tendency to be deranged by his own excited penis (Ibid, 14-15)

Giving a holistic explanation of these tendencies he opines that “a man can be controlled by the hunger in his belly and by the other hunger which flares up just below his belly. Consequently, he can be manipulated by whoever controls the kitchen which feeds him or by whoever carries the womb through which he craves to procreate” (Ibid, 15). Wondering how women are able to gather these powers, he traces it to the saying that “the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world” meaning that “woman, who rules the nursery, shapes boys and girls for life; and the way in which she shapes boys make them what they become in life” (Ibid.). However, he remarks that the womb is chief among the strategies of female domination:

Of these five pillars, the womb is by far the most important. Because it is of exceptional importance in reproduction, because woman has a monopoly of it, and because of man’s irrepensible craving to use it, the womb has become woman’s supreme headquarters for manipulating men. (Ibid, 16)

Pushing forward with his masculinist mantra, Chinweizu further notes that men are the figure heads, the unreal lords while women are the real heads and lords and that is why “an average woman prefers covert to overt matriarchy” (Ibid, 75) where she will not be exposed to core leadership:

Overt leadership would give woman duties which expose her to too many pressures and risks. When she declares that she is weak, and lays her head on his chest and weeps to prove it, and lets him take the decisions, she simultaneously massages his ego and exploits him. She offloads high-pressure and high-risk jobs unto the patriarch and takes for herself the superior but safer position of the power behind the throne. Thus, behind the patriarch, stands his matriarch: she runs her world by running the man who runs the world for her. (Ibid.)

From an unnoticed but vantage corner, such a woman manipulates her man. She assumes the role of “the back seat driver, giving instructions from the owner’s corner” or “the supreme executive, excellent at delegating the most burdensome and dangerous jobs to her chief lieutenant, alias the patriarch” (Ibid, 76).

MEN AS VICTIMS OF FEMINIST PLOYS

In *Anatomy of Female Power*, the author also identifies the various subtle strategies through which women are nurtured in the society to gain advantage over men while the general belief is that men have advantage

over women. The first one is through the process of upbringing which in most societies is left in the hands of women. “Consider a beautiful girl and a strong boy. When they are successfully reared by motherpower, they mature into their respective ideals: the dolly bird and the macho. To bring this about, the girl is taught self-worship or narcissism; the boy heroism or self-sacrifice... When they grow up, the dolly bird will worship herself, but the macho will worship woman and serve her, even to the point of sacrificing his life to preserve hers” (Chinweizu 1990, 30). The effect this kind of training has on both the boy and the girl is enormous. For instance “the narcissist personality is what makes a woman take it as a matter of course that a man should offer goods and services to her for her contribution to their joint sexual pleasure. He gives her pleasure, she gives him pleasure,[during a sexual encounter] but he pays...” (Ibid, 31) As he further illustrates, that is why a small girl of about fifteen years takes it as a natural course of life and even for granted that a high ranking military general or a notable business tycoon who is thrice her age, should put down before her feet, all his laurels and hard-earned wealth, simply because he is courting her. And most times, a man who is brought up to be woman-fixated would see nothing wrong acting to please his mistress even to the detriment of his own life.

While the women are trained to be self-centered and shy away from taking risks, men are nurtured to be altruistic and take greater risks. “Whereas the mother equips the future dolly bird with a narcissist personality, she equips the future macho with a heroic personality. The hero is a servant who performs extraordinary duties for family, community or humanity: as warrior or protector, as organizer of wealth or as bringer of vital knowledge” (Ibid.). In the same vein, “mothers magnify the advantage of female restraint by not teaching boys to restrain their sexual appetites and even by teaching them to become hopelessly addicted to the female body... many mothers continue to cuddle their boy children long past weaning time. Some allow them into their beds till they are four years or more.” (Ibid, 33) The end product of this deliberate action as Chinweizu in his masculinist disposition observes is that this leads men to a kind of addiction to female body. And as he puts it, “addiction to female body weakens a man’s power of sexual abstinence; it puts him into the power of whoever can satisfy his cravings... Thus, addiction which makes a man more desperate for sex increases women’s power over him” (Ibid, 34). No wonder he believes “that when his penis stands up a man’s brain takes French leave. Which is why a woman who wants to rule a man first gets his penis to stand and salute her” (Ibid, 15).

A man does everything humanly possible to assuage his sexual craving not minding the risks involved or the shame it may attract.

With such a stage set for men, a woman further fortifies her entrapping net through glamorous body packaging which results to her gaining a kind of 'body-beautiful.' This increases the stake as Chinweizu notes: "male susceptibility to female beauty gives women a great leverage in their dealings with men; this leverage is further increased by women's artifice" (Ibid, 36). Correct and calculative application of body adornments is an artistic craft which every woman is tutored to practice and exhibit. Thinking deeply about this, Chinweizu insists that "a women who packages herself for that purpose, and does so effectively, is said to dress to kill. A woman dressed to kill is not dressed to kill deer, or trees, or pigeons, or other women... she is dressed to kill men" (Ibid, 37). Adding to this, he remarks that "a woman undergoing glamourization is like a warrior kitting himself out for battle. In contemporary Western fashion, she will shave her legs and armpit, wear curlers in her wet hair; smear thick paint on her face, and let it dry and cake on her skin, stuff her feet into tight, high-heeled and ankle-snapping shoes; diet herself into an enervating twiggy slimness; and then set out to seek battle" (Ibid, 38).. Having observed all these gimmicks, the masculinist affirms that "if men were smart enough to act in their own interest, they would seek protection, in both law and custom, from all public display of the female body-beautiful" (Ibid, 40).

The next ploy that Chinweizu exposes is that of love. According to him, men and women perceive and love differently. "Love acts on men and women in opposite ways" he argues and states that "when a women tells a man 'I love you', she means 'I want you to feed me, house me, ... and take me as your burden until I catch a better slave'" (Ibid, 43). But conversely "when a man tells a woman 'I love you', he means 'I am eager to be your slave, and ready to do everything I can to make you satisfied and happy'" (Ibid, 44). From this, it seems that the slogan "love is blind" is only applicable to a man in love but for the woman, she is clear-eyed and knows exactly what she wants. That's why once a man approaches a woman, her first interrogation would be to ascertain his financial status, and if it is not juicy she would quickly discharge him.

From love, dissecting female's subterranean domination strategies, Chinweizu's attention shifts to wedding. Arguing strongly, the masculinist says that a woman's wedding day is the greatest in her life. Citing Sue Bruley, a feminist who contends that "someone coming from another planet and looking at a marriage contract and the semi-slavery it

entails for the woman would think it insane that she would enter it voluntarily” (Ibid, 59). Countering this argument from the masculinist angle, Chinweizu avers thus: “that women do enter it [marriage] not just voluntarily but eagerly suggests that women are daft or that they are not the ones enslaved by marriage” (Ibid.). He also asks, “if indeed weddings ushered women into exploitation and hardship, why is it that the bride can be counted upon to appear for her wedding looking radiant and joyfully expectant?” (Ibid.) Answering this question, he highlights the bride’s reasons:

Of course, the bride is happy because the wedding is her triumph ceremony marking the end of her man hunt, marking the beginning of her retirement on the earnings of her husband... She has gotten him to propose, and is about to bring him before the public to accept to be her nest-slave. Why should she not be happy after such a successful campaign? Why should she not be happy and radiant at the prospect of her fine reward—to live on his earnings for the rest of her days? (Ibid, 60)

And in the masculinist sense, any day the man wants to back out from the marital union, she would lay her hands on a large chunk of his wealth in the name of alimony.

After the wedding, Chinweizu contends that as the man and woman start living together as husband and wife, the woman rolls out all the skills she has acquired in the art of “husband management.” Explaining how they acquire such skills, he reasons that “Girls learn it by observation, or through conversation with their mothers or aunts, or during initiation rites in those societies which practice them... After marriage, she keeps her skills sharpened through refresher courses, alias kaffe klatches or gossip sessions where women, talk what, for them is serious business” (Ibid, 66). In adopting some strategies to manage her husband, Chinweizu says that a woman acts in line with the words of Jilly Cooper who says that “the male is a domestic animal which, if treated with firmness and kindness, can be trained to do most things” (Ibid.). With this, the man like a domestic beast is cowed, strictly trained to observe, obey and dot his wife! If he fails to behave like a tamed animal in the house, she makes the home hot and uninhabitable for him. This is carried out with great display of professionalism as Chinweizu observes too: “To the management of her husband, a wife brings the highest possible professionalism. If the essence of professionalism... is doing what one is doing for monetary or other economic reward and not for fun; at as high a level of skill as is possible, and with a singleness of purpose that is intolerant of distraction or

frivolity—then it is in husband management that women show the highest professionalism” (Ibid, 67). Going further, he says that once the man has sliced a ring on a woman’s finger and returns home with her, he is brutally handled:

Once the nest slave has been brought home, the poor fellow is managed ruthlessly. He is given his assignments and made to perform them. He is routinely henpecked and spied on. If he is particularly recalcitrant, he is threatened with starvation, with loss of peace of mind, or with loss of sexual privileges. He is subjected to the full force of what some Nigerian husbands call bedroom terrorism. (Ibid.)

These are tactically applied “with the support of her professional colleagues... her circle of female friends and relatives. They act as her spy network, informing her of her husband’s activities when he is out of her sight” (Ibid.). This to Chinweizu checkmates the man and ensures that he adheres to the rules of marriage to the letter. With such, it is clear that a man in a marriage is a completely conquered fellow. He rarely acts or takes any important decision, without first consulting and obtaining the wife’s express approval. Yet, feminists would want us believe that women play second fiddle roles in most families while in the real sense of it, according to Chinweizu, they are the real boss.

CONCLUSION

In the midst of persistent clamour by feminists that men subjugate, enslave and maltreat women, in the situation where men are perceived to be powerful while women are powerless, in the situation where men are regarded as oppressors of women who have set up patriarchal structures to perpetuate inequalities among male and female gender, in the event where men are portrayed as arch manipulators of women, the masculinist, Chinweizu, writing back to feminists, in *Anatomy of Female Power* debunks the beliefs that “women are weak and fragile; that men are cleverer than women, that women are fickle, passive, irrational, helpless and sentimental” (Ibid, 86). Rather, he strongly believes as a masculinist that “women are far less fragile and weak than they pretend to be, that women are cleverer than men, that their fickleness, passivity, irrationality and helplessness are calculated instruments of power” (Ibid.). Chinweizu strongly believes that men are the oppressed irrespective of the position of powerful, angry and equality-demanding women that men are oppressing them. In his calculations, most women who understand the level and depth of power that women already have, especially in traditional

societies, rarely support feminism, rather, they vehemently oppose it. To such matriarchists, “feminism is a revolt in paradise; and the feminist rebels jeopardize the ancient matriarchist privileges of all women. As a result, despite advertising itself as a movement for the liberation of women, feminism has provoked the opposition of the matriarchist majority of women, and has therefore remained a minority movement” (Ibid, 122). These women, in not joining the feminist movement, are afraid that it will not only whittle down the influential powers they already have but will attract men’s attention to scrutinize their hidden powers and recognise some of their surreptitious and deeply camouflaged machinations.

Being a masculinist and among men who are constantly receiving barrages of bashing and accusations from feminists, Chinweizu, in *Anatomy of Female Power* writes back to counter some feminist-based accusations by insisting that women are the ones subjugating men to subservient positions with their matriarchal ploys and machinations. Writing back to feminists, he exposes certain feminine gimmicks and chanceries that are deployed to enslave and oppress men. Sounding quite like a masculinist, he emphasizes that women are already powerful; that they exude and exhibit so much authority and influence over men through various means, therefore, it is rather preposterous that they are ganging up in the name of feminism demanding for equality and power. In his view, women through so many ways, trick, cajole and lord it over men. As a core masculinist, he therefore enunciates some strategies and machinations which men can adopt to resist the enslaving snares of matriarchs or feminists. He seems to warning women that their agitation would awaken men to their sensibilities to really weigh who is the victim or villain in a woman-ruled world which is wrongly perceived to be male dominated. Writing in the spirit of a staunch masculinist, he alerts men to be vigilant while admonishing women to keep being the neck, which dictates the movement of the head as they rule the men who rule the world.

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