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The Discourse of Samora Machel

Samora on the woman question and social emancipation

Maji Maji [Dar es Salaam], no.33, March 1978, p.42-48. [not found in Amélia Souto and António Sopa, *Samora Machel: bibliografia*, 1970-1986 (Maputo: Centro de Estudos Africanos, 1996)]

This speech is apparently considered to be one of the classic texts in Machel's considerable discourse. It was delivered to the first OMM conference in March 1973, and was published as a pamphlet, anthologised, translated and reprinted over and over again (see references printed in Souto and Sopa). Even in Tempo it appeared on at least two occasions. Here it is published in the progressive student journal at the University of Dar es Salaam, with no apparatus.

Dr. Colin Darch 72 Milner Road Rondebosch 7700 Tel.686-3691 THE WOMAN QUESTION

AND SOCIAL EMANCIPATION

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SAMORA ON THE WOMAN QUESTION AND SOCIAL EMANCIPATION

Editorial Note

In issue No. 32 of this Journal we published an article "A LAMENT OF BEING A WOMAN". In this issue we bring to comrade readers and particularly the Women comrades in the struggle for social emancipation come fundamental Questions on the Woman Question raised by the Great Combantant and Militant for the oppressed Peoples of Africa.

The Need for Emancipation

The emancipation of women is not an act of charity, the result of a humanitarian or compassionate attitude. The liberation of women is fundamental necessity for the Revolution, the guarantee of its continuity and the precondition for its victory. The main objective of the Revolution is to destroy the system of exploitation and build a new society which releases the potentialities of human beings, reconciling them with labour and with nature. This is the contex within which the question of women's emancipation arises.

Generally speaking, women are the most oppressed, humiliated and exploited beings in society. A woman is even exploited by a man who is himself exploited, beaten by the man who is lacerated by the palmatoria, humiliated by the man who is crushed under the boot of the boss and the settler.

How can the Revolution triumph without the liberation of women?
Will it be possible to get rid of the system of exploitation while keeping one part of society exploited? One cannot only partially wipe out exploitation and oppression, one cannot tear up only half the weeds without even stronger ones spreading out from the half that has survived.

How then can one make a revolution without mobilising women? If more than half the exploited and oppressed people consist of women, how can they be left on the fringe of the struggle? To make a revolution it is necessary to mobilise all the exploited and oppressed, and consequently women as well. If it is to be victorious, the Revolution must eliminate the whole system of exploitation and oppression, liberating all the exploited and the oppressed. Therefore it must eliminate the exploitation and oppression of women, it is forced to liberate women.

Moreover, if we also consider the basic need for the revolution to continued by the new generation, how can we ensure the revolutionary education of the generation which will carry on our work if mothers, the first educators, are marginal to the revolutionary process? How can one turn the homes of the exploited and the oppressed into cells of revolutionary struggle, centres for the diffusion of our line, encouraging the involvement of the family, if women remain apathetic to this process, indifferent to the society which is being build and deaf to the call of people?

To say that women do not feel the need to liberate themselves, or that it is after FRELIMO, and not the women, which uphold women's emancipation is a paltry argument which cannot stand up to analysis. Women feel their subjection, they feel the need to change their situation. What happens is that the domination imposed by society, by stifling their initiative, often prevents them from expressing their aspirations, often prevents them from thinking of how to wage their struggle. It is here that

FRELIMO intervenes. As the conscious vanguard of the women and men of Mozambique, of the oppressed people, FRELIMO formulates the line and indicates the methods of struggle.

It is assential that we understand this phenomenon so as to avoid false and futile debates.

What is the Basis of the Womens Oppression?

The System of Exploitation as the Basis of Women's Oppression

To speak of the omancipation of women clearly implies that they are oppressed and exploited. It is important to understand the basis of that oppression and exploitation.

Let us begin by saying that the oppression of women is the result of their exploitation; oppression in society is always the result of imposed exploitation. Colonialism did not come to occupy our country for the purpose of arresting us, flogging us and beating us with the palmatoria. It invaded and occupied our country for the purpose of exploiting our wealth and labour. In order to exploit us, in order to quell our resistance to exploitation and prevent us from rebelling against it, it then introduced the system of oppression; physical oppression, through the courts, the police, the armed forces, imprisonment, torture and massacres; and spiritual oppression, through obscurantism, superstition and ignorance designed to destry the spirit of creative initiative, to kill the sense of justice and criticism, to reduce the individual to passivity and make him accept his exploited and oppressed state as a normal thing. Humiliation and contempt came into being in the process, since he who exploits and oppresses tends to humiliate and despise his victims, regarding them as inherently inferior beings. And then racism appears, the supreme form of humiliation and contempt.

The mechanism of women's alienation is identical to the mechanism of the alienation of the colonised man in colonial society, or of the worker in capitalist society.

From the moment when early man started to produce more than he consumed, the material foundations were laid for the emergence of a stratum in society which would appropriate the fruits of the majority's labour. This appropriation of the product of the masses' labour by a handful of people in society is the essence of the system of the exploitation of man by man and the crux of the antagonistic contradiction which has divided society for centuries.

As soon as the process of exploitation was unleashed, women as a whole-- like men - were subjected to the domination of the privileged strata. Women are also producers, and workers, but with specific characteristics. To possess women is to possess workers, unpaid workers whose entire labour power can be appropriated without resistance by the husband, who is the lerd and master. In an agrarian economy, marrying many women is a sure way of accumulationg a great deal of wealth. The husband is assured of free labour which neither complains nor rebels against exploitation.

Hence the important role played by polygamy in the rural areas of a primitive agrarian economy. Society, realising that women are a source of wealth, demands that a price be paid for them. The girl's parents demand from their future son-in-law the payment of a bride-price - lobolo - before giving up their daughter. The women is bought and inherited just like material goods, or any source of wealth.

But what is more important is that compared with, say, the slave, who is also a source of wealth and an unpaid worker, the woman offers her owner two added advantages. She is a source of pleasure and above all, she produces other workers, she produces new sources of wealth.

This last aspect is particularly sighificant. Society grants the husband the right to repudiate his wife and demand the re-payment of the lobelo should she prove barren, or if the husband thinks that she is.

It was also be noted that in many societies, mindful of the value of the labour power of the woman's children, the principle is established that the children belong to the mother's clan or family. In our society, it is also current practice for the children to continue to belong to the mother's family, especially if the husband has not paid the entire lobolo that is, the purchase price for this wealth. This situation has led to the excessive emphasis on women's fertility and the transformation of the woman relationship into the mere act of procreation.

But a particular situation emerged. Owing to his control over the masses, the exploiter acquired vast riches, vast estates, large herds of cattle, gold and jewels and so on. Yet despite his wealth he was still mortal, like other men. The problem then of the fate of his wealth—in other words, the question of inheritance—became crucial. Women are the producers of heirs.

It is therefore clear that the exploitation of women and their consequent oppression starts in the system of private ownership of the means of production, in the system of exploitation of man by man.

The Ideological and cultural Mechanisms of the Domination of Women.

A society based on private ownership of the means of production, on the exploitation of men, creates and imposes the ideology and culture which uphold its values and ensure its survival. The economic exploitation of women, their transformation into mere producers with no rights, at the service of their owners - whether husbands or fathers - requires the establishment of a corresponding ideology and culture, together with an educational system to pass them on. Obviously, this is not something which happens all once, but a process developed and refined over thousands of years of the society's existence.

Obscurantism is the beginning of the process. The general principle is to keep women in ignorance or give them only an essential minimum of education. Every where we find that illiteracy is higher among women, they are always a minority in schools, colleges and universities, even though they are the majority of the population.

Science has always been kept as man's monopoly, his exclusive domain, in the developed vivilisations of the past as in capitalist society today. To keep women away from science is to prevent them from discovering that society is created as a function of certain specific interests and that it is therefore possible to change society.

Obscurantism and ignorance go hand in hand with superstition and give fise to passivity.

All superstitions and religions find their most fertile soil among women, because they are submerged in the greatest ignorance and abscurantism. In our society, rites and ceremonies are the main vehicle for the transmission of society's concept of women's inferiority, and their subservience to men. It is here too that countless myths and superstitions are propagated with the express intention of destroy ng women's sense of initiative and reducing them to passivity.

Family education itself emphasises and reinforces this. From infancy the girl is brought up differently from the boy and a feeling of inferiority instilled in her.

Nor of this is surprising. As we have said, exploitative society promotes the ideology, culture and education that serves its interests. It does so with women, just as it does with colonised people and with workers in capitalist society. All are deliberately kept in ignorance, obscurantism and superstition with a view to making them resigned to their position, of instilling in them an attitude of passivity and servitity.

This is where racism comes in. The colonised man is called a second class human being by virtue of his skin. The woman is called an inferior human being by virtue of her sex. In capitalist countries in Europe, they claim that women are creatures with long hair and short ideas.

The process of alienation reaches its peak when the exploited person, reduced to total passivity, is no longer capable of imagining that the possibility of liberation exists and in turn becomes a tool for the propagation of the ideology of resignation and passivity. It must be recognised that the centuries old subjugation of women has to a great extent reduced them to a passive state, which prevents them from even understanding their condition.

The Nature of the Antagonism

It is important to understand correctly the nature of the contradiction or contradictions involved, for only after understanding them will we be in a position to define the target of our attack and plan the appropriate strategy and tactics for our struggle.

We have seen that the basis of the domination of women lies in the system of economic organisation of society, private ownership of the means of production, which necessarily leads to the exploitation of man by man.

This means that, apart from the specific features of their situation the contradiction between women and the social order is in essence a contradiction between women and the exploitation of man by man, between women and the private ownership of the means of production. In other words, it is the same as the contradiction between the working masses and the exploitive social order.

Let us be clear on this point. The antagonistic contradiction is not between women and men, but between women and the social order, between all exploited people, both women and men, and the social order. The fact that they are exploited explains why they are not involved in all planning and decision-making tasks in society, why they are excluded from working out the concepts which govern economic, social, cultural and political life, even when their interests are directly affected.

This is the main feature of the contradiction: their exclusion from the sphere of decision-making in society. This contradiction can only be solved by revolution, society on new foundations, freeing the initiative of women, integrating them in society as responsible members and involving them in decision-making.

Therefore, just as there can be no revolution without the liberation of women, the struggle for women's emancipation cannot succeed without the victory of the revolution.

It should be pointed out that the ideological and cultural precepts of the exploitative society which maintain the subjugation of women are destroyed by the advance of the ideological and cultural revolution which introduces into society new values, a new content to education and culture.

But apart from the antagonistic contradiction between women and the social order, other contradictions of a secondary nature also arise between women and men as a kind of reflex.

The marriage system, marital authority based solely on sex, the frequent brutality of the husband and his consistent refusal to treat his wife as an equal, are sources of friction and contradiction. If they are not correctly solved, these secondary contradictions may become more acute and produce such scrious consequences as divorce.

But however serious they may be, these factors do not alter the nature of the contradiction.

It is important to stress this aspect, because we now see an ideological offensive taking place particularly in the capitalist world, in the guise of a women's liberation struggle. The aim is to transform the contradiction with men into an antagonistic one, thereby dividing exploited men and women to prevent them from fighting the exploitative society. In fact, leaving aside the demagoguery which hides its true

nature, this ideological offensive is an offensive by empitalism to confuse women, to divert their attention from the real target.

We see small manifestations of this offensive appearing among us. Here and there we hear woman grumbling about men, as if the cause of their exploitation lay in the difference between the sexes, as if men were sadistic monsters who derive pleasure from the oppression of women.

Men and women are products and victims of the exploitative society which has created and formed them. It is essentially against this society that men and women should fight united. Our practical experience has proved that the progress achieved in the liberation of women is the result of the successes gained in our common struggle against colonialism and imperialism, against the exploitation of man by man, and the build a new society.

The Way Out

The Main Lines of Action.

The fight for women's emancipation demands, as a first step, the clarification of our ideas. Such clarification is all the more imperative in that there is a profusion of erroneous ideas about the emancipation of women.

There are those who see emancipation as mechanical equality between men and women. This vulgar concept is often seen among us. Here emancipation means that women and men do exactly the same tasks, mechanically dividing their household duties. 'If I wash the dishes today you must wash them tomorrow, whether or not you are busy or have the time.' If there are still no women truck drivers or tractor drivers in FRELIMO, we must have some right away regardless of the objective and subjective conditions. As we can see from the example of capitalist countries, this mechanically conceived emancipation leads to complaints and attitudes which utterly distort the meaning of women's emancipation. An emancipated woman is one who drinks, smokes, wears trousers and minimals. who indulges in sexual promiscuity, who refuses to have children, etc.

Others associated emancipation with the accumulation of diplomas, and particularly university degrees, which are regarded as certificates of emancipation.

Yet others think that emancipation consists of achieving a certain economic, social and cultural level.

All these are arroneous and superficial concepts. Not one of them either gets to the heart of the contradiction or suggests a line that will really emancipate women.

Emancipation requires action on several essential levels.

First of all, a political line of action must be laid down. For women to emancipate themselves there must be conscious political commitment. What does this mean in practical terms?

It means, firstly, that the line must be laid down by a revolutionary political organisation which, defending the interests of the exploited masses as a whole, leads them in the fight against the old society. Only such an organisation is in position to formulate a global strategy for the fight for liberation. In our case, what this means in concrete terms is that in order to liberate themselves, women must internalise FRELIMO's political line and live by it in a creative way. Otherwise they will throw themselves into sterile and secondary battles which will exhaust them uselessly and to no effect.

To internalise and live by our line requires involvement in the tasks laid down by the organisation. Just as a plant needs to strike roots in the ground in order to grow, so does the political line take root in revolutionary practice. Revolutionary practice destroys the exploitative society, unleashes the internal struggle, demolishes our erroneous ideas and releases our critical sense and creative initiatives.

In this context women must be mobilised for internal struggle and for mass struggle, and they must be organised. They will then be able to internalise the political line to start the offensive. They must be involved in the battle for the political education of the next generation and in the battle for the large-scale mobilisation and organisation of the masses. Their commitment to the liberation struggle will then become concrete action, leading them to take part in making decisions affecting the country's future.

There also arises the need to engage in production.

Releasing the productive forces and launching the process of economic development will lead to deeper ideological understanding and a sounder knowledge of reality, of society and nature.

A third aspect is scientitific and cultural education. A scientific and cultural grounding enables women to achieve a correct understanding of their relationship with nature and society, thus destrictly the myths fostered by obscurantism which oppress them psychologically and deprive them of initiative.

In this way, women will gradually attain all levels of planning, decision-making and implementation in organising the affairs of children; hospitals, schools, factories, the armed forces, diplomacy, art, science, culture and so on.

It should also be emphasised here that all these needs do not apply solely to women, because men are also alienated, though in different ways.

The last aspect is that of the relationship between men and women, that is, the new revolutionary concept of the couple and the home. We can already see clearly what this relationship should not be. Until now it has been based on the alleged superiority of man over woman, aimed at satisfying the male ego.

We must state here - and this is somethin; new in society - that the family relationship, the man-woman relationship should be founded exclusively on love. We do not mean the banal, romantic concept of love which amounts to little more than emotional excitement and an idealised view of life.

For us, love can only exist between free and equal people who have the same ideals and commitment in serving the masses and the revolution. This is the basis upon which the moral and emotional affinity which constitutes love is built. We need to discover this new dimension, hitherto unknown in our country.

Concluding Remarks

Millions of Mozambican women, who for centuries have been opposed are anxiously and hopefully waiting the dawn of freedom which will be born here. The Mozambican people, the Mozambican revolution, need to commitment, your struggle. You have a decisive weapon in your hand which is FRELIMO's political line on the emancipation of women, we must once more underline the most important aspects of our thought.

The exploitation of women is an aspect of the general system of exploitation of man by man. This exploitation creates the conditions for the alienation of women; it reduces them to passivity and excludes them from the sphere of decision-making in society. The antagonistic contradictions which thus exist, are between women and the exploitative social order. Those contradictions are between all the exploited masses in our country and in the world, and the exploiting classes. Only revolution can definitively resolve this contradiction, because it alone is the incarnation of the interests of the exploited masses; it mobilises. organises and united them for the struggle; it alone can a ythe old social order. Revolution puts the exploited masses in power, the masses who lived under oppression and were forced into passivity.

Our people's armed struggle against colonialism and imperialism is the fundamental starting point for the Mozambican revulution; the moment of the unleashing of the process of liberation of our land, women and men. The armed struggle which is gaining in popularity in our country acts like an incubator in which the revolutionary process starts to take root.

The centuries—old experience of exploitation and suffering of the women and men of Mozambique and the discovery of the freedom born of people's power in the areas under our control, have made our people receptive to ideas of progress and revolution. The conditions are ripe for an offensive on the women's liberation front, an important moment in the revolutionary struggle.