

Women in development in Africa

A perspective on female oppression in Africa

by
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The annual African cultural events begin this afternoon in the Marshall D'Avery Hall Auditorium with a two-session seminar on women in Africa.

The theme of the first session is "Women and Development" (in Africa), and the guest speaker is Ms. O. Rogo-Manduli from Halifax and N. Lubanga. The session will be chaired by Bothi Sekgororoane from UNB. "Women and Health Development", the guest speaker being N. Lubanga from the Columbia University.

Second session - Roy. This session will be followed immediately by a short film titled "You hit the woman you hit a rock" and a panel discussion on women and literature, politics, education, health and the economy in Africa. Speakers will include Professor Tony Boxill, Professor Brown, Gertrude Edem, Professor Dexter Noel, Professor Sears, N. Lubanga, and O. Rogo-Manduli.

The grand finale of the events will take place tomorrow evening at the Student Union Building cafeteria. The cultural festival will commence with superb cuisine after which the guests will be entertained with music, dance, fashion show and assorted cultural displays. Africa being a multicultural society, the night promises a variety of shows from the component countries.

The climax of the event will be a cultural drama/dance by the UMZA-BALAZO, a South African cultural group based in Halifax.

The theme of this year's event "celebrating the African woman" seems to be very attractive and interesting. Attractive because of the prevailing women liberation struggle and, interesting because of the clarification of the "Women Question" at the present stage of Africa's political-economic development is very important and quite decisive. The invited speakers will no doubt try to present a position on the "position of women" in Africa, and the role the African woman is destined to play in the socio-political-economic development of the raped continent.

While I must admit that I am not in any way qualified to be the mouthpiece of the African women, the following has been observed.

The African woman has always been considered to be a subject of brutal subjugation and/or exploitation. However this assertion has always been refuted on the basis that the position of "women in Africa" and perhaps elsewhere is a result of the natural division of labour based on sex. While this view may not be tenable in this technological age, it had some validity in pre-colonial Africa. Even now, modern technology still remains a dream in sub-saharan Africa and those activities considered exploi-

tative or 'humiliating' are probably the consequences of division of labour. Hence, to a large extent, the African woman is neither oppressed nor exploited as conceived by the external world. In fact, African women who toil in the villages where allegedly oppressions or exploitations are considered paramount, seem to concur with Engels that "the division of labour was a pure and simple outgrowth of nature: it existed only between sexes. The man went to war, hunted, fish, provided the raw materials for food and the tools necessary for these pursuits. The women cared for the house and prepared food and clothing. They cooked, weaved, sewed. Each was master of his or her own field of activity." Such is the situation in most African countries where more than sixty percent of the population depends on subsistence farming.

In fact, it is a diversionary issue at this stage of Africa's development to assert that the women are exploited or subjugated by the men! While no doubt a few 'Westernized African Women' are pushing for equality in order to solve their psycho-social problems, the majority of African mothers and sisters together with their husbands and brothers move in unison to fight the real problems - the day-to-day exploitations of the continent in human and natural resources, the reckless pollution of the environment by the multi-national companies, the division of tribes through artificial boundaries, and all forms of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism. In these struggles the African women has contributed immensely.

It is a fact though that the African women has always been playing the dual role of a mother and at the same time a soldier-in-arm. But she has never considered herself exploited for she clearly recognizes the danger in seeking a cure for ringworms while being ravaged by leprosy. She sees the problems for the true perspectives - that of being exploited by the economic system and probably the ruling class. She does not belong to an underprivileged class because she is a woman. Her problem is identical to that of a man and the solution she realizes lies in the formulation of a viable political-economic system compatible with the Africans way of life and, the freedom of Africans to determine their destiny just like the people of Europe and America. Rarely has she considered her husband the exploiter or subjugator.

The African woman regards herself as neither a slave nor a chattel. While she respects and cares for her husband, she has never felt inferior, intimidated, or mentally incarcerated. Hence she seeks not a feeble equality and liberation which could be a license to shamelessness in her society. She does not seek to live quite apart from her man, seeking emotional, sexual and domestic satisfaction from other women, even if through ignorance and myopia this is interpreted as "selling her soul down the river of male chauvinism and oppression." A woman in Africa religiously believes and reposes unparalleled confidence in the power of the family. She believes that the family is capable of solving all domestic problems. The leadership of the family of course is based on wisdom, not necessarily on material wealth, age, or gender. In fact women are the leaders in some African clans - why not?

Finally the African woman should not be seen as a mere mother and lover. She espouses female suffrage, support woman's right to work and to be well paid. She is the architect of moral and spiritual development. She has her personal rights, which include the right to own personal property. Her dual role in production she gladly accepts without considering it a double oppression. Provided her man does not drink palm-wine

under the Iroko tree while she toils (a low probability event), she smiles her way through life's forests and deserts. She believes more in today than tomorrow - after all today gives birth to tomorrow and, tomorrow may never come.

All are invited to the seminar. Valuable contributions in the form of comments and questions would be appreciated. And for the cultural night tomorrow evening, there is 'plenty in the pipeline.' This year's event will positively be different and one in town!

Don't Miss
Africa Night '91

Saturday, February 2nd, 1991
SUB Cafeteria.
7:30 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.

Seminar Theme:

The role of African Women in Development

All sessions will be held in the Marshall d'Avray Hall Auditorium, UNB

Women and General Development Issues

Guest Speaker: Ms. O. Rogo-Manduli (Public Affairs)

1:15 p.m.

Women and Health Issues

Guest Speakers: N. Lubanga

2:00 p.m.

Women and Political Issues

Guest Speaker: Prof. C. Ragaven

3:15 p.m.

Panel Discussion

Chairperson: Gisele Seck

4:30 p.m.

