

**CHINWEIZU, I. (1990). ANATOMY OF FEMALE
POWER: A MASCULINIST DISSECTION OF
MATRIARCHY. LAGOS, NIGERIA: PERO PRESS**

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Chinweizu (born Chinweizu Ibekwe) is a Nigerian critic, poet and journalist. His education began at the *Government Secondary School* (in Afikpo, Nigeria). He subsequently studied in the United States at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and SUNY (Buffalo). While studying in the US, Chinweizu was influenced by the black philosophical and artistic movement, and still continues to be associated with black Orientalism. His books, essays and newspaper articles have been published in Africa, Europe and North America. Some examples of his most popular and controversial works are: *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators, Black Slavers, and the African Elite* (1975), *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (1983), and *Anatomy of Female Power: A Masculinist Dissection of Matriarchy* (1990).

Chinweizu's book *Anatomy of Female Power: A Masculinist Dissection of Matriarchy* (1990) begins – right on the cover - with a statement that makes its clear intention: “for all men who have been confused, misused and abused by women, particularly since the coming of feminism; and definitely not for women”. The book itself is presented as a challenge to feminism, announcing that women have always ruled over men and that this is the time to give men the tools to subvert this reality in order to move towards gender equality.

To successfully achieve his goal, the author structures his thoughts into three parts preceded by an epigraph titled “Who governs who - man or woman?”, where Chinweizu states that the male empowerment theory circulating in society is nothing but a propaganda strategy built by feminism and naturally accepted by both men and women. However, in the author's opinion it is women who dominate men, and it is necessary to examine feminine power and the way it operates socially. Thus, the book starts by introducing the features and pillars of female power (part I), to further develop the theories of what the author called the “motherpower” (part II), “bridepower” (part III) and “wifepower” (part IV), ending with a section devoted to matriarchy and its discontents (part V).

Looking at the structure of the book and the goals that motivate the author, it is possible to identify, within the theoretical framework of Cultural Studies, two great epistemological pillars that intersect and communicate: discourses of power and gender relations. In fact, the author seeks to introduce a notion of power (and its position between genders) which, by being different and completely devoid of context within the understanding of Cultural Studies, deserves to be critically imaged, so that readers of this book (particularly men) are not deluded by an opinion that, attacking women, aims to subvert

the possibility of female resistance. Obviously, the purpose of this critical review is not to completely dissect Chinweizu's book, but provide a comprehensive reading that allows a critical interpretation of the main arguments presented by the author.

The problem with the author is right at the outset, in his definition of power as "possession" rather than "exercise", "if the essence of power is the ability to get what what one wants, then women are far from powerless." (Chinweizu, 1990, p.11). In effect, this definition departs from Foucault's conception of power distributed and involved in social fabric relations, which, automatically, proves it to be outdated in the postmodern theoretical context. Power is not what we want or have, but what is exercised and circulates in the beam of organized relations, pyramidal and coordinated (Foucault, 2010). Chinweizu, criticising the actions of feminist movements, states that if female power existed, it would be something possessed by women through public authority, creating what is known as "matriarchy". However, for the author, despite the fact that a completely matriarchal society does not exist, this does not imply that there is no female power. He goes along to say that this power is real and a kind of "power without authority".

Although Chinweizu does recognize that women are not well represented in public and institutional structures, he assumes that there are many other sources of power (education, propaganda, punishment, recognition, etc.) that they possess. This means that in society there is room for both genders and that despite societies apparently seeming to be phallogentric and patriarchal, there is, behind the scenes, a female version of the same societies. It is an unclear hierarchy of power relations between men and women:

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. (Chinweizu, 1990, p. 12).

Chinweizu therefore assures that female power on the male exists and manifests itself in five main pillars: 1) women's control of the womb; 2) women's control of the kitchen; 3) women's control of the cradle; 4) the psychological immaturity of men relative to women; and 5) man's tendency to be deranged by his own excited penis. From amongst these pillars, the author highlights the power of the female womb, because the woman has the exceptional characteristic of giving birth. Chinweizu also shows that these five pillars can be condensed into only three phases: "motherpower", "bridepower" and "wifepower" (as above). Chinweizu still finds room to characterize both genders, attributing strength, confrontation, aggression and control to the male, and calm, passivity, emotion and ability to manipulate to the female. These attributes are mere stereotyped images that are reproduced in society (easily coarsened by the author) and give visibility to male power and attribute inferiority to female power. However, Chinweizu claims that these female characteristics are purposefully used to deceive men, so as to, in a covert and intelligent way, govern them.

For the author, this kind of "hidden matriarchy" is a conscious choice by women, because they would rather not have to deal with the obligations that exposing their power

could bring them. Women prefer positions with little pressure and low risk, leading behind the patriarchal throne: “under this arrangement, a woman has everything to gain and nothing to lose, except little vanities” (Chinweizu, 1990, p. 75). In Chinweizu’s eyes, and subverting Foucault’s theory (Foucault, 2006; 2010), one could (pretentiously) understand this position of women as the “resistance” to male power, although this is a possibility that Judith Butler (2006) and Bourdieu (1990) understand as difficult, being that society is subjected to male order structures. It is within this discussion that Chinweizu poses the question: why do men not resent this situation and impose a real patriarchy? For him, the answer is simple: because this is a façade that feeds the male ego well enough, and, moreover, because women would not allow it.

Contrary to what many theorists (modern, postmodern, structuralist and post-structuralist, feminist and postfeminist) argue, Chinweizu claims that female power exists and operates mainly in marriage¹, but not on a large institutional scale, because there is no need: “female power does not need those elaborate structures of formal authority which have evolved to control the large aggregates of persons required by the specialist activities of the male domain” (Chinweizu, 1990, p.111). Thus, Chinweizu’s (1990) theory proves to be anti-feminist and bold, by trying to move away from the traditional conception of “uncontrollable” female to male submission. However, it is important to read this theory in another way, because despite the author constantly emphasizing that the position of “the power behind the throne” is a conscious position by women, this may just be the only form of “power” that is consented to them.

Although the author’s discourse sometimes ambitions to step towards women’s liberation (evidenced in the awareness of their own condition), his words often emphasize conformity and do not provide for women’s ability to go further in their resistance to models of male power. Under some feminist theories, this can prove to be one of the macho ways of giving a false sense of freedom and power to women. Chinweizu just seems to continue Lacanian symbolism (Lacan, 1981) that consolidates social practices that perpetuate cultural heteronormativity through the Oedipal family structure (phallogocentric). This view departs entirely from the poststructuralist view, which rethinks the whole social power structure based on a queerism of the psyche, of sexual difference, and of gender.

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¹ Marriage and family control are a kind of “nest organization”.

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