

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

The aim of this special issue on 'the women's question' is to present original and analytical articles on women's issues. Preference has been given to articles which are either based on field research or else contribute to our theoretical understanding of the issues raised. We have also included one review article and two book reviews.

There are significant differences in the nature of women's oppression and exploitation, and struggles for women's liberation within each African country. These differences multiply when the entire continent is considered. We have, therefore, included work which refers to several different countries, namely Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and Tanzania.

A variety of themes and positions are explored in this issue. The variety itself should help to correct any false assumptions about the homogenous character of women, of 'the women's question', of how it is posed, and of the rapidly developing field of women's studies.

The articles by Ruth Meena and Marjorie Mbilinyi bring out major contradictions underlying women-oriented programmes which are promoted by the Tanzanian state and by international agencies. Ruth Meena explores the attention given by donor agencies to women's projects and provides an explanation for this intervention. Marjorie Mbilinyi concetises the contradictions and struggles that characterise women's projects and programmes with reference to one region and several villages in Tanzania.

Anita Baltzersen raises important insights about the different kinds of networks which have developed among women, and women and men, in Nigeria. Special attention is given to networking among University students. Eileen Wilson explores the different forms of substitute child care which have developed to meet the needs of working mothers in Western Nigeria. The extent to which child care centres have become big business. Which do not cater to the needs of children nor their parents challenges usual assumptions about their non-problematic character.

The life history of a former slave, Mishi wa Abdala, Mombasa, Kenya (edited and translated by Sarah Mirza and Margaret Strobel) illustrates the efforts made by a growing number of historians to re-insert women—and slaves—into African history. Stephanie Urdang's account of the struggles being waged in Mozambique against bridewealth presents a verbatim record of different and often opposing views about bridewealth itself, as well as the strategies adopted to get rid of it.

The critique of recent reports on energy by Allen Armstrong and Marion Carry successfully shows how class and sex matters when dealing with energy issues. In her critique of Goran Hyden's recent book, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania*. Kathleen Staudt argues that his analysis is totally inadequate because he ignores such basic questions as the sexual division of labour and sex discrimination in society. Magdalena Ngaiza commends the pioneer work done by Ophelia Mascarenhas and Marjorie Mbilinyi in their analytical bibliography, *Women in Tanzania*. She calls for more work of this nature to be carried out

which develops the critique of women's studies in Tanzania, and Africa as a whole.

The positions taken by the authors are not necessarily shared by the special editors of this issue. It is our expectation that this collection of articles, and views, will stimulate more debate on the many substantive questions posed.

We have appreciated the positive response we received to the invitation for submissions to this special issue. It is unfortunate that we could not include more of the articles submitted. We hope, however, that this collection will inspire women and men to consider the issues raised and to contribute relevant articles to later issues of the journal. It is also expected that this will be the first of many special issues on 'the question' in *The African Review*.

Marjorie Mbilinyi

Ruth Meena

SPECIAL EDITORS

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Foreign Aid and the Question of Women's Liberation

Ruth E. Meena*

INTRODUCTION

As women in Third World countries remain deprived, starved, overworked, exploited and oppressed, national governments and international organisations, including UN organs, multilateral aid agencies and NGOs, claim to be concerned with the plight of women in the rural areas and urban slums. Individual governments have established ministries, departments or commissions to be in charge of 'Women's Affairs', while international organisations have created institutions and structures to assist and support women's activities and protect their rights. The United Nations, for instance, from its inception symbolically recognised the existence of the women's question by including in its charter a phrase condemning all forms of discrimination on the basis of religion, race and sex as well as a principle of human equality.¹ In 1946, the UN's Economic and Social Council established a Commission of Women, and in 1952 the General Assembly adopted the Convention on Political Rights of Women. Twenty-three years later, the General Assembly announced the International Year of Women which was followed by a declaration of the United Nation's Decade for Women (1976—1985). Part of the World Plan of Action for the decade constituted ninety-nine projects designed mainly to support poor women in the rural and urban sectors. Seminars, congresses and workshops were organised at national and international level to review, assess and evaluate programmes planned for the decade. Responding to the UN's World Plan for Action, African states included in the Lagos Plan of Action for the Development of Africa 1980—2000 a section recommending measures to improve women's contributions to the development process. This section covered such aspects as agriculture, nutrition, handicrafts, small-scale industries, employment, education and training, science and technology, natural resources, water supply, energy, health and family life. It was further recommended that steps should be taken to involve women at higher administrative and policy-making levels alongside attempts to lessen the domestic burden of rural women. Training was proposed to enable women to perform their multiple roles as *wives, mothers, workers and citizens*.² Studies have shown that women, especially in rural Africa and urban slums, are extremely overworked. Every minute of their lives are spent on a variety of domestic chores such as walking long distances for firewood and water, carrying fodder for cattle where land shortage has made cattle grazing impossible; and in the fields tilling, weeding or harvesting the land with the hoe. Food production, processing and preserving for domestic consumption is a major occupation of these women,³ while they are also responsible for reproducing and maintaining a

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