

# The Emerging New Woman

by Naheed Kamal

She is a housewife dividing her precious time between her children, husband, the kitchen and shopping and housekeeping. Then she is an executive, a president, a chairperson or a company director. She is an artist, a leader, a role model, the sex-symbol. She is stoic and cool; she is wild and free. She is unmarried and ambitious or she is a divorcee with a will of her own.

Each of these women represents one of the many well-recognized facets of womanhood in the present-day society. In the past few years, however, a stereotype has emerged to join the others: that of "superwoman" who has exhausted herself reaching the top while remaining ever-youthful and feminine, in conformity with a popular image of self-fulfillment. Because she has won the right to a career and can plan when to bear children, the woman of today has rediscovered the joys of motherhood, in a world she has helped to alter.

She is the role model for today's young girls — fiercely ambitious, utterly prosaic and hopelessly feminine.

Out of it all has emerged the prospect of a new type of relationship between men and women which is far more relaxed.

The 60s saw "individual freedom" become the watchword of the feminist movement, as it tried to throw aside old beliefs and taboos. The demise of the family was predicted as women went to work in increasing numbers throughout the Western world, or at least they changed the type of work they did and they produced fewer and fewer babies.

In the late 60s the use of contraceptive pills was made legal in Europe and America. Its impact was enormous in the lives of both men and women. For the first time women could, if they wished to, escape their biological destiny. Abortion remains the usual recourse among many modern women in the case of an unwanted pregnancy. The struggle between "pro-life" campaigners and those who are for abortion will continue for years to come. But that is not for the rest to worry about because one's own life comes first.

While the old moral codes take a battering and increasing numbers of women are opting for remaining single a little longer than their parents would like, the family still remains very much intact. Even though the 70s saw the old system being heralded back as the feminist movement lost a little steam, by the 80s

"equality" once again popped up. Women are still used to advertise in fashion, but so are men. The man is no longer portrayed as all-powerful, he too has his weaknesses and he faces them.

Marriage however has not bounced back as an institution. In the West the number of marriages dwindled during the 80s and many couples began to live together. People are now less inclined to view marriage as a lifetime contract guaranteeing emotional and material security; or at least, the "formality" of marriage is seen as guaranteeing nothing. With the rise in the number of divorces all over the world, the social stigma once attached to divorce has more or less vanished. Even though a divorce is traumatising for both parties, the choice is still for it rather than living together in misery. Sociologists attribute the rise in divorce to the fact that people now live longer. When men and women of say, 25, marry today, they know they have roughly 50 years of life in front of them. If their commitment to one another is less than to-

tiny. While the women's liberation movement has lost its capacity to stir up storms, its ideas have caught on in a lasting fashion. Still the family is by no means dead. It remains a haven in troubled waters — especially since children stay with their parents longer than in the past.

In the 70s many women in the West began to champion the idea of living alone, insisting on the right to possess a place where they could live by and for themselves. Although the idea has not caught on in our society, even in India and the South Asian countries, the single woman with a "bed of her own" is a common sight.

Women's magazines and feminist literature all make out the single woman as dynamic and happy. Some are mothers. The single woman is by definition unmarried. In general, they are city dwellers who hold jobs. Some are executives, others artists. Girls living and studying abroad from our country often opt for this role rather than return home immediately to inevitably marry and settle down. They choose to live alone for as long as possible.

From the beginning of the century to recent times, the single woman — the proverbial spinster — was a shopkeeper, school teacher, social worker, nurse or mid-wife. For having received a non-mixed schooling, worked in a feminine milieu and obeyed the moral codes the chances of meeting someone were limited. Today women have discovered the advantages of being alone and are able to organize their lives to get the most from it. They know of the benefits of choosing for themselves. In other words, many have chosen to be happy alone rather than be unhappy with a man, for as long as it is possible. Women are still hopeless romantics at heart but so are men, but all in all they are both far more practical. They refuse to accept the concept of blind love.

The teenage girls of today enjoy wider freedom than their mothers and grandmothers. Most consider themselves lucky to be growing up at a time when teenage girls enjoy greater freedom than previous generations did. They know that boys feel they are obliged, whether they like it or not, to accept the new status of girls. Under law, girls enjoy equality with boys. But a change in mentality may take some time in emerging. The result: even greater numbers of single adults, common-law marriages and one-parent families. Behind this change in the family structure lie several factors, such as the greater independence of women who insist on being paid on equal terms as their male counterparts; better education and a parallel decline in the influence of religion means that women no longer view marriage as their lone social des-

ticularly among the families hit by economic crises, many girls seek refuge in a marriage at an early age and breed children as if forsaking any chance to live their own lives.

Women have successfully held out for new rights in addition to bearing children. They attend the best universities, work and take part in the same extra-curricular activities as men. In essence marriage is usually seen by elders as a trade off in social and educational capital. The factor of love never arises. It is not to be confused with love, a priceless bonus. Many over-educated women remain single due to their unreasonably high expectations from marriage, and due to the shortage of suitable partners. For these reasons parents often object to the daughters wanting to study longer than they feel necessary, for fear she will end up a spinster. Women who make what one calls a good marriage (financially or socially) tend, in reality, to retreat into an early retirement, because the marriage prevents them from

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It is wrong however to weigh everything in marriage because one needs to remember the heart comes before other considerations. Love has a price but it shouldn't be added up. Love, it seems, springs more from an accidental encounter than from everyday contacts. People who meet under the benign eye of family, friends or workmates are slower to fall in love. No longer does falling in love automatically mean getting married and having children.

On any scale love counts for more than sex. The heart needs to be satisfied before the body. It is a new couple which has emerged, based on equal-

ity, reciprocity, trust and respect. In fact, equality is no longer a wish for women but rather something already acquired, a fact of life. Women have become more or less carbon copies of their male partners. They are no longer afraid of their future because they tend to be socially and financially independent by the time they are ready to settle down with someone. Girls who are in college or university now intend to remain single at least until they have a career. By that time they will be in the age group of 24 upwards and will no longer be naive young girls but mature young women. They will be aware of their preferences.

Some 67% women in our country hold jobs today. More, if we consider part time jobs and farm workers. Many have been encouraged and aided by NGOs. Many women help their men in the fields, others are employed otherwise. In shops and crafts, women have always been involved. Now they have broken into liberal professions as university professors, scientists, journalists, etc. The most spectacular jump has been in the number of office workers. The times have changed and women are no longer afraid or ashamed to work beside their male counterparts in an office from 9 to 5.

Despite the myth of the women being chained to her stove, most women have always worked. It is only their type of work which has changed. Women's magazines all over portray the modern women as young, glowing, beautiful, rich and carefree — a creature so perfect that few can identify themselves with her. These magazines do however pay attention to the spheres of behaviour and the evolution of society. Besides featuring glossy pictures of the smiling, perfect woman, the women's press has managed to catch the pulse of women in harmony with her femininity. After much ado about nothing, women have rediscovered the right to proclaim their femininity. Increasingly independent, women have freed themselves from fashion, preferring to switch back and forth between sneakers, slippers and high heeled shoes. Beauty, for its part has gradually become synonymous with health and good form. Feeling good inside is as important as looking good.

The humdrum about the women's liberation and equality have died down. The point has been made and success has been achieved. It is up to the rest of the world to remember that, "A man is as good as he has to be, and a woman as bad as she dares," said E Hubbard.

# A New Approach to Africa

by Jacques Belmont

**T**HE manner of giving is more important than what one gives. This is what the West seems finally to have realized in its relations with the African continent.

The donation is, without doubt, considerable, as aid for development represents an average of more than 15 billion dollars a year, but the way it is allocated is not the right way as it does not produce the economic results expected.

This is because the western lenders offer their aid but to-

Integrates and respects African values, what he calls the "informal" sector as opposed to the so-called "modern" sector in which western rules of management are applied.

The success of most of the micro-firms of the informal sector, which still have to survive in a hostile environment without any aid, can, above all, be explained by their ability to

combine the social and cultural values of Africa with necessary economic efficacy. The great originality of this new approach is to demonstrate that, far from being an obstacle to economic development, African culture, if it is acknowledged and integrated, instead of being criticized, serves as a support for economic development of a kind based on notions peculiar to Africa and not to the West.

Another western idea which has been discredited is "Time is money". In Africa, time is perceived in a completely different way. The time spent talking is sacred. Here too, the



together with their own instructions, the only ones they know and which, moreover, work in their own countries, that is to say, economic liberalism, in other words, individual promotion, personal profit, risk-taking, etc.

They forget one thing. The fact that these notions have no value in Africa, that they do not form part of its specific social and cultural environment. "There are no terms to express these notions", Claude Marchant explains in his book "Nord-Sud, de l'aide au contrat" (published by Syros).

This is the misunderstanding that the World Bank has, itself, brought out in a recent study, published in its "Finances et Développement" review, devoted to the "psychological implications of economic decisions in Africa". This study conveys a total reversal of outlook. In it, Africa is no longer considered from a western point of view, but seen for itself, from the inside, from its own values and its own "founding myths".

Commenting on this study, the Senegalese former civil servant, Mamadou Dia, judiciously puts his finger on an essential fact: what works best in Africa, on an economic level, is precisely that which

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Thus, in Africa, Mamadou Dia explains, "the value of economic action is not measured in terms of individual success, but, on the contrary, in terms of solidarity: the value lies in the strengthening of bonds that if brings about within a group". The writer of the study, for his part, points out that "Any social success outside the group can lead to ostracism".

Everything that was once thought to maybe create obstacles to economic development, on the contrary appears positive. It is by respecting these values that western aid could be useful.

As has been seen, collective solidarity and the community tradition count more than individual success, but a respect of harmony and ancestral links

purpose of this time is to strengthen the concord of man with nature and with his peers. There is thus again a quest for fundamental harmony. We are a long way from the "founding myths" of western societies, which are individualistic and technical.

In the light of these facts, the World Bank has acknowledged the necessity to reconcile traditional values and economic efficacy and admitted that the economic development of Africa could not only be achieved by respecting the African identity, but it should be based on it.

The study concludes that, the ideal solution would be "to extend the solidarity which exists within the framework of a family, to firms and to the nation". Hence the choice made by this international institution from now on to closely integrate the traditional values of Africa into its proposals for economic development, particularly in firms which need to learn to draw strength from their social and cultural environment rather than from external principles.

This new model could finally enable Africa to find the road to lasting development.

— L'Actualité en France

# The Long, Long Tunnel at the End of the Line

by Luis Tricót

**C**HILE, the longest country in the world, is home to the longest tunnel in South America. The Las Raíces tunnel — 4,528 metres long and 1,010 metres above sea level — is in Chile's beautiful southern Andean region.

It took Chilean and Argentinian workers 10 years to build. Construction began in 1922 and it was designed to link — via a railway track — the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

This was never achieved, and for the past 60 years the train has stopped at Lonquimay, 700 kilometres south of the country's capital, Santiago. So, as is often the case, the Latin American dream of unity and regional integration did not quite work out.

Now Argentina is eager to re-activate the idea of this transandean train, which could speed its export products to a Pacific port within 12 hours — very different from the five or six days it currently takes on an Atlantic ship.

Looking at the tunnel it seems incredible that it might become such an important economic asset. Just a tiny black hole in the middle of the

majestic Andes, it seems to have been taken from a train set.

However, the barrier, with its traffic lights and small

**Early this century Argentinians dreamed of a railway line to Chile that would link them to Pacific ports. Instead of cargo being shipped round Cape Horn it could reach a Pacific port in 12 hours. It never happened — in Chile the line stopped far from the border. Now there is talk of reviving the idea. Gemini News Service's correspondent visited the longest tunnel in Latin America, at the end of the line.**

wooden tool hut, soon bring you back to reality, because you must pay to cross it. And most importantly, you have to wait your turn, for the tunnel

is a one-way road. It could not be otherwise, because it is only 2.70 metres wide.

The moment you enter the tunnel, despite its concrete surround, you can feel the overwhelming power of the mountain. Although it is summer, the cold is intense — winter temperatures can drop to 50 degrees below zero.

Jose Luis Tapia, one of five railwaymen who manage the tunnel, says that under the former military dictatorship of Chile, the state-run railway system would hire unemployed workers and send them into the tunnel to try to break the hard ice formed there.

"They didn't last more than 10 minutes," he says. In total darkness we advance forward into the heart of the Andes. The impressive silence of the place is broken only by the sound of heavy raindrops.

When the tunnel was being built, the hill sank in, killing at least 15 workers and forming a natural lake above the roof of the tunnel. This is the main

source of the continuous and persistent leaking.

We finally reach the tunnel's southern end, emerging into a beautifully sunlit interandean valley surrounded by active volcanoes.

We leave behind this amazing South American catacomb knowing its days as a railway tunnel could be numbered. Today it is used only two or three times a week by a freight train that carries timber from the vast Araucaria (tall pine tree) forests of the

region.

The government has declared the felling of this ancient native tree illegal. So, at least in theory, no more timber will come out of Lonquimay.

"The railway branch is slowly dying off." 38-year-old Jose Tapia says sadly. The passengers are long gone and will not come back and neither, it seems, will the freight train.

However, about 100 road vehicles pass through it every day, specially during the summer months.

— Gemini News

# Zanzibar Finds a New Spice of Life

by Lucas Lukumbo

**S**EAWEED, once despised as sea rubbish, is proving a valuable new cash crop for village women on Zanzibar's east coast.

Cropping was introduced to the Tanzanian island two years ago and some 10,000 people, mostly women, make a living from it.

According to Juma Shamuhuna, principal secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Natural Resources, some women are making up to US\$100 a month, "twice the salary of a newly employed graduate in the civil service".

"I believe that in a few years Zanzibar seaweed farmers will be the wealthiest women in the whole African coastal belt."

About 500 tonnes of dried seaweed have been produced in the past year, worth US\$150,000 to the growers. Industrialised countries use seaweed in pharmaceuticals, textiles, rubber, adhesives and various foods, and Shamuhuna hopes that seaweed will become an alternative foreign exchange earner to cloves. The spice accounts for 90% of Zanzibar's export earnings, but sharp competition principally from Indonesia, once the world's largest importer, has cut the island's clove exports by two-thirds since the 1960s.

Seaweed farming was first mooted two decades ago by Professor Keto Mshingiri of the University of Dar es Salaam's botany department. It takes place in shallow coral reefs with at least one foot (30 cm) of water at all times. Seaweed can be harvested for drying after three weeks and can be cultivated all year round. Rope, sticks and seedlings are the only outlays needed to start farming.

Says 21-year-old Mwatum Ali of Kiwengwa village who previously owned nothing but cooking utensils: "Since I began seaweed farming six months ago I have managed to purchase a radio and seven pairs of shoes and 15 dresses. I named by second son 'Mtumwa', which means slave, to remember the old days when farming in the coral area only gave two bags of rice a year." /PANOS

## Rail link-up

