Anatomy of Female Power review

I’ve just finished a fantastic, yet not well-known, book about male/female issues called “The Anatomy of Female Power”. The author is the Nigerian philosopher and social critic Chinweizu Ibekwe. The book is available for download here.

Quite generally, the book is a rather detailed analysis of how human civilization has fundamentally always been matriarchal, even though it has worn a patriarchal mask. That is: while men appeared to be the rulers, women, in fact, ruled the rulers, and thereby indirectly the whole civilization. While his general thesis is provactive and well-argued (and rather reminiscent of Esther Vilar’s “The Manipulated Man“, albeit more systematic in nature), my main interest here is to explain Chinweizu’s view of the current situation — one which I find original and incisive, particularly as it encompasses the author’s experiences in the diverse landscapes of North America, Europe, and Africa.

Taken against the background that he sees as the basic underlying matriarchalism of human society, Chinweizu sees feminism as the revolt of a few women not against patriarchy, but as against the matriarchalist order which underlies the patriarchal mask — a “revolt in paradise”. He explains this by noting that, in power terms, there are essentially three types of women:

 Matriarchists — women who believe men should serve women, and the most effective way to do this is for men to think they are “in charge” while actually submitting to female control

 Tomboys — women who wish they were men

 Termagants — women who insist on showing openly that they are “in charge”, and who take pleasure in openly bossing around and harassing men

Chinweizu stipulates that all three types have always existed, but that matriarchists have always been the vast majority of women. He describes feminism as “a movement of bored matriarchists, frustrated tomboys and natural termagants”, noting that “each of these types has its reasons for being discontent in the matriarchist paradise that is woman’s traditional world”. He describes second wave feminism as follows:

 Bored martiarchists (like Betty Friedan) and frustrated tomboys (like Simone de Beauvoir) kicked it off;

 Termagants (like Andrea Dworkin) made a public nuisance of it;

 Satisfied matriarchists (like Phyllis Schlafly) oppose it;

 Non-militant tomboys (the female yuppies) have quietly profited from it.

He explains that what he calls “Friedanite feminism” began out of boredom and a hope for something more satisfying than suburban housewifery, but was quickly joined by frustrated tomboys and termagants. Under the unified front of feminism, militant tomboys vent their frustration at not being men by expressing anger and outrage at “male privilege” and “male power”, while the non-militant tomboy is glad for an atmosphere in which she can pursue male roles with less resistance than in the past — “she goes into previously all-male fields, and still uses to full advantage the skills and weapons of female power.”

And as for termagants, Chinweizu analyzes them as follows:

 The termagant (the shrew, scold and harridan of old) is a misandrous sadist whose greatest pleasures come from man-baiting and man-bashing. She resents the matriarchist code which would have her pretend that she is not boss to her man. Under the banner of feminism, she can truly blossom. … The termagant claims for herself absolute freedom of conduct, and would punish any reaction, however natural, she provokes from men. She is the type of woman who would wear a miniskirt without panties, a see-through blouse without bra, and swings her legs and wiggles her arse as she parades up and down the street, and yet insist that no man should get excited by her provocative sexual display. Any man who whistles at the sight is berated for male chauvinism. … Under the guise of “radical feminism”, some termagants, in their utter misandry, have retreated into lesbian ghettos, and from there attack, as traitors to womankind, those other women who are heterosexual, and who do not totally refrain from social and sexual intercourse with men. Under the banner of feminsm, all this is treated as legitimate human behavior.

Chinweizu notes that the matriarchsists saw feminism as the ruse that it was, and had no interest in surrendering the traditional bases of female power. Therefore, he sees the support of most women for feminism extending only so far as feminism did not dislodge traditional female privileges and powers. In other words, women are sympathetic to a system which adds to female power and privilege, so long as it does not dislodge or upset the existing power and privilege. He claims, for example, that this is why many matriarchist women organized to defeat the ERA — a constitutional amendment that was supported by feminists, but which could have undermined traditional female privileges in many areas (such as the draft). So his analysis of feminism is that women in general supported the aspects of it that resulted in net gains for women (educational and economic opportunities, greater sexual freedom, easy divorce) but insisted that female privileges be retained (“chivalry”, female child custody, male obligation in the form of child support and alimony, etc.). Hence he sees the current system as being an odd mish-mash by which females expanded their power base into the world of men without conceding any of their own power base, ultimately, to men.

That this is the case is obvious from an even cursory look at most marriages today. A man is encouraged to do housework and especially equally share child raising responsibilities — and many men are doing this — but at the end of the day, in the event of divorce, female power over the children is exerted in an absolute, totalitarian way, even in cases where the father was the primary caregiver during the marriage!

What about men?

Chinweizu also breaks men into three groups:

 Machos — almost all men, trained to believe they are strong and in charge, but in reality serving women

 Mushos — “that breed of diffident men who have been bullied, guilt-tripped, ego-bashed and penis twisted into pram pushing, diaper changing, and breast envy.” This is the classic “mangina”.

 Masculinists — the tiny portion of men who are devoted to liberty, and insist on avoiding marriage, which he refers to as “nest slavery”.

Chinweizu describes his brand of masculinism as being based on the view that the world is matriarchal, not pariarchal, and that these imbalances are based on biology (rarer eggs). He says that masculinists would attempt to redirect feminism against matriarchy, rather than against the patriarchal mask it wears. His masculinism supports a kind of equality which requires dismantling of all of the female power bases and sources of privilege — such that women should serve on the front lines in infantry, be subject to the draft, work in dangerous jobs like mining, and generally not have social privileges extended to them (chivalry). His masculinism is steadfastly against marriage (which he sees as slavery for men), against male violence with other men over women, against female violence against men (Jean Harris, Lorena Bobbitt), against a hypersexed society which weakens male resistance to female manipulation and power, against the divorce racket and so on.

He describes his masculinism as being sympathetic to feminism insofar as feminism represents a revolt against matriarchy (as described above). He draws a distinction between “tomboy feminism” (which he describes largely in terms of equal opportunities) and “termagant feminism” (which he describes as the female supremacist or man-hating strain), and believes that useful alliances can be drawn between some tomboy feminists and masculinists, provided the efforts are directed against the old matriarchal order, and not its patriarchal mask.

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Clearly this is a provocative thesis. Many traditionalists will not care for it, I think, due to his emphasis on critiquing the old order, as Vilar did as well. However, to me it has the ring of truth.

I do not believe our society can “go backwards” — at least not until the whole thing collapses around our ears and we enter a kind of “Mad Max” phase. I don’t think we will see the restoration of marriage anytime soon, and as RAMZPAUL points out, almost certainly not on the basis of any democratic process. In light of that , I do think some of the ideas of Chinweizu are useful.

We can, and have, built bridges with some of the “tomboy feminists”. Christina Hoff-Sommers, Kathleen Parker, Dr. Helen and so on –> these are women with whom men can work, and who to our are sympathetic in various ways to our issues while clearly being the beneficiaries of greater opportnuities for women. More importantly, if Chinweizu (and Vilar) are right that the old, traditional order was matriarchal, and subjected men to slavery, why would we want to see it resurrected? Wouldn’t it be better for men to push past both that model and the current “hybrid” version of it (which is probably the worst of all worlds for men) and towards a new model which is more open for men and women alike?

What would that model look like? That’s the subject of another post, and one which I intend to write soon. But for the meantime, I think this fascinating, provocative book is well worth reading for its original take on where we are, how we got here, and where we may want to go from here.

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