

**Notes on the Link Between Oppression of
New Afrikan Women
and the
New Afrikan National Liberation Revolution**

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The Origin and Nature of Women's Oppression**

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If one seeks the social-political ancestor of socialism, one must go to communalism. Socialism has characteristics in common with communalism...In socialism, the principles underlying communalism are given expression in modern circumstances. Thus, whereas communalism in an untechnical society can be laissez faire, in a technical society where sophisticated means of production are at hand, if the underlying principles of communalism are not given centralized and correlated expression, class cleavages arise, which are the result of economic disparities, and accompanying political inequalities. Socialism, therefore, can be and is the defense of the principles of communalism in a modern setting. Socialism is a form of social organization which, guided by the principles underlying communalism, adopts procedures and measures made necessary by demographic and technological developments.

Kwame Nkrumah

Consciencism

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Part One:

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A. Overview-1

(These are sketches from the journal of a New Afrikan Prisoner of War. It's my belief that they reflect the thoughts and efforts of other individuals and organizations that are now re-building the New Afrikan national liberation movement.)

The Link: Practical

1. The New Afrikan national liberation revolution, and the movement to end the oppression of New Afrikan women, are inseparably linked -- to each other, and to the nation's struggle for socialism.

That is: 1) The national liberation movement cannot be effectively generated, and thus will never realize itself, unless the struggle to end the oppression of New Afrikan women becomes a cutting edge of all theoretical and practical activity; 2) New Afrikan women can't be fully emancipated unless and until the national liberation revolution is realized; 3) There can be no genuine emancipation for New Afrikan women, nor can there be realization of New Afrikan national liberation, without the struggle for socialism. The link must be grasped before a leap in consciousness and struggle can occur.

The link can't be grasped by continuing to focus on the effects of women's oppression or national liberation; it must be sought through a focus on causes.

That is, as We search for more accurate ways of conceptualizing and solving women's oppression in all its present manifestations, We must abandon the concepts, values, and goals that rest on amerikkkan, euro-centric, and bourgeois (capitalist) outlooks. We can't end the oppression of women by working and thinking within the framework of capitalist relations, because these very relations underlie the cause of gender and national oppression.

To find the link between women's oppression, national oppression, and the struggle for socialism, We must analyze and re-analyze the past, look for points of origin, and trace the paths of development: "If one seeks the social-political ancestor of socialism, one must go to communalism."

We must go to communalism to seek the ancestor of -- and the resolutions for -- contemporary forms of women's and national oppression.

We must go to communalism to discover its underlying principles, and to get some idea as to how they may be expressed by us under contemporary circumstances. We must analyze communalism to discover how, why, and when these principles were departed from, and to understand the meaning of "demographic and technological developments" within past and present context.

We must go to communalism to seek its origin and motivating factors. Communal societies, like all others, expressed the sum of social connections and relationships in which its members found themselves. These relations were established in the course of their collective material and ideological activity in their struggle to survive and develop.

Communal societies are not characterized by the color or nationality of their members, but by the method of collectively producing and using/distributing the resources needed for survival and development. The relations between people in such societies (i.e., male-female, the presence or absence of dominant-subordinate, or exploitative, relations), depend upon whether this "collective mode" is maintained. If it is not, then "class cleavages arise, which are the result of economic disparities, and accompanying political inequalities."

In short, We must go to communalism and investigate the social reality, and seek out inter-relationships of such things as matriarchal systems of descent, communal (social) ownership of property, and the development of patriarchal systems of descent and private ownership of property; We must seek inter-relationships between the above, and the rise and development of social division of labor, the rise of commodity production and exchange, and the dissolution of clan/family bonds and the rise of exploitative class and state structures.

2. The oppression (and exploitation) of New Afrikan women is rooted in the appearance of social relations on the African continent, which have come to characterize the capitalist-imperialist system.

The specific forms of women's oppression (as women, and as citizens of the nation), can't be eliminated apart from the struggle to abolish capitalist-imperialist relations of production and exchange. New Afrikan women can't become 'collective masters of nature, society, and themselves,' without participating, as "complete persons," in the struggle to build a socialist New Afrika.

The oppression and exploitation of the New Afrikan nation is rooted in the development of the same social relations, and in the rise and development of capitalist-imperialism.

The nation's struggle for (political) liberation is simultaneously a social and economic revolution. The very concept of communalism/socialism embraces social, as well as political and economic aspects.

The nation's struggle for liberation **is** the struggle for women's emancipation **is** the struggle for socialism.

The new society (new social relations) that We struggle to create, begins to take shape as soon as ideo-theoretical struggle occurs, and as soon as practical activity -- in all spheres of life -- begins to occur.

The commitments to women's emancipation, national liberation, and socialist transformation must manifest themselves **now**, in the ways We live every aspect of our lives, each minute of every day.

We can't generate a people's war if We continue to think and act as if all the people are men, and as if all the children are boys.

We can't build a mass movement if We fail to educate and organize on the basis of the particular needs of women, who "hold up half the sky."

We can't shout "Black workers take the lead!" while failing to address ourselves to the particular interests of those workers who are women.

All problems facing the nation and all of its citizens are interrelated and interdependent, and the policies and programs of the new movement must base themselves on this reality. We must address all issues, and then coordinate the many struggles and fronts of war.

Yet, there must be (an) autonomous women's organization(s), mass-based women's leadership and full participation in all levels of struggle, organization, and spheres of life.

The Link: Theoretical

1. Why is it necessary to deal with theory (and practice) related to women's oppression (and to socialism) **during** the course of national liberation struggle?

A) Because We don't want to repeat the practice of other movements where, once in power, they failed to fulfill the promises made to women in the course of struggle -- a failure intimately related to their inability to fulfill other fundamental aims and principles of the socialist society for which they fought.

Without an appropriate theory and practice on women's oppression, there can be no valid and worthy theory and practice on revolutionary national liberation.

B) The lines We draw between "national independence" and "socialist revolution" are essentially abstractions. These lines help us grasp concepts, stages, and periods of struggle and social development.

But, the building of a new society -- a new socialist society -- takes place during the course of the struggle for national independence. We struggle simultaneously to destroy one set of social relations, and to create a new set of social relations...simultaneously, We struggle to overthrow an old, alien society, and to build a new one.

C) And, We need new theories, new concepts, new values and models of behavior.

Part of the old movement's failure was due to the dominance of functionalist, idealist theories which had (and continue to have) many of us believe, for instance, that the contradictions between men and women are caused by biological differences, or by the failure to fulfill "traditional roles" which somehow just fell from the sky (i.e., "head of the house," "providers" and "nurturers" and "kings" and "queens").

These theories led to models of behavior and forms of political practice that were ill-suited to **revolutionary** struggle. To view men as "providers" and women as "nurturers" is unfounded in the reality of our previously independent and **communal** societies, and contrary to the principles of **revolutionary** nationalism.

To take only one element: such a view ignores the "role" that African and New Afrikan women have always fulfilled in providing both productive and reproductive needs for survival and social development. It removes our women from the sphere of socially necessary labor, and consequently removes them from the sphere in which they share full responsibility and power in the society.

The very terms are ill-suited to revolutionary philosophy and practice, since "nurturing" is given a "feminine"/subordinate connotation, and "providing" given a "masculine"/dominant connotation. The very terms are sexist, patriarchal, bourgeois and reactionary.

The practical concepts surrounding the terms "kings" and "queens" are also loaded with sexist-patriarchal connotations, heavily class-based. Particularly, to refer to African and New Afrikan women only as "queens," ignores the **masses** of women who labor, inside and outside the home. This labor (the lives) of these "common" women is in and of itself the basis upon which women used to and should exercise social responsibility and decision-making power in communal societies...the basis upon which she shares and enjoys all rights and privileges in the society on the same footing as all other **persons**.

It's the majority of women that should draw more of the attention of the new movement; it's their "common" labor and day-to-day activity that is the basis of their contribution to the nation's survival and development.

Therefore, theoretical understanding and practical commitment to issues of specific concern to women, are in fact commitment to issues of specific concern to the nation. Theoretical understanding of the past and present experiences of women is essential for the proper conduct of the nation's struggle now, and with regard to its post-independence policies and practice.

B. Overview-2

1. New Afrikan ("black") women are oppressed and exploited on the basis of their gender, and on the basis of their nationality. Most of our attention is focused on the effects of this oppression, but We need to search for causes. Just as We say, "You can't know where you're going, if you don't know where you've been," the attempt to solve the problems of women's oppression and exploitation, without understanding their cause, will be frustrating and largely ineffective, because We'll be chasing shadows.

We need to discover the point of origin, and trace the development of gender oppression, and national oppression particularly as it relates to New Afrikan women. The results of these analyses are essential to the development of theory and programs to combat and eliminate gender and national oppression, and to prevent them from re-emerging in the future.

2. Because We're concerned with uncovering the point of origin of gender oppression, a good place to begin the search would be the point of origin of social units and socio-economic formations on the African continent. Our analyses must cover the specific forms of oppression of women in independent African societies (prior to Arabic and European influence), and they should cover those forms in African and New Afrikan societies after the emergence of capitalism and imperialism.

3. The oppression of African women predates by thousands of years the European colonization of Africa.

These "traditional" forms of women's oppression were given added features and only assumed new, "unnatural" forms as a result of foreign invasions and influences (i.e., Arab-Islamic; European-Christian; the trade in Africans as slaves, and the rise of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism). The old and new forms had common roots. The new forms arose, in a sense, out of the old forms, retained their essential elements, built upon them, and strengthened them.

(At present, my studies indicate that the first social units arose during what i've come to call "rudimentary communalism" and what others call "the transition from animal to human," or "primitive communism." These social units arose on the basis of women's pivotal role in social production, which was the basis for their equality and full participation in all other social relationships. During the rudimentary communalist stage, there was a "natural" division of labor between women and men, adults and children, wherein each essentially contributed according to ability, and received according to need. There was no oppression of women (or any other group), and no exploitation.

(During the early phases of what i've come to call "transitional communalism" and what others call "communalism," the direct relation of all people in the society to the major means of production was essentially maintained. But, as the society developed, there first appeared a simultaneous existence of relations of domination (oppression of women) alongside those of equality. This was a result of the development of productive forces, and the social division of labor that accompanied the domestication of animals, the development of agriculture, and production of surplus and its gradual appropriation by men, on the basis of rising forms of private ownership. The relations of domination (male-female) grew into relations of exploitation (class-class) as the creation of surplus product and greater social division of labor led to appropriation of the surplus first by men, and then by an exploitative class; the communal societies and the clans at their core began to break-up; communal property became private property; products came to be exchanged on a regular basis; and production for exchange became systematic. The oppression of women was the means by which communalism was undermined, and the way paved for the rise of private ownership.)

4. The contemporary forms of New Afrikan women's oppression and exploitation continue to reflect a material base in the common roots that all forms of women's and national oppression share.

C. Cheikh Anta Diop and African Matriarchy

The matriarchal system is the base of the social organization in Egypt and throughout Black Africa... The matriarchal system proper is characterized by the collaboration and harmonious flowering of both sexes, and by a certain preeminence of women in society, due originally to economic conditions..(1)

1. My search for clues to the origin and development of women's oppression began with the reading of Cheikh Anta Diop's The Cultural Unity of Black Africa, and his The African Origin Of Civilization: Myth Or Reality? (2)

A theme of both these works is that a social characteristic common to most African societies (prior to Islamic and Christian influences), is the matriarchal system (the prominent role of women in social production and socio-political life), and the material (communal) conditions which serve as its foundation.

Diop's Cultural Unity shed light on the status of women in rudimentary and early transitional communal societies; African Origin illuminated some of the factors which brought about a change in that status, the disintegration of communal societies, and the rise of what Samir Amin calls "tributary formations (class and state societies). (3)

(The studies and practice that we undertake in this area would have to touch the way the term "matriarchy" acquired such a negative connotation, especially inside the U.S. empire. Evidently, the fact that the empire is patriarchal has a lot to do with it. I also assume that Islam has something to do with it. The frantic counter-revolutionary thrust against the nation in the 1960s, was largely inspired (in the socio-cultural sphere) by Daniel Moynihan's attack upon the New Afrikan family in general, and "matriarchy" in particular. This was an attack that sought to weaken and undermine what were essentially communal characteristics, which contributed to the strength and capacities for resistance. The attack upon "black matriarchy" was an attack upon the spiritual and material foundations of national community. They appealed, in large part, to the bourgeois spirit. It was a contemporary expression of the factors that inspired the initial undermining of the communal societies.)

2. Diop sets out in Cultural Unity to uncover the matriarchal and communal homogeneity "still alive beneath the deceptive appearance of cultural heterogeneity." (4) He cites, for example, the prevalence of matrilineal descent systems in Ghana, Mali (Malinke), among the Pelus, Sereres, Swazi, Tswana, and Bantu. And he asserts that in Africa, "...matriarchy is as alive today as it was during Antiquity. In regions where the matriarchal system has not been altered by external influences (Islam, etc.), it is the woman who transmits political rights." (5)

Diop seeks to point up this unity by examining sociological facts (customs and traditions which reflect the presence of matriarchy), which he says are "motivated," i.e., they didn't fall from the sky. He therefore "tried to start from material conditions in order to explain all the cultural traits common to Africans, from family life as a nation, touching on the ideological superstructures, the successes and failures and technical regressions." (6)

3. But, before he can examine African matriarchy and its material foundations, he must take on the "universal transition" theory. This theory holds that all peoples began social development on the basis of a matrilineal descent system, and evolved toward the adoption of patriarchal/patrilineal systems. The theory believes matriarchy to be inferior to patriarchy. The basis for this alleged inferiority? The theory holds that matriarchy originated during a presumed stage of "sexual promiscuity," during which there were no marriage forms, and descent could, "unfortunately," only be traced through the mother, because the paternity of children allegedly couldn't be determined.

[Another example of the alleged inferiority of matriarchy to patriarchy was the easiness of divorce -- on the initiative of women -- in marriages of matriarchal origin, compared to the "civilized, superior" near-impossible divorce under patriarchy. Diop challenges this with "Facility of separation must not be considered as a revelation of mores which have undergone disintegration, but as an index of the degree of freedom which a society grants to all its members, without distinction of sex." (7)]

Thus, while the proponents of the "universal transition" theory held matriarchy to originate on the basis of "sexual promiscuity," Diop's view is that:

The sacred character of the mother [women] in the societies which are sedentary, agricultural and matriarchal, is ill-suited to the idea of a primitive stage of promiscuous intercourse which they could be said to have passed through. (8)

He believed that the dominant elements in the system of matrilineal descent were peculiar to Africa, and to the material conditions underlying its socio-economic formations. He believed that these systems arose on the basis of "a system of political and social organization, from a sedentary and agricultural way of life." (9) He therefore had to take on the views of Johann Bachofen, Lewis Henry Morgan, and Frederick Engels, each of whom rest their views of the history and role of the family, and the development of successive socio-economic formations, on the "universal transition" theory.

4. Johann Bachofen, one of the earliest proponents of the theory, actually based his view on his interpretation of the Oresteia, written by (they say) Aeschylus. As described by Engels, it was:

...the dramatic representation of the conflict between declining mother right and the new father right that arose and triumphed in the heroic age. For the sake of her paramour, Aegisthus, Clytemnestra slays her husband, Agamemnon, on his return from the Trojan War;

but Orestes, her son by Agamemnon, avenges his father's murder by slaying his mother. For this act he is pursued by the Erinyes (Furies), the demonic guardians of mother right, according to which matricide is the gravest and most inextinguishable crime. But Apollo, who by the voice of his oracle had summoned Orestes to this deed, and Athena, who is called upon to give judgment -- the two deities who here represent the new patriarchal order -- takes Orestes under their protection; Athena hears both sides. The whole matter of the dispute is briefly summed up in the debate which now takes place between Orestes and the Erinyes. Orestes contends that Clytemnestra has committed a double crime: she has slain her husband and thus she has also slain his father. Why should the Erinyes pursue him and not her, seeing that she is by far the more guilty? The answer is striking: "**Unrelated by blood** was she to the man she slew."

The murder of a man not related by blood, even if he be the husband of the murderess, is extinguisable and does not concern the Erinyes. Their office is solely to punish murder between blood relations, and of such murders the most grave and the most inextinguishable, according to mother right, is matricide. Apollo now comes forward in Orestes' defense. Athena calls upon the Areopagites -- the Athenian jurors -- to vote. The votes for Orestes and for his acquittal are equal. Then Athena, as President of the Court, gives her vote for Orestes and acquits him. Father right has triumphed over mother right. The "gods of young descent," as the Erinyes call them, have triumphed over the Erinyes, and the latter then finally allow themselves to be persuaded to take up a new office in the service of the new order. (10)

Now, Diop's interpretation of the Oresteia differs somewhat from that of both Bachofen and Engels, and it rests on a different base. He asserts that Aeschylus used cultural material that was "a reflection of the conscious struggle between the social principles of the North [i.e., patriarchal private ownership in Europe] and the South [i.e., matriarchal collective ownership in Africa]." (11)

In other words, Aeschylus was re-interpreting a political-economic struggle that had taken place between Africa and Europe more than a thousand years before he wrote the Oresteia. For, according to Diop, by 1450 b.c., "we have indeed reached a period of demarcation when the Indo-European world was freeing itself from the domination of the Black Egypto-Phoenician world. This economic and political struggle, similar in all respects to that which colonial countries are now waging against modern imperialism, was supported, as it is today, by a cultural reaction caused by the same reasons...At the outset...[matriarchy] dominated and spread throughout the Aegean Mediterranean thanks to Egypto-Phoenician colonization of populations, sometimes even white populations, but whose inconsistent [patriarchal] culture permitted no positive reaction at the time...In its forms most foreign to the northern mentality, Egypto-Phoenician cultural imperialism hardly survived economic imperialism." (12)

Going on to explain more specifically the distinction between the 'social principles of the North and the South,' Diop says that in the North,

...man was the pillar of that kind of life [nomadic]. Woman's economic role [alienation from the means of production] was much less significant than in Black agricultural societies [where, under communalism, women stood in direct relation to the means of production]. Consequently, the nomadic patriarchal family was the only embryo of social organization. The patriarchal principle would rule the whole life of the Indo-Europeans, from the Greeks and Romans to the Napoleonic Code, to our day. This was why woman's participation in public life [i.e., all activities related to managing the society, especially in contrast to an isolated "domestic" life said by some to be reserved for women], would arrive later in European than in [African] societies. If the opposite seems true today in certain parts of Black Africa, it can be attributed to the Islamic influence." (13)

5. Lewis Henry Morgan's theory of the universal transition and his history of the development of the family, were based heavily upon his misunderstanding of the origin and development of descent systems he encountered among peoples of the Hawaiian Islands and among the Iroquois, and upon his misinterpretation of the terms used within these systems (i.e., that children referred to all women as "mother," and to all men as "father").

While Morgan rested his view of "sexual promiscuity" and "group marriage" on his interpretation of these terms, Diop holds that the descent systems and the terms reflected "purely and simply the social relations of the peoples among whom they are in force," (14) and "reciprocal obligations" of collective ownership. (15)

6. Among the major criticisms Diop levels against Frederick Engels, is the latter's failure to recognize the economic base of the systems and terms studied by Morgan--a base similar to those in African matriarchal societies.

Referring to the Iroquois system as an example, Diop says that "the woman owes her social rank and her esteem exclusively to the structure of the society which allows her to play a leading economic role." (16)

7. Diop has taken great pains to demonstrate that the matriarchal system did not originate on the basis of "promiscuous intercourse." With his help, i've come to understand that:

- a) Up to the stage of transitional communalism, matriarchal social relations characterized most African societies;
- b) These social relations were based upon: 1) relations of production in which women played pivotal roles; 2) these relations were communal, i.e., characterized by collective ownership of the major means of production; 3) these productive relations were the basis for all other social relations (i.e., political, moral, legal,

familial, etc.), and for the equalitarian character of the societies;

- c) These communal socio-economic relations constitute the fundamental distinction between matriarchy and patriarchy;
- d) Any transition to patriarchal forms of socio-economic relations must reflect the absence of collective ownership of the means of production, the decline or absence of major economic roles played by women and, consequently, the decline or absence of major social and political roles for women.

8. But, while Diop emphasizes the role of matriarchy and its material base in the structure of African communal relations, he admits that he doesn't know when or how matriarchy originated -- except that it's somehow related to women's role in the discovery and development/practice of agriculture. (17) And, he believes the practice of agriculture first appeared in the 8th millenium b.c., in the region of the Sahara.

He doesn't give any indication as to how or why women's role in agricultural societies accounts for their status. Also, he doesn't have much to say regarding how and why patriarchy overcomes matriarchy in Africa, and thus how or why African communalism enters the transition to tributary socio-economic formations (i.e., the rise of private property, class formations, embryonic capitalism, and the state).

We now have to turn to some anthropological evidence to help answer some of these questions. We can then return to Diop to get some insight into the factors which inspired the transition from communal to class-based formations.

D. Rudimentary Communalism - 1

It is generally conceded, in most scholarly circles, that mankind originated in Africa. This makes the African man the father and the African woman the mother of mankind.

...The first accomplishment of the African woman, in partnership with the man, was the creation of a functioning family unit. This major step in human development laid the foundation for the organization of all subsequent societies and institutions. (18)

1. Just how did the first family originate? Exactly how and why did the African woman form the partnership with the man? What was the material basis for the first form of family organization, and what were its superstructural elements? What role did the family play in the organization of communal societies?

Of course, these and related questions can't be answered with great degrees of certainty. But the field of anthropology is one, among others, that can lead us in the right directions, and give us something to build on.

2. This section relies almost exclusively upon an article by Boyce Rensberger, "What Made Humans Human?" (19)

Near the beginning of the article, Rensberger poses questions that are related to those above, relative to the origin of matriarchy, the distinguishing characteristics of both matriarchy and patriarchy, and what constitutes the material base of the social relations that allowed the earliest social units to survive and evolve.

Under a subtitle that informs us that "New theories hold that cooperation, not competition, divided [people] from ape," Rensberger poses his questions:

What led a population of apelike animals to diverge from an apelike way of life and set off on an evolutionary course that would establish human beings as the most extraordinary of animals?

Was it the use of weapons...that brought about the change from ape to [people]? Did the human brain evolve in the skulls of blood-thirsty killer apes... Or, as some of the more recent scenarios recount it, were the first humanlike creatures -- members of human-style social units -- clever gatherers of plants and scavengers of carrion? Is male dominance an inescapable human trait rooted in the prowess of men bringing home the bacon? Or was "woman the gatherer" the real foundation of human progress? (20)

The article makes quick work of proving the unreliability of theories holding that brain size, weapons and "killer apes," the hunting of animals and the dominance of men, were primary factors.

A) Brain size of fossils had long been used to determine whether they were human or non-human. "Now it is clear that the big brain was the last of the distinctively human anatomical traits to evolve." (21) Over the past decade evidence shows that the earliest human ancestors were walking on two legs and forming basic social units nearly four million years ago -- and their brain didn't begin to grow beyond those of apes until only two million years ago.

B) The "killer ape" theory was first articulated on a wide scale by Raymond A. Dart, in the 1950s, and later taken up and popularized in the 1960s by Robert Ardrey in the book, African Genesis.

Dart is credited with discovering *Australopithecus Africanus*, the fossil of early humans believed to have lived two million years ago. This discovery undermined the previously held belief that people originated in Asia, and instead placed the origin of people in Africa.

But, it was Dart who found fossil specimens in Azanian caves, along with those of animals that looked as if they'd been crushed with a club. He erroneously interpreted this damage as evidence of people departing from a herbivorous diet to begin the killings of animals (for meat) as well as the killings of other people. Dart thus assumed that bipedalism freed the hands, which fashioned weapons, made people hunters and killers. Hunting (and killing) was then assumed to have created an environment

where only the "strongest" would survive and evolve; the brain was assumed to have developed as a result of the need for greater killing skills.

C) Louis Leakey was among those who rejected the "killer ape" scenario, and argued that it was "the closeness of humans to the natural order and their obligation to protect the natural environment that nurtured their evolutionary rise." (22)

Leakey undermined the Dart-Ardrey theory by pointing out that the bones found by Dart were in caves where roof falls could have caused the damage to the skulls long after death.

D) The strongest evidence undermining the Dart-Ardrey theory came from C.K. Brain and Elizabeth Vrba, Azanian paleontologists who held that the predators of the animal bones found by Dart were leopards and not humans.

(Other evidence which tends to discount the Dart-Ardrey theory is the fact that most fossils of our ancestors found in East Africa were buried -- not merely left in caves. Burial, as opposed to, say cremation, is one of the "sociological facts" relied upon by Diop to support his theory of African matriarchy.)

E) British archeologist Glynn Isaac was an early proponent of the now dominant view that "the forces shaping the human species were not violence and competition, but peaceableness and cooperation." (23)

While working with Richard Leakey in Kenya, Isaac found the remains of campsites estimated to be more than two million years old. He called these sites "home bases";:

The evidence was mainly a collection of animal bones, some with cut marks from stone knives, and the waste flakes of toolmaking in stone. The number of bones and stones suggested repeated or sustained occupation by hominids rather like the australopithecines that Dart had discovered. These sites were thought to be places to which the roving members of a hominid band would return each night to share the food obtained during the day.

The home base might have been little more than a shady spot by a stream, but the implications were enormous. However primitive the hominids seemed from their skeletons, they had already developed a stable social organization and an advanced degree of cooperation. No other primate shares food on a regular basis. Apes forage for themselves.

A home base would permit older or infirm members of the group to stay behind and wait for the others to come back with food. "It is the home base," wrote Sherwood L. Washburn, a physical anthropologist at the University of California at Berkeley, "that changes sprained ankles and fevers from fatal diseases to minor ailments." It also changes the image of murderous

killer-apes into law-abiding members of society. (24)

F) While working in Ethiopia, in 1974, Donald C. Johnson discovered *Australopithecus Afarensis* ("Lucy"), a human ancestor that was on the scene 3.5 million years ago.

G) Mary Leakey discovers, in Tanzania, not only bones of the "Lucy" type, but also footprints that resemble those of modern humans, and which are believed to be 3.7 million years old.

H) Here We confront C. Owen Lovejoy, and a theory resting on patriarchal assumptions. "Lovejoy contends that human beings emerged from apedom because of the simultaneous appearance of bipedalism, regular food sharing, and the more or less continuous sexual availability of males and females in a monogamous pair bond." (25)

Lovejoy believes that men carried food back to the home base...to the women...because they allegedly couldn't obtain enough food for themselves. And, "To keep her mate coming home with food, the early hominid female became continuously sexually attractive and receptive." (26)

(In point of fact, it seems that men were more likely to be the ones who couldn't feed themselves -- assuming a "male-hunter, female-gatherer" division of labor.)

I) Enter Nancy Makepeace Tanner, anthropologist at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and author of On Becoming Human. On the basis of the home base idea, Tanner suggests that the chief forces propelling human origin were the challenges faced by hominid females coping with the rigors of the semi-arid savanna, which demanded skill and ingenuity, because a premium was placed on intellect in the gathering of food. She suggests that this food gathering led to the first tools: digging sticks made of wood or hide, used to get at tubers and roots; baskets or bags used to carry food back to the home base.

Tanner also suggests that the first social units -- the first families -- were composed of mothers, their children and perhaps grandmothers; that pair bonding came later, after a long period in which females "in effect, tamed aggressive and socially disruptive males. They did this by preferring to mate only with 'those who were socially cooperative, willing to share and be protective.' Since the bearers of cooperative genes were given preference in reproduction, later generations of males were eventually domesticated and allowed into the social group as permanent members." (27)

Is this how the African woman, in partnership with the African man, created the first functioning family unit? Could this be the origin of the matriarchal system, and the origin of communal collective ownership?

E. Rudimentary Communalism-2

1. Rudimentary communalism begins with the formation of the first social units, and ends when people begin to produce their own food (i.e., hoe agriculture) rather than appropriate it in its natural state. During the rudimentary communalist stage, We can clearly see the existence of productive forces and their initial development (i.e.,

people; the acquisition and application of production experience and labor skills; the first instruments of production). The productive forces are at a very low level, but nevertheless exist, and express the relationship between people and the objects and forces of nature, as people acquire the means of their subsistence.

And, as people work together to provide themselves with food, clothing, and shelter, and to distribute these resources among themselves, We see the development of relations of production.

We see, even with the "home bases," embryonic forms of collective ownership of the means of production (i.e., the objects of labor, and the aggregate material means and instruments that people use in the labor process). All things gathered or made are used in common and is common property (although there was probably no concept of "property"). All things made are made for immediate consumption and direct distribution. There is no surplus, and any surplus that should arise (especially as the society develops) is, under rudimentary communalism, appropriated by the entire society and redistributed according to the needs of reproduction.

We see, as rudimentary communalism emerges, a "natural" division of labor between males and females, adults and children. This division of labor expresses no dominant-subordinant or exploitative relations -- because all labor is equally valued; everyone labors, and stands in direct, non-alienated relation to the means of production and the products of their individual/collective labor. Each person recognizes personal dependence on every other person.

So, at the beginning of rudimentary communalism, We can see the emergence of social relations (i.e., all relations established between people in the course of joint material and ideological (spiritual/cultural) activity). These social relations conform to relations of production, and allow each person -- male and female -- to acknowledge the rights and duties and responsibilities of each for the other and for the total welfare of the community. There is no "domestic life" reserved for women, and no "public life" reserved for men. All the power in the community belongs to all the people.

2. Under rudimentary communalism, kinship (the family) is the basis of social, political, and economic organization, (i.e., "the low level of development of the productive forces necessitates forms of cooperation within the village collective and between villages, forms which are the material key to understanding the function of family, lineage, clan, and tribal organizations." (28) All adults participate in socially necessary labor, and collectively own production (communal), so all adults participate in the making of all decisions affecting the community's public life.

This key to understanding the basis of familial relations (i.e., its forms and functions don't fall from the sky, but are based on the character of existing relations of production and social relations as a whole), should be grasped and applied as We move to resolve what's now being called "the crisis of the family," or "the attack on the family." At bottom, We can't resolve this crisis, or repel this attack, without ourselves attacking the fundamental contradictions underlying national oppression.

3. Rudimentary communalism continues to develop, largely on the basis of developments of productive forces and instruments of production. People move from merely gathering food in its natural state, to producing food on the basis of their own energy (i.e., without the use of animals). Population increases.

As these "demographic and technological developments" appear (i.e., larger and more families, clans, tribes, villages; making and use of stone tools, fire, etc.), occasional trade or barter may develop between, say people living in forested areas and those living near the sea. But any such trade doesn't develop beyond the bounds that would require "social" division of labor, nor is it characterized as "commodity exchange." These and other fundamental developments must await the appearance of *Transitional Communalism*.

F. Transitional Communalism

There has been no communal, collective ownership of the land in Egypt (for the past five thousand years at least), nor in China (at least since the Han), nor probably in India (with some qualifications). These societies have long had private property in land in the same way as had feudal Europe. (29)

Sedentary life [in Egypt] led to the institution of private property and a whole ethic... (30)

1. In the "Introduction" to Diop's Cultural Unity, John Henrik Clarke tells us that during "the entire history of the Egypt of the Pharaohs, African women enjoyed complete freedom." (31)

But the reality indicates otherwise. Cheikh Anta Diop himself tells us that sexual inequality and class exploitation were apparent during the First Dynasty. It wasn't until the Third Dynasty that "relative" gender equality was re-established (resting on the elimination of "noble" and privileged classes), only to have male privilege and political and economic oppression reappear in the Sixth Dynasty. (32)

The existence of class-based exploitation is further demonstrated when Diop tells us that during the Eighteenth Dynasty, on the basis of what he describes as "marginal capitalism," the state apparatus was reorganized, hereditary posts were eliminated, and the clergy was dislodged from property that it had held privately.

And, near the end of the Twentieth Dynasty, "...the germs of feudalization had reappeared and were again undermining Egyptian society. Reinforcement of the clergy's administrative autonomy and the intensification of its immunity finally created a veritable clerical state within the Egyptian State." (33)

Finally, "under the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, the Sudan revived theocratic monarchy and extended it over the whole country." (34)

So, it appears that not only did women not enjoy complete freedom during the entire history of the Egypt of the Pharaohs. Alongside the

oppression of women, We see in this history the oppression and exploitation of classes.

How did women lose the status and esteem We saw in rudimentary communalism? How did collective ownership of the land come to be replaced by private ownership? Why did Diop use terms like "male privilege," "noble," "privileged classes," "feudalization," "theocratic monarchy," and "marginal capitalism," to describe socio-economic and political relations in the "Southern Cradle" that he earlier described as the antithesis of patriarchy and private ownership?

In part, Diop did what We must do: He continued to learn, to study, to reevaluate and to reinterpret. He also combined his study with revolutionary practice in his native country.

But, We'll begin to uncover most of the answers to these questions in our own examination (*and begin new research projects*) of transitional communalism.

2. Transitional communalism begins when people start to produce, on the basis of human energy, and ends when (on the basis of settled agriculture and the use of domesticated animals; the use of iron and other metals and the development of handicrafts), classes and state formations appear.

During the early phases of transitional communalism, the level of development of productive forces remains low, relations of production remain cooperative, and the form of ownership of the major means of production is still collective (social/communal), and regulated by the system of kinship, i.e., matriarchy.

Each person recognizes that the survival of the communal-clan group rests upon their mutual dependence...the work of each is the work of the whole. Labor is not looked upon as an individual undertaking, but as a collective one; the products of labor are thus understood to be social products, and not individual ones. The products of labor are not looked upon as things with an existence separate from the people who produced them. All relations in the society are recognized by all members as relations between people, not relations between products.

But, this began to change as population growth influences increased productivity of labor, and the development of productive forces creates a minimal surplus. "Occasional exchanges" take place between individuals, families, villages, and clans -- but exchanges on the order of "barters" or exchange of use values, since there is yet no material basis for exploitation.

There soon appears what Engels calls the "first great social division of labor," i.e., the taming and breeding of animals (by men) and their use in agricultural production (the sphere where the "economic role" of women had constituted the foundation for their political role, their status and esteem); the separation of pastoralists from non-pastoralists. It was this social division of labor that came to fundamentally effect the system of ownership, by first stimulating the disintegration of matriarchy.

3. When animals were first captured, tamed/domesticated, used in agricultural production (especially meat and milk), they were characterized as **instruments** of production (and as such were the "personal property" of men, similar to the way instruments used by men in the hunt were considered "personal property"), while nevertheless remaining the collective social property of the commune. The new instruments of production became, over maybe hundreds of years, new **means** of production (eventually "owned" by men), a change which further influenced the displacement of women in major areas of socially necessary labor (i.e., as the importance of hunting declined, and as cattle and other domesticated animals became the source of new products/means of subsistence, and wealth), and thus the reduction in the value of the labor power of women.

Again, over time, and in combination with other factors, the herds (and later, agricultural land), pass from the clan (communal ownership) first through their allotments to villages, then to families, and then to individuals within the families. This transition is both cause and effect of the disintegration of the clan, and the undermining of the role of kinship (matriarchy) in the regulation (maintenance) of communal ownership.

Since the herds "belonged" to men (those individuals within the family who benefited from the transformation of instruments of production into means of production -- thus ever-increasing private ownership of these means), the men came to appropriate more and more of the products (surplus) derived from these means; the surplus turned into privately accumulated wealth, and the wealth into private property. Women were thus gradually removed from direct relation to major means of production, and the quality of their socially necessary labor was ever-greatly reduced in value.

Men were appropriating (first as "personal" and then as "private") surplus products (and consequently, surplus labor) and property that was actually social. But this social character was being hidden behind social divisions of labor, and hidden behind ever-developing commodity exchange and commodity production.

The oppression/domination of women, the overthrow of matriarchy, was the means used to enable the transformation of communalism and the rise of private ownership and embryonic capitalism.

4. As cattle and agricultural land lead to greater production of surplus, and pass into private ownership, the form and character of exchange enters transition. Exchange between villages and clans, between pastoralists and non-pastoralists, becomes more common, and involves greater diversity of products.

We can't overlook what Engels calls 'the second great social division of labor,' i.e., when handicrafts are firmly established and separate from the sphere of agriculture, primarily on the basis of the development and use of metals, especially iron. Nor can we overlook the fundamental changes in (and those caused by) agriculture, once the plow is developed:

The development of the productive forces, a necessary condition for the constitution of a surplus large enough

to lead to irreversible state formation, occurs through the transition from human energy (hoe agriculture) to animal energy. Similarly, it is hard to imagine a state without the use of writing for census taking, dispensing information, and transmitting orders. The imperial Ethiopian state and the Mahdist state in the Sudan were forming at the same time that the use of the plow and of writing were becoming widespread. (35)

The plow (and fertilization and irrigation) and a wider variety of better tools for crafts, leads to greater surplus and diversity of forms of labor, thus more specialization and division of labor -- and eventually to production for the purpose of exchange, the creation of classes, and the state.

Increased exchange, and eventual production for exchange, is only possible because the form of ownership has already shifted significantly from communal to private, and, again, the basis for this shift is the qualitative change in the role of the family and the oppression of women.

Products can't be exchanged on a regular basis without the prior existence of surplus products and private ownership. Products can't be produced for the purpose of exchange without agreement among the exchangers as to a "universal equivalent" -- a commodity by which all others will be valued.

Not all products of the (now relatively isolated) family are available over and above the needs of subsistence (except, maybe, cattle). Property can't be considered private so long as the system of kinship, i.e., matriarchy, is in force and continues to regulate/maintain the system of communal ownership. Therefore, the kinship system (relations of production resting on matriarchy) must be overthrown. It's overthrow begins with the reduction in the value of the labor power of women, the disintegration of the clan, and the separation of the family from the clan, turning it into "an isolated and vulnerable unit, economically responsible for the maintenance of its members and for the rearing of the new generation." (36)

Diop indicates the relationship between the disintegration of communalism and the clan system, and the rise of classes and the state, in Cultural Unity: "...beginning with the same period [the 10th century Islamization of West Africa] detribalization was an accomplished fact in West Africa; this is proved by the possibility of an individual bearing his own family name and not the name of a clan...It is only when the members of the clan are dispersed that they can retain as individuals, in memory of their primitive community, the name of the clan, which could then become their family name." (37)

G. Tributary Formations

1. The term "transitional communalism" thus refers to the stage within which communal ownership and matriarchy were transformed into private ownership and patriarchy...classless societies transformed into class societies. It was the stage where "demographic and technological developments" arose, and the principles underlying communalism weren't given centralized and correlated expression.

Women couldn't have enjoyed "complete freedom" throughout the entire history of Egypt or throughout the entire history of any socio-economic formation that had witnessed the kinds of transitions indicated above. The oppression of women can't be separated from the development of exploitative class relations and the rise of oppressive and exploitative states.

Thus, too, We see that Diop used the terms that i isolated above, because the Egypt he describes had reached, with the First Dynasty, "...a level of development of the productive forces which makes the growth of the state both possible and necessary. That is, it necessitates the end of the dominance of kinship (which can continue to exist but only as a vestige dominated by another rationality). The forms of property corresponding to this second step are those which enable the dominant class to control access to the land and by means of this to extract tribute from the peasant producers. The extraction of this tribute is controlled by the dominance of ideology, which always takes the same form: state religion or quasi religion." (38)

The tributary mode is the first class mode of production. Such a mode made its appearance in Africa long before any foreign influences, and forms of (women's) oppression and (class) exploitation thus became the "traditional" ones that the oppression of New Afrikan women, and the exploitation of the New Afrikan nation by capitalist-imperialism, would build themselves upon:

Capitalism was not destined to be invented in Europe; it might also have been invented by the Chinese, Arabs, or others. The only reason it was not invented in Asia or Africa is that its prior development in Europe led to its impeding the other continents' normal evolution. (39)

If the evolution of Africa had not been impeded, We'd still face the struggle We face today. The link between the oppression of women and the oppression of the nation, is the rise of capitalist relations of production. To end the oppression of women, and to liberate the nation, is to struggle for socialism.

End -- Part One

(Parts Two and Three to follow)

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