

I AM NOT ANTI- MEN

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Dear Prince,

Thanks so much for your letter and your interest in the issues I try to raise in my articles.

You closed your letter by advising me "you should leave the man alone. He has much work to do I know it is just a woman's temptation".

Let me open my answer by citing from Times International of Monday, January 26, 1981: -

"If you consider yourself overworked, you had better think again. A report compiled by Peter Adamson and published by the United Nations states categorically, that women work twice as hard as men" (page 4)

"On the home front cooking and washing, shopping and cleaning, sewing and mending, looking after the old and bringing up the young - a woman's work is probably as tiring as a man's. But on top of that, most of today's women also have a job outside of their own four walls.

"But it is on the shoulders of the 1600 million women of Africa, Asia, and Latin America that the burden of the 'double job' falls most heavily. For them the working day commonly begins at 4.30 or 5.00 am. and ends 16 hours later, as they struggle to meet most basic needs of their families - for food, water, firewood, clothes and health care.

"In the popular imagination the women of the Third World ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ look after the house and raise the children whilst the men look after the land and raise the crops'. But recent research has blown this myth sky-high.

"According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation in Rome, women are responsible for at least

50 per cent of all food production"

"A study by the Economic Commission for Africa, for example, has shown that women do 60 per cent to 80 per cent of all the agricultural work on the continent, plus 50 per cent of all animal husbandry and 100 per cent of the food processing".

According to the editorial of West Africa, August 4, 1980 "Women are an oppressed group. The discrimination against them in part of West Africa can only be compared with the discrimination against blacks by whites in south Africa".

In fact, the very same men who protest that blacks in south Africa can only work as servants or serve as cheap labour force, regard their own wives as personal servants and find it in order that women provide almost all of the unpaid labour performed in their society.

According to the Programme of Action released by the 1979 Copenhagen Conference on the United Nations Decade for Women, the present situation is quoted as follows, "While they represent 50 per cent of the world population (in fact, more than that) and one third of the official labour force, women perform two-thirds of all the working hours and receive only one tenth of the world income and own less than (one per cent) of world property".

These are facts. Now you ask me to leave men alone. Can you tell me, who will do all this work, when women start becoming reluctant to be exploited like this? Won't it be men who will have to share a bit more?

How on earth do you get the idea that it is childbearing and nursing I like men to share in?

I don't think you realise how serious the issues I try to raise with my articles are. We women are human beings. We should have a right to a decent life, to leisure and pleasure, which men enjoy, usually on our cost.

I don't know whether you are aware of the Human Rights Declaration of 1978, it's ~~xxxx~~ one of the most fundamental

~~Human~~ Rights. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ After the right to life comes the "right to freedom from slavery and servitude," Yet women are considered natural servants to men, just for being female! Aren't women humans?

It may also interest you to know that the OAU has adopted an African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which declares to fight.

"...all forms of discrimination particularly those based on race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion, and political opinion".

In addition article 18 calls for the "elimination of every discrimination against women". Yes. Did you know this?

You are busy mocking me with the question whether Christ should have been man or woman. Why did you only protest the article in which I claimed He must return as a woman.

Was the article declaring women as too base, infact nothing better but slaves for Christ to be a woman alright to you? I feel such articles which have no objective but to ridicule and debase women should be challenged.

I challenged it. I don't think I should be blamed for it. I have no regret doing it, no matter how much you mock me for it.

No human being challenging his exploiter for equal rights goes unpunished. Blacks are shot. Women are ridiculed, as you so aptly do with your story of old spinsters who can't find a husband again because they insisted on equal rights when they were young.

I bear your rid^sacle with pride. I know I am not alone. We are many, and you cannot turn the clock back, no matter how hard you try.

I don't know what you mean with natural sex differences between men and women We have them all right but do we need them for cooking and sweeping? Let me assure you that the limbs

we need for cooking and sweeping are all owned by men as well, and there is certainly nothing sex specific about them. And though we may be weaker we are doing the harder work, and more of it on top.

I have no interest in a world where women rule and men are servants. I have interest in a world which will be built on justice and not on exploitation - a world in which the old rule of might is right will be replaced by cooperation, understanding and love.

As long as women are left out in an attempt to build this world this cannot be achieved. We women are half of ~~the~~ human-kind.

Don't you think this is worth writing for I have often been told that the views I express on women issues are "dangerous." If I ask what makes them dangerous, I am being answered that they destroy family life.

Rejoinder: the political economy of women liberation

Women in this country have started speaking up for their rights. As women experienced throughout the world, they are being ridiculed for it, and proved wrong for doing so by men, no matter how obviously wrong the male argumentation.

"The political economy of women liberation" is a typical example for this male strategy to keep women in their inferior place. The fact that the author comes up with the correct solution (though not through thinking, but through citing Marx) namely that household chores must be shared and children cared for communally so that women can stop living vicariously through men and start making impact on society in their own right, does not change the said male strategy. In fact, the author only shows that women's thinking products are wrong, their approach misdirected and their perspectives distorted.

The author does not hesitate to bring forward the most obviously false arguments to prove women's inability to see things in their correct perspective.

First, he claims, petty bourgeois women have no right to speak for women. With this logic, Marx had no right to speak for the proletariat, and first and foremost, a privileged (undergraduate) man has no right to speak for oppressed women. Although he has therefore, in the very first paragraph, disqualified himself for writing the article at all, he continues with similarly stupid argumentation.

It is wrong that the feminist analysis starts

off from biological differences. Every analysis, also the feminist analysis, starts off from the experience of Oppression. If women don't come up with the solution that they are oppressed by capitalist organization of society, but by men, this is so, because they experience themselves as Oppressed by men. I do not know how any woman can experience her oppression differently. It is the man who controls the household money. It is the man who beats her when the meal is late. It is the man who expects her to serve him food, and serve him for his sexual needs, whether she has any or not (rape is not possible in marriage....and not one single woman would ever pass such a law)

This experienced male oppression is explained by feminists through biological differences. Only women can be raped. Women become helpless through pregnancy and childbirth, and are therefore very easily exploited. Women are physically weaker and vulnerable because they have even more helpless babies to protect.

Men exploit this vulnerability and helplessness by making women their servants. The author says that such biological explanations are mystical and dangerous. (The argument that women are created from the rib of a man is of course not brought forward by feminists, but by male chauvinists). There is really nothing mystical or dangerous about such things, except somebody fears the truth.

As long as women cannot protect themselves otherwise, they have no choice but to avoid the traps - that is their sexual function as bearers and nurses of babies - which make them such easy prey for ~~the~~ exploitation through men.

Of course women have not escaped capitalist exploitation when they have escaped male exploitation. But as long as women cook for their men, so that men can

do the thinking without being disturbed by daily chores, and become heroes in the revolution, for as long women are being denied manhood. (or should I say humanhood) Eldrige Cleaver said of the black (male, of course!!) Americans "We shall have our manhood. We shall have it, or the earth shall be shattered in our attempts to get it." Typical man.

No, this is not the alternative focus. The alternative is: "We (women) shall have our humanhood. We shall have it or justice and freedom for all will not have been achieved". As simple as this. The alternative is not destruction of the world, but the alternative is continued injustice and all the suffering and all the human misery (for both males and females, that is) which goes with it. There is no need to add to this through destruction; women are the beares, and nursers of humankind. As long as they suffer injustice and misery, human kind will be afflicted with injustice and misery. As long as women are discredited for having only wrong perspectives, the world wide struggle for human emancipation from the chains of profit interests on the cost of human needs will be fought by half of mankind. Socialist organizations will so long not have female membership as long as they are denied the ability to reflect their experience correctly. Don't tell any woman she is not oppressed by men. She experiences daily to be oppressed by men. Her intellectual abilities are ridicul^ed at University by male colleagues as "bottom power". Before that, she is told she does not need education, "because she is a woman". Later, she needs her husband's permission for thousands of daily things.

The author may think differently. That does not give him the right to deny that male oppression is the daily experience of millions and millions of women. We have the scars on our bodies which prove it. The laws prove it also. The customs prove it. And what about non-socialist

women who are bullied and beaten into submission and are unable to free themselves (due to laws and customs) other - wise than by acquiring economic independence? To such women, wage labour does not mean capitalist exploitation, but independence from cruel and oppressive men.

I wonder how Margaret Thatcher comes in. She was not a candidate of the women. Infact, she was fought by organized women, just like Muzorewa is being fought by organized blacks in Rhodesia. If we do not want to be racists or sexists, we must learn that it is not the sex or the race or the nationality of ^{or} ~~are~~ the class membership of a person that counts, but whose interests ~~(of)~~ he stands for.

The article, "Political Economy of Women's Liberation" is one single smear on women because it discredits the ability of women to think correctly. It even denies women the ability to report on their experience correctly. As long as men will discredit us as soon as we open our mouth and as long as they exploit our biological vulnerability there won't be many women in any public area. It is up to the men to change this. We can only press for laws to protect us. We women, though different from men, are as capable and as intelligent as rational, tenacious and courageous, as any other human being, whether men recognize this or not. We have nothing to change.

The whole issue (Feminists versus Marxists) seems to me a pseudocconflict. It is as wrong, to accuse women for experiencing wage labour not as capitalist exploitation, but as liberation from male oppression, as it is wrong to accuse a poor peasant for being happy when he finds a job so that he can now afford perhaps clothing and medical treatment, which before he could not. Such experiences of gratefulness toward something which objectively is exploitation, should not be blamed on people. They should only be taken into consideration, in order to avoid wrong analysis of the situation.

Feminist groups are all socialist but they also support women in freeing themselves from male oppression who are not socialists. They are not Marxist, because Marx did not apply the consequences of division of labour to the division between men and women, but to the division between men only. But at no point is the continuation of an analysis in this direction restricted, and at many points it is formulated in the outline. Rather than defying feminist movements for being not Marxist, the Marxist analysis should also be applied to the division of labour between men and women, as it has ~~since~~ recently been applied to Neo-colonialism.

If two different methods of approach lead to different results, there is something wrong somewhere. Certainly it is correct that women can very easily be exploited on the basis of biological differences. If Marxists scoff at this, they only prove that they find fault with women where there is none. They should then practice self criticism: they will realize that it is difficult for men in general, to give women credit. This is nothing but a reflection of age-old power distribution between men and women, and not a proof that the feminist analysis is wrong.

The freedom I asked for: freedom to associate with whom I like, to chose the type of relationship I like, to decide myself whether it should include sex or not, to spend my money on what I please, to chose the topic and ways of communication, to decide on my own - life/aims and follow them, (those find important,) to decide what I talk about with whom, to go and come as like and go where I like etc etc etc,. I hope I haven't forgotten enything. Anyway, those are things women are not free to do, but I consider them human rights. Women usually adjust to men and their husbands needs in all those respects.

I have already, before, told him, I wouldn't like to move in with him again. I want to keep my own house, where he would be always welcome of course.

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It is a standing joke in women's groups that as soon as women bring up the topic of their oppression, we ^{are} advised by courageous men that we have been misled to see as oppression what in reality is a privilege (to be confined to menial and trivial ~~xxx~~ activities) - not to have to earn money, whereas ~~why~~ comrades, we are told that we neglect the main contradiction, which is not the contradiction between men and women, but class contradiction.

I have often found that men have difficulty ⁱⁿ understanding the depth of our daily humiliation (of course, because in an oppressive society men are naturally always involved in it, irrespective of their intentions), and therefore ^{they} cannot appreciate why women's groups take the direction they have taken so far. It is therefore necessary to outline the essential features of women's existence.

- (1) The most pervasive experience for women is the fact that we are not masters of our lives. Our own will and own ambitions do not count. In Nigeria, many girls must earn money early, to help finance their brothers' education. They may be coerced into marriage because of the material benefits for the parents. In marriage, we are expected to support our husbands' life-aims, ~~at~~ the cost of our own. In frequent discussions I have noticed that men are almost totally oblivious of the fact that women have life aims different from these men's aspirations. Rather, any refusal to support the men, is perceived as "misbehaviour"

and sanctioned. Women ~~make~~ therefore ^{have} the experience that they get punished for anything they mistake on their own. In fact, their value is only exclusively measured ~~is~~ by the children ~~they bears~~ and the labour ~~they provides~~ for their husbands.

Consequently, women are perceived as passive, dependent, airmed, and unambitious, whereas our own experience is to be forced against our will, being kept dependent, and to live in fear of beatings and other sanctions like ridicule, reprimand and, not the least, rejection.

2. The strongest social motive is doubtlessly the sexual motive. Consequently, the sanctions against women's own will are most severe where it concerns sexual activity. While men are made to feel proud of their sexual activity, women are made to feel ashamed of ~~it~~ ^{theirs}. Men boast ~~with~~ of sexual conquests, women hide theirs. Men are called big guys or play boys for being sexually active, women immoral or wayward. A man who is unfortunate with first experiences, will be advised to practice ^s more; a woman (usually referred to as "girl") would be cautioned, and advised that women are made so that they have to protect themselves emotionally by staying away from men, otherwise they will get hurt. But the sanctions become concrete when sexual activity results in pregnancy, which is of course nothing but the natural consequence of sexual activity quite independent of marriage. Women get beaten for being pregnant, sacked from their institutions of learning (and this often even when they are married), they may be sacked from jobs, but certainly they forfeit their pay alwing maternity leave, and they are socially ostracised, all even when the pregnancy is the result of rape, which is much more often the case ^{than is} as usually considered (I have a case in mind, where a fifteen year old girl was preganated by her mother's first cousin, a man in his forties. Certainly,

the girl

she can't forbid him the house; she also can't fight him off not only because of strength, but because of authority. She was severely beaten and sacked from school. She wrote me in a letter: "God alone knows that I did nothing wrong". It certainly should not be she who should have to defend herself, but such instances are rather the rule than the exception). The crudest means of curbing sexual activity is of course the removal of the clitoris. It has long been shown that the vaginal orgasm as postulated by Freud, is a myth; rather, orgasm can be elicited by clitoral stimulation alone, and is impossible without involvement (tactual stimulation) of the clitoris (either through direct manual stimulation or as a byproduct of intercourse). Women themselves are often not sure of their physical functions as they are typically rather used than being ^{mistresses} masters of their experiences. They may therefore rather learn how to please men sexually (including simulation of orgasm) than learn how best to enjoy their own bodies.

Another very ^{ru} crude means to curb sexual activity, is restriction of movement which is common in all of Nigeria (sanctions against going out alone in the evenings, to go out for relaxation and such). But ^{this is} carried to the extreme in the practice of purdah.

The function of such practices is obviously to ensure ownership of children, as shown in the greater freedom for women who have passed childbearing age (but may still be sexually active). Or think to what extent the value of women is measured by her ability to bear children.

(3) Not recognized by men is the extent to which restrictions against women are enforced by sheer violence and physical intimidation. Although a married woman can practically be as much beaten and raped by her husband as by other men (or even more so) rape is legally not possible in marriage, and beating generally not disapproved of.

This makes it neither less painful, nor less humiliating, nor less powerful in forcing somebody into submission; rather, the lack of legal and practical recognition of such human rights violations act practically as approval of such crude methods of oppression. It is similar with the enforcement of restriction of movement: It is not the attacks women suffer when they go out alone which are being condemned, but the fact that a woman goes out. Such intimidations are so much part of a socially approved of behaviour pattern, that only women realise that the obscene remarks and molestations are not in order, or even that they are intimidating at all.

(4) Men usually do not realize that conscious to many is great! rather, women are considered naturally dependent in character for desperately wanting to be married. However, women face endless victimisations, molestations, social ostracism and outright punishments (e.g. maternity leave without pay) as long as they are not married. The saying; "A married woman is much respected" is a mere euphemism for the fact that unmarried women's personal rights are not honoured.

(5) The restriction of women to domestic and trivial tasks can best be understood in its function within this system of restrictions. A functional analysis (What can't I do, as long as I look after children? How does the fact that I cook and keep house for my family affect the relationship between my husband and me? What are the economic consequences for me? for husband? for the family? for the society?). A functional analysis is also most faithful with respect to patterns of behaviour towards single women (Be it single = unmarried; or single = walking alone somewhere). Then it will be possible to learn to understand how its restrictive function could lead to an (informal) legitimization of intimidating, victimising and attacking single women; and further, explanation in terms of "men are like this", "it is women's nature" can be neutralized.

From these it will become ~~more~~ ^{er} clear that the concentration of women's groups on sexual problems and relationship to boyfriends and husbands is a necessary ~~step~~. Till now, a woman's interests are more determined by the relationship to her boyfriend or husband than by the conditions of the society in which she lives. While this can be ~~temporarily~~ ^{temporarily} overcome in revolutionary situations, it is necessary to encourage women to continuously exchange and reflect ^{on} their specifically female experiences in order to overcome ¹ this last and deepest division between humans permanently.

An economic analysis has been avoided in this essay on purpose as this, in order to be correct, must be based on the women's experiences themselves as collected in these groups. It should not be difficult to get the process of self-evaluation going by taking up the legal restrictions for women which are by an overwhelming majority of women considered unjust. As the link between the specific oppression of women and economic motives e.g. interest in legislation and analysis of economic interest are fairly direct, the women's movement must be understood as a very powerful lever to political awareness for women in a non-revolutionary situation.

Political awareness which ^s ~~is~~ based on an analysis of the personal situation will be further a guarantee that the women's participation in the class struggle will not merely be exploited in male power interest but will lead to a new society where power motives will finally be replaced by human needs.