

SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

***Dear Ijeawe*: A Marxist Analysis**

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Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Dear Ijeawe* or *a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017) provides fifteen suggestions to her childhood friend Ijeawe who seeks the advice of the writer regarding how to raise her baby girl Chizalum Adaora up a feminist. Nothing so far has been done to connect this essay with any theory. Therefore, this paper attempts to study *Dear Ijeawe* or *a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017) from the perspective of Marxism. Here men are considered as the upper class who governs females through hegemony while women are the proletariat or lower class who believes in the ideology of the patriarchal society. It shows that Adichie wants women not to become a commodity. Rather, females must develop their own economic base as well as identity. So, this paper delves into details into the analysis *Dear Ijeawe* as it has deep-rooted connection with Marxist point of view..

Keywords: base, superstructure, ideology, hegemony, Marxism.

Introduction

Karl Marx (1818-1883), A German Philosopher and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) a German Sociologist were the joint founders of Marxism which emerged in the 1840s and 1850s. Marx noted in the “Foreword” to his 1859 *Towards a Critique of Political Economy* that “the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life”(Bertens 81). Marx noticed that all societies are arranged in such a way that a large group of workers does the labour of production while a small group of owners reap the benefits and accumulates wealth (Ryan 52). Moreover, capitalism thrives on exploiting its labourers and they become things (Bertens 83). Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) a German Sociologist along with Marx argued that societies exhibit a battle of the classes where the upper classes (feudal landlords, factory owners, capitalists) sought to keep the working classes (serfs, factory workers, proletariat) under their control (Nayar 122).

Many Marxist critics have focused on the terms base and superstructure which are present at the heart of Marxist theory. Base and superstructure in Marxist thought refers to the relationship between the economic and socio-cultural aspects of society where the economic base (which include factors and relations of production) determines, influences and forms the cultural superstructure (which includes arts, religion, the law, media, lifestyles) (Nayar 136). So, the superstructure is the cultural world of ideas, art, religion, law and so on (Barry 158). As per Marx, the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general (Waugh 143). In the words of Marx, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker 88).

Marx believed that the proletariat will one day spontaneously develop the class consciousness needed to rise up in violent revolution against their oppressors and create a

classless society (Tyson 54). Overall, the aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society (Barry 156).

Other noteworthy concepts in Marxist discussion is the concept of hegemony and ideology. Hegemony refers to the maintenance of power without the use, or direct threat, of physical force (Hawthorn 146). Under hegemonic control, people actively work toward their own subordination through consent (Webster 63). The Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) came up with this and he argues that historically the ruling classes have been able to exercise leadership not through direct coercion but by indirect means (Webster 63).

French Marxist theoretician Louis Althusser (1918-1990) define ideology:

Ideology is a system (possessing its logic and proper rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts according to the case) endowed with an existence and an historical role at the heart of a given society (qtd. in Barry 163).

According to him in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, the state is controlled Repressive State Apparatuses or RSAs like the police, the armed forces, the government administration, the penal system and so on (Webster 61). In contrast, the state is also operated by Ideological State Apparatuses or ISAs (religion, the legal system, education and culture, the media or communications, the various conventions of family life) which foster sympathetic ideas within a human being towards the state and political status quo (Webster 61). Religion, which Karl Marx called ‘the opiate of the masses’ is an ideology that helps to keep the faithful poor satisfied with their lot in life, or at least tolerant of it, much as a tranquillizer might do (Tyson 59). Nayar states

Ideology enables the dominant classes to reinforce their powers over the oppressed and the marginalized classes because ideology serves as a system of beliefs that naturalizes the unequal power relations, and leads the oppressed to

accept it as natural, a given and as self-evident and therefore beyond questioning (131).

Marxist critics relate the context of a work to the social-class status of the author and they also claim that literary forms are themselves determined by political circumstance (Barry 167-168).

Analysis

According to Adichie, women must not identify themselves with motherhood only. Although becoming a mother is a glorious gift (7), women should become a full person (7) and they should never apologize if they are working because loving what she does is a great gift to give to the child (7). The division of labour in the society allocates household works only for women. As a result, females cave in the ideology that she is breaking the norms of the society by doing a job. This feeling of guilt is totally unacceptable to Adichie as both sexes have equal rights to work. In fact, she will have a strong base through her wealth and thus she will be able to understand the superstructure of the society better.

The hegemony which influences women is the idea that they have to stay at home as traditional mothers. However, the author advises that motherhood and work are not mutually exclusive (8). She suggests that fathers can take care of the child too. Neither wives should complain a lot about the imperfections of the husbands nor they should provide special gratitude or praise (8) to the husband for caring the baby as he is only doing his duty. Under the hierarchical diminution, the wives feel that the husband is helping her or babysitting (8). Adichie negates such ideas. The responsibility of the child is on both the parents and so they should do it together (8). The union of both the sexes indicate a world with equality and a struggle less society.

Moreover, Adichie believes that the idea of gender roles is absolutely nonsense. Active Trains, cars, helicopters and blue colour for boys versus passive dolls, cooking and pink colour for girls represents the distorted sexual roles. The toys of boys represent power while that of girls indicate their marginalized powerless objectivity. The social stratification accepts the baby boy to be free but the girl child is always constrained. Thus, mothers of baby girls become very restraining too. Hence, Chizalum should not only be taught self-reliance (10) but also, she will be looked as an individual first so that she can reach her full potential (10). It is evident that the process of subordination of girls begin at childhood when the baby boys are considered rulers who will govern women in the future. Adichie wants to end such ideological misrepresentations.

Furthermore, Adichie wants baby girls to love books of autobiographies, histories and novels (1). In this manner, her language will make her understand and question the world, help her express herself, and help her in whatever she wants to become (11). It is striking here that the writer wants girls to develop self-consciousness so that she can question before consenting to the rules of the male lords of the society.

Moreover, Adichie claims that language should be questioned. Females can be called only mechanic, not a lady mechanic (12). Women do not need to be championed and revered. They just need to be treated as equal human beings.

Regarding marriage, Adichie mentions that marriage is definitely not an achievement (13). Girls are conditioned from childhood to aspire for marriage while the boys are not. This happens as women agree to their own exploitation and feels that marriage should be the goal of all female lives. Marriage market makes women a product where the males act as the buyers who buy them. In the process of bartering, women are saleable things while males are their purchasers. Taking the title of the husband occurs due to the overwhelming societal pressure (13) from both the sexes of the community. The solution, according to the writer, is to take an

absolutely new surname. This recommendation of the writer points out that she seeks for a classless society where there is no discrimination between the two classes- males and females.

As for the eight principle, it can be seen that women must be taught to reject likeability or the idea to please all. Being nice (14) and thinking about the feelings of all those who are hurting them have made the easy prey of sexual predators (14). Teach her to be kind, honest and truthful (14). She can also like or dislike and be a subject (14). Women have to slug it out to get their emancipation.

As per Adichie, females must have a sense of identity (15). Being an Igbo girl, Chizalum can embrace the beautiful parts of the Igbo culture and reject the rest. She should be given an Igbo name. To take pride in the history of Africans and in the black diaspora (15) are also essential teachings for her. Definitely, the ideological ideas make people feel inferior in their own class but here the writer suggests that one must embrace their culture.

In addition, in the words of Adichie, girls must be physically active (15). They must be encouraged to participate in all kinds of sports. Plaiting skin must not be painful. Fashions and makeup depend on her choices. If she likes, she can be fashionable or makeup lover. She can avoid both as well. In mainstream magazines, film and television, whiteness is valuable. To the writer, commodification of women or treating them as a thing is not acceptable. Agreeing the ideology that games are only for men is totally wrong. Pressurizing her to assent to the makeup or fashion culture only to please the male gaze of the materialistic world which praise only female beauty is not permitted by Adichie.

Coupled with these, as for Adichie, parents must talk about sex with the little girl early. She remembers her old class three school days when while teaching about sexuality, teachers threatened them by saying that talking to boys will lead to disgrace and pregnancy. Female sexuality is not about shame (18). Additionally, period blood is not shit (18). Rather, it is sacred as it is required for reproduction. As per the author, sex is not only a marriage act (18). The

alienation of parents from providing right information about physical relationship to girls lead to her lack of knowledge which in turn causes her misinterpretation of it. In teaching about oppression, oppressed are often compared with saints (20) as stated by Adichie. This happens as the society has led to this false idea so that women can easily permit their mistreatment by men. It is assumed that women are morally better than men but to Adichie, female goodness is as normal as female evil (20). Hence, we can see that Adichie is not glorifying any gender here.

Lastly, Chizalum will be full of opinions, and her opinions will come from an informed, humane and broad-minded place (20). May she become what she wants to be is the last thought of Adichie. This final piece of advice indicates that the author sides with non-discrimination or fairness between the sexes and thus she supports the main concept of Marxism.

Conclusion

All in all, the counselling of Adichie highlights that women must be treated equally with members of the opposite sex. The social ideology and hegemony that women who are working at office are neglecting their families is an incorrect idea. Women can wear high heels and makeup only when she feels like doing these fashion. She must not be imposed in doing so by the social structure of the world where male wants women as a beautiful thing, commodity or products. Marriage for females should be a personal choice devoid of any chained force of the society. All these concepts display that *Dear Ijeawele* has connection with Marxism to a great extent.

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