

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

Women of Eastern and Southern Africa: Bibliography, 1976-1985, by
Davis A. Bullwinkle

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9q34v4r8>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 18(1)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

More, Duke

Publication Date

1990

DOI

10.5070/F7181016850

Copyright Information

Copyright 1990 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

BOOK REVIEWS

Davis A. Bullwinkle. *Women of Eastern and Southern Africa: Bibliography, 1976-1985*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989. 545 pp.

For years, the worlds of women were relatively unexplored. Social scientists solicited neither women's thoughts nor their opinions. They emphasized production and reproduction as women's activities. Women were written off to a mundane existence in the home. Although women are not a single sociological category, gender remains more than a physiological category and, as such, is an important means of social differentiation everywhere. There is a general identification of women with the sphere of domesticity, even though the roles and obligations of women within this sphere and the definition of domesticity itself are culturally and economically specific. There are, of course, shared experiences among those men and women who bare the brunt of poverty, or those who bask in the comforts of wealth. Nevertheless, it is women, rather than men, who carry the heavier tasks. The incontrovertible truth is that without consideration of persons as gendered individuals and collectives, our historical vision is so impaired as to be unacceptably inaccurate.

The tides of African independence and the international women's movement that swept the 1960s converged in the 1970s in an intensified interest in the lives and affairs of African women. African women's contributions to the economic, political and social lives of their nations, communities and families, their collective fate under colonialism, their potential roles in the continent's development, and their participation in the liberation struggles presently being waged are subjects of serious study and speculation.

This bibliographic work by Davis A. Bullwinkle on women of Eastern and Southern Africa represents a selection of recently published works. It is by no means complete, but it is an attempt to present a sample of accessible materials published between 1976 and 1985 on some of the most critical issues relating to African women today. The areas that this work attempts to address include family structure and the household in a historical context; political economy; African forms of status deprivation (including slavery) and class formation; the impact of Western culture on marriage, education, religion and law; and the nature and impact of political and economic oppression.

While the image of the African woman as the prolific and nurturing mother is widely acknowledged, the fact that that she also provides three-quarters of the continent's agricultural labor and, to that extent, feeds and sustains it, is not. However, the magnitude of women's roles in provisioning the continent is among the most

projecting the nature of Africa's economic and political future. This bibliographic compilation should be understood neither as an apologia for African women's history, nor as a plea for its inclusion-mainstreaming, but rather as an explanation of its great importance. More attention needs to be paid to changes in the nature of women's subordination before and under colonialism, not treating these periods as monolithic wholes, but establishing a chronology referring to women's events and family structure.

Studies of the political institutions and practices of African societies have given scant attention to women's roles. Recent pioneers in this bibliography furnish information on this subject, demonstrating how women's traditional economic autonomy was undermined by the intervention of European male administrators who imposed European values of male superiority and economic policies that set women in subservient positions. Modernization meant more dependency, and without the development of an anti-dependency political base, and without politically conscious women's organizations, modernization will continue to push women deeper into their dependency on men, and Africa deeper into its dependence on the West.

In sum, therefore, this bibliographic work provides the litany of critical issues besetting Africa, including food crises, massive population and poverty and restrictive policies imposed by international financial and donor agencies. It is also a critical study that summons attention to be focussed upon women who are suffering disproportionately from the plethora of problems spawned by poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and underdevelopment, lower life expectancy and physical abuse. It provides a reference source as well as critical impetus for the reconceptualization of women's role in society. Noting that the idea of change in the roles of women has more often than not been viewed as anathema, this bibliographic source provides a theoretical perspective for the critical issues of unequal power relations, not only of gender but also of oppression based on race or ethnicity, class, age and geography as well. From this analysis, it is hoped that this bibliographic reference source will spark the establishment of a new tradition that fully integrates women into all future issues rather than regulating them to the genre of "special issues."

Duke More