
Women Waging Peace: Lessons in Leadership

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Over 100 women involved in peace efforts in the most violent areas of the world convened in December, 1999, to launch "Women Waging Peace," a global network of women working to prevent conflict, stop war, reconstruct ravaged societies and sustain peace in fragile areas. Delegations came from Armenia/Azerbaijan, Boston urban neighborhoods, Colombia, Cyprus, India/Pakistan, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Northern Ireland, the post-Yugoslav region, South Africa and Sudan. The launch of the Initiative spurred groundbreaking work, bridging divides between communities in conflict, as well as those among policy shapers, academics and grassroots activists. Valuable results in coalition building, information technology training and public policy shaping were the practical outcomes of the two-week gathering, at which women peace builders shared expertise, stories, and strategies to help each other in their difficult and momentous work.

RE-EXAMINING LEADERSHIP

The Women Waging Peace initiative has raised classic questions about the relationship of gender and leadership: Do women and men in conflict areas lead differently from one another? If so, is this because of nature, nurture or a combination of the two? If women have different skills, how can the international community capitalize on them? And by doing so, will that risk confining women to reductive stereotypes that will be detrimental in the long run? These questions contain assumptions about both gender and the nature of leadership. Simply put, women do not always fit the predominant image of leaders in many segments of social experience.

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TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP

Since women in peace building are not always seen as leaders, perhaps the basic notion of leadership should be examined. According to Plato, a leader should be the brightest and most virtuous within a group. Others argue that leadership has much more to do with the ability to influence people through the use of power and authority. Max Weber set the stage for formulating typologies of leadership in the late 1800s. He posited that there were three “ideal” types of leadership: the rational legal, the rational authoritarian and the charismatic. Additionally, Stoghill formulated two characteristics of good leaders: the successful accomplishment of tasks and positive relations with subordinates¹.

These early theories have become more nuanced as scholars attempt to develop a more complex and systemic understanding of multiple variables used to determine effective leadership. According to *Trait Theory*, leadership is determined by the constellation of qualities of an individual. *Historical Determinism* maintains that the circumstances, challenges and forces of a particular historical period determine the leadership that emerges. *Contingency Theory* maintains that leadership is determined by the situation at hand. There is no “ideal” leadership; leaders need to assess the factors and use different styles and tactics to achieve their goals. Finally, *Transaction Theory* asserts that loyalty and services rendered between leaders and followers are of primary importance.

Such theories present a paradigm of leadership as a characteristic of the leader, the interplay between the leader’s qualities and circumstances and the relationship between leaders and followers. These theories build a thoughtful framework for examining leadership but they have been formulated by exclusively examining male leaders. Since women are largely invisible in historical documentation, in order to explore the gender dimension in leadership, we must research and conduct fieldwork in various societal sectors.

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT REGARDING GENDER & LEADERSHIP

In studies of the relationship between gender and leadership, women’s leadership styles have been characterized as nurturing, relational, non-hierarchical, attuned to the ideas and feelings of others, communicative and communal. In contrast, men’s leadership styles have been characterized as independent, hierarchical, individualistic, task oriented, assertive, rational and autocratic.²

Two primary schools of thought have emerged to account for these differences: the biological and psycho/social. The biological school posits that gender roles are rooted in genetics. Male and female leadership styles and attitudes towards dominance, power, aggression and hierarchy are heavily influenced by anatomical, hormonal and genetic differences.³ By and large, social scientists have

rejected these views by saying that empirical evidence does not substantiate such claims. The psychological school argues that women's and men's socialization results in the development of unique characteristics and leadership styles. Eagly and Johnson suggest that these differences are specifically due to role-induced tendencies for men to specialize in behaviors strictly oriented to their group's task, and for women to specialize in socially facilitative behaviors.⁴

Laboratory studies provide mixed results and inconclusive support for either of these schools. This may be partly due to methodological problems: 1) the narrow definition of leadership; 2) subjects in these experiments are usually college students who lack significant leadership experience; and 3) poorly defined variables and uncontrollable differences exist between groups within artificial settings. Thus, while the etiology of gender differences remains unknown, we are left to ponder why there are differences between men and women's leadership styles.⁵

WOMEN LEADERS IN THE FIELD

The role of women in leadership has increased significantly within the last 50 years as evidenced by the proliferation of women in senior global leadership positions. On a global scale, more than half the women who have ever served as political leaders have come into office since 1991.⁶ As women move up the leadership ranks, several patterns are appearing in the area of gender and leadership.

The Corporate Arena : Some studies looking specifically at the gender component of the corporate sector find that women tend to encourage participation, share power and information and offer more praise. Their peers and subordinates characterize them as inclusive, team oriented, non-hierarchical, willing to listen, enthusiastic and emotionally intense.⁷

Rosener refers to women's "transformational leadership"—convincing subordinates to transform their own self interest into the interest of the group through concern for a broader goal. Inclusion is at the heart of their style. Rather than focusing on the relationship between leader-decision maker and subordinate-follower, women see leadership as a collaboration between people.

Many corporate professionals and the researchers who study them dismiss claims of differences between genders, arguing that women's leadership styles vary as much as men's do and that the differences are due to personality factors. Women often argue that they should be viewed as individuals rather than judged and boxed within gender identity. They feel undermined by stereotypes that delegitimize their leadership abilities and oppose the usage of common labels such as 'less decisive' and 'more soft.' Indeed, some women executives refuse to talk about gender differences and will only discuss the issue off-the-record.⁸

Regardless, the definition of effective leadership must be expanded to allow women to explore advantages to the perceived differences in style between

the genders. This change is beginning. As the business environment adjusts to meet the demands of a changing environment, management is becoming more responsive, by encouraging more flexible networks, less-hierarchical approaches, open communication and other “feminine” approaches to leadership.

The Political Arena: In politics, the requisite qualities for succeeding in leadership positions include the ability to win constituents’ support, the ability to articulate a vision powerfully and persuasively and the analytical skills needed to assess and understand political systems.⁹ However, the majority of women who have succeeded as heads of state did not actively pursue public office. These women more often acquired their leadership positions “unintentionally” through the assassinations of their husbands, family successions or pressure from the community to lead.¹⁰ This pool of women has been interviewed and studied whether or not they offer a unique leadership style.

Some, like Mary Robinson, President of Northern Ireland, support the notion that women have unique leadership styles. According to Robinson, they are “instinctively less hierarchical... and harness in a cooperative way the energies of those who are like minded.”¹¹ Others challenge this viewpoint and claim that female heads of state such as Margaret Thatcher and Benhazir Bhutto lead in a manner quite similar to men: hierarchical and power-centered. In fact, Thatcher has been characterized as “generally more ambitious, more of a centralizer, more autocratic, less collegial, more confrontational and more ideological than her predecessors.”¹²

Thus, is it necessary for political women to adopt a “male” style in order to gain legitimacy? To overcome biases that they are weak, do women compensate by being tough? Do they not perceive that they have the mandate or power base to introduce an alternative agenda? Like corporate women, women in politics are often the subject of self-conscious ideological debates about gender and feel reluctant to limit themselves to reductive stereotypes. Many who have succeeded to leadership positions have done so in spite of their gender, and are reluctant to embrace an identity that is perceived as a liability.

Various studies posit that it is still premature to make generalizations about female political leaders at this stage because they are anomalies. They lack those supporting structures that would allow them to create an alternative leadership style. Moreover, there is not the critical number necessary to make a difference.¹³ Thus, in a circular irony, the paucity of women in leadership positions adds to the difficulty of drawing concrete conclusions about the role of gender in leadership styles. In the absence of greater understanding, stereotypes are allowed to prevail. To the extent that women leaders are recognized, their styles are characterized as inclusive, non-hierarchical and collaborative.

AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

The arena where women have the opportunity to lead is overwhelmingly at the grassroots level.¹⁴ Because work at the community level is generally underfunded and overlooked, it is open to those outside the power structure. In this situation, women's "second-class" status can be both a curse and a blessing. Because this work is often dismissed, grassroots leaders may mobilize and set their own agenda without the close scrutiny of political parties or official establishments. Thus, the type of leadership that emerges at the grassroots is "without formal authority."¹⁵ This type of leader often steps into a void, addressing the needs of people who fall outside the power structure, and whose needs are often not being addressed by the formal establishment.

The demands and risks placed on leaders without formal authority heighten in situations of political instability and war. During times of distress, people often resort to narrowing their identification with groups by externalizing the enemy, scapegoating and engaging in other behaviors that reorganize and divide the community. The "good leader" must confront his or her constituents, drawing them away from destructive and divisive responses to the conflict environment.

Thus, there is a clear value judgement attached to the concept of a leadership without formal authority. The leader's challenge is to force a community to face its fundamental problems while discouraging short-sighted and counter-productive measures. The ends must clearly benefit society within commonly accepted boundaries of fairness and justice.

In this sense, many of the "women waging peace" are not only leaders but also exemplary leaders. As the lessons below demonstrate, many of them have pushed their communities and governments to confront human rights injustices and issues that would otherwise go ignored.

WOMEN WAGING PEACE

The 102 founding delegates of Women Waging Peace came from ten different conflict areas, each at varying stages of conflict and within different levels of intensity. Despite sharing the experience of working in troubled areas, these women differ greatly from one another. Drawing on the accounts of their own work, we can draw several compelling lessons.

Many of the delegates would be uncomfortable with the notion that they are "leaders," or that their work should be studied and even emulated. First, they are usually excluded from the formal decision-making circles popularly associated with leadership. Second, the notion of leadership implies an individualism to which many of the women are culturally unaccustomed. Third, the term "leader" detracts from the fact that the central thrust of what they are doing is collective.

War is a collective enterprise. So too, our delegates insisted, must be the creation of peace. Nevertheless, even if they may not think of themselves as leaders, these women do lead.

In this sense, there is a clear fit between women's leadership styles and the tasks demanded of them in many areas of peace-building. As Angela King, Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women to the U.N., pointed out in relation to her work in South Africa:

The presence of women seems to be a potent ingredient in fostering and maintaining confidence and trust among the local population. In performing their tasks with their male colleagues, women were perceived to be more compassionate, less threatening or insistent on status, less willing to opt for force or confrontation over conciliation, even it is said less egocentric, more willing to listen and learn – though not always – and to contribute to an environment of stability which fostered the peace process.¹⁶

Questions of whether women are “natural” peace builders aside, the large pool out of which the delegates were chosen testifies to the fact that very large numbers of women in conflict areas are working for peace. The women whose accounts we collected work at different levels in a wide variety of areas. While the majority of them actively participate at the grassroots level, some work in local or national government, others write for major national newspapers and magazines, and still others work as academics, conduct policy advocacy and lobby governments. Their work includes the provision of services to those affected by conflict, as well as a variety of activities connected with peace activism. The overwhelming number of the delegates are working outside the traditional power structures where most decisions are made. The delegates united in demanding greater female participation in decision-making processes.

THREE LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

Following clues from the research on gender and leadership discussed above, we found many similarities among the women. Below, we have specified three lessons which may be learned from the approaches of these non-traditional leaders. The categories used here to describe the delegates' work are necessarily porous. An individual may focus on one area, or work in several areas simultaneously. The heterogeneity of their work reflects an implicit understanding of what it means to work for “peace” in divided societies. Peace involves everyone, not just a select few. It is an active process that demands that all members of society participate. Peace is more than a simple absence of war. No matter how effective or ineffective politicians are, peace cannot simply be organized and guaranteed from above.

I. "WOMEN ARE MORE THAN VICTIMS; THEY ARE HIGHLY MOTIVATED ACTIVISTS" (PATRICE KEEGAN, BOSTON DELEGATION)

Women in conflict situations are usually thought of in terms of the horrors inflicted on them. This perception—propagated in the press and perpetuated in international organizations, aid agencies and their ilk—is reinforced by practice, as victims are given short-term relief to alleviate their suffering. The result is self-fulfilling: the ability to respond actively and assertively is replaced by a dependency syndrome and hope of self-sufficiency is quashed.

"Victim-hood" can be understood in two ways: objectively, as in the case of a woman being the victim of a crime (such as robbery, rape, murder); and subjectively, as in the case of a woman who thinks of herself as a victim. Though many of the delegates at the Women Waging Peace conference have suffered, they do not possess a psychology of victim-hood. Rather, they comprise an extraordinary collection of capable, hard-working and industrious women, some of whom are driven by their past experiences. Their stories are clearly of active response to societal or personal misfortune and not of passive suffering.

In recounting their work, many of the delegates describe particular events in their lives that motivated them to act. Often their stories involve children. Awut Deng Acuil remembers the galvanizing moment during her time as a refugee living in Nairobi, when she was asked by her son, "Mummy, when will the war ever end?" Dollina Odera describes her turning point as witnessing the mass exodus of refugees from Rwanda and meeting one woman in particular who had chosen to kill her only surviving child rather than seeing her die slowly from starvation. The woman "muffled up the child, and since she had no tools she could not even give her a decent burial. All she could do was to wrap her in a piece of cloth and leave the body by the roadside." Anne Itto writes of herself:

I know what it means to be hungry, to fall sick and have no medicine. At the age of nine, I was displaced. My whole extended family became refugees in Uganda. After six months of living with no health care, people started dying from intestinal worms and anemia. During one month, eight of my family members died. My grandmother starved herself so she didn't have to see it any more.

My five-year-old sister – one of twins – died after being sick for six months. The night before she died, she had more energy – she wanted to tell stories together. My mother thought this was a bad omen, because people often gain energy just before they die. My mother feared my sister wouldn't live, but my sister said to my mother, "Don't cry, there are two of us!" As I grew up, I resented war. My sister didn't have to die. I determined if there was any way I could prevent war, I would do it. This has been my

drive: to save the living. I responded in the opposite way to my grandmother. I started thinking "What can I do?" I wouldn't want to see this happen again.

In a striking pattern, once they started working, the delegates continued to do so with enormous resolve and commitment despite many setbacks and frustrations. Rita Manchanda writes of her work with Pakistani women to secure the release of three Indian children from a Pakistani jail:

I cling to these small successes, when buffeted by the huge setbacks to the peace process as a result of the activities of the Indian and Pakistani governments to cut off their noses to spite each other. Every time I am overwhelmed with the sense that peace is a chimera, I tell myself, 'the process was never expected to be easy, and the backlash was predictable'.

With drive and dedication, many of the delegates work tremendously long hours with scarce resources. Some are formally employed in their peace building work. Others work on a voluntary basis, in addition to their many other commitments. Rebecca Joshua Okwaci balances full-time work for the East Africa Unit of the BBC monitoring service with the demands of motherhood. Yet her passion is her volunteer peace work, conducting workshops and writing for "The Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace" and for "The Initiative to Facilitate the Participation of Sudanese Women in the Peace Process." Awut Deng Acuil writes of her own work, "All of this was voluntary; nobody was paid. Sometimes we used our own money for transport to the meetings instead of buying something for our children."

The work the women take on receives little thanks. To the contrary, several of the delegates spoke of death threats, fear and isolation. Without formal authority, few resources exist for deflecting criticism. As Sevgul Uludag Erkut from Cyprus wrote:

Some of us were branded traitors. I personally suffered a lot because of this: I received many death threats because of my activities I lost my job many times, stayed unemployed for long periods. The "separatist" ideologues, dominant in power circles in the northern part of Cyprus, tried to degrade my work, attacked me through the media, tried to create suspicion around me in the community and created "myths" about me.

In summary, despite severe circumstances, enormous difficulties and often overwhelming challenges, these women exhibit intense focus, determination and dedication to the improvement of their societies. Whether reacting to personal tragedy, witnessing and responding to the hardship of others or trying to improve the world in which their children will grow up, the bottom line is

that these women do react with enormous determination and passion. As Manchanda described the two-week gathering: "It really has been such an eye-opener to listen and to appreciate the level of activism, the level of agency, the potential these women have—and the courage they have shown under extremely adverse circumstances." While many women give up those who persevere are highly motivated leaders who constitute a considerable force for potential change.

2. "CREATING SPACES IN WHICH PEOPLE CAN CHOOSE" (THE NORTHERN IRISH DELEGATION)

The delegates' commitment to action carries over to their basic mode of helping others. Central to Heifetz's concept of leadership is the notion of engaging others to make progress on their own problems, a concept that echoes throughout the delegates' descriptions of their own work. For example, Finola Hunt from Northern Ireland lists the principles of community development as "active participation, getting people involved, collective action, networking, coalition-building and empowering people." Indeed, the Northern Irish delegates refused to write up their stories individually. Instead, they worked on a joint submission where they defined a constituent part of leadership as "creating spaces in which people can choose to improve the quality of their lives together and in so doing maximize their resources."

These women do not see themselves as "providing services" to passive recipients. Instead, they view themselves as conduits—they help others help themselves. Similarly, Anne Itto eloquently describes communities in rural South Sudan:

They can plan if given the opportunity. They know what they want. Their own resources to provide for themselves and take charge of their lives are hidden and untapped. By not asking them what they need, we keep them dependent.

Leading without authority has both advantages and disadvantages. The women face hostility within their own communities. Their impact is limited as they must battle dominant currents of opinion. However, being outside the official structure provides space for creativity, an ability to focus on particular issues of passionate concern and information received directly from those on the front-line. There is powerful resonance in all three of these traits.

The extra creativity fostered by informal authority can be seen in a wide variety of examples. The Center for the Training of Young Women in Conflict Resolution and Journalism, based in Pristina, Kosovo, combines training in journalism with conflict resolution, so that as young women become reporters they bring balance and calm to their reporting. The Center stems from the work of two female journalists who eschewed the tension exacerbating sensationalism produced by their male colleagues.

Anis Haroon with The Women's Action Forum (WAF), brought together Pakistani women from different sides who had suffered from communal rioting. Reaching out to these traumatized women, who were fearful and distrustful of formal authority, required a creativity and adaptability usually impossible for governmental institutions to display. Instead, the organization worked through friends and relatives to persuade the women to take that first difficult step of talking about their suffering with women from supposedly "hostile" communities.

With the flexibility of being outside an official system, many of the delegates choose to work on narrowly-defined issues ranging from rape and other forms of gender violence in South Africa to psychological healing in Nagorno-Karabakh, or the provision of Internet access to humanitarian and human rights groups in Colombia. While concentrating on a single issue allows for more sharply focused attention and resources, it does not permit examination of the complexity of issues in society that those in positions of formal authority need to undertake. In contrast, other delegates work broadly, helping communities understand, grasp and tackle the problems they face, and the competing claims involved.

Some delegates work on the very issues that originally motivated their involvement in peace building. One example is Maria Contreras from Boston, who started her community activism with cookouts in her neighborhood to try to reclaim street corners from gangs. Unlike policymakers, who may be distant from such realities, many of the delegates have a very direct and real grasp of community-based issues. In myriad ways, at multiple levels and with varying mandates, these women lead. Truly, to quote the Northern Irish, "Leaders come in all shapes and forms."

3. "WEAKNESS THAT WE ASSUME TO BE A WOMAN'S CHARACTER IS IN FACT A STRENGTH, WHICH WE HAVE TO RECOGNIZE AND MOBILIZE." (SUMAYA FARHAT-NASER, PALESTINIAN DELEGATE)

Among the delegates, there are many examples of crossing conflict lines that are inspired, led and sustained by women. The Jerusalem Link is the most celebrated example in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but there are numerous others including the Cyprus Link, the Sudanese Women's Civil Society Network for Peace and the Dialogue of Women of Transcaucasus for Peace and Democracy. This is to say nothing of the numerous individuals who have started less institutionalized links. As one delegate from Bosnia stated in an interview,

The history of Bosnia-Herzegovina shows that women were actually the first ones who started the contacts between the two entities, between "us" and "them." Those kinds of things were really secret..., because it wasn't easy to say to your neighbors, to your family and to your colleague that you were on the other side and that you spoke with women.... But I guess there was something feminine within this story, because we were looking for

women who would be able to understand us, to whom we could tell... our truth and our life stories.

This connection between the nature of the work and the gender of the participants is striking. The societies from which the delegates come from are, to varying degrees, patriarchal. To be female, therefore, is often understood as a weakness rather than a strength. Sumaya Farhat-Naser, a Palestinian living in the West Bank and director of the Jerusalem Center for Women, argues that it is precisely because of these perceptions that Middle Eastern women are able to reach out to other communities in ways denied to men. The corollary is that the impact of their work will be limited. However, such a contradiction does not detract from the courage of those who do dare to reach out, often at great peril to themselves and their families. Moreover, the secrecy shrouding such activities, and the reactions they incur (such as arriving at work to find land mines under the desk), suggest that this work is perceived as deeply threatening to certain sections of society. Again, this power is a double-edged sword; the perceived threat both evokes strong resistance and implies that such work may have great potential for changing the system.

In this context, one can find leadership through inverting the value judgments placed upon gender roles and turning perceived weaknesses into strengths. Sumaya graphically describes an encounter with Israeli soldiers in which the assertive use of her feminine identity proved the key to deflecting violence. Looking out from her office window, she saw eight Israeli soldiers firing off their automatic weapons while a group of four young girls stood clutching each other in terror. She ran out, put her hand in the soldiers' faces, and commanded them to stop firing so that the girls could cross the intersection and go home. She led the girls across, then returned to tell the soldiers that they could resume firing if they so wished. They sheepishly withdrew. Her conclusion is simple: "They were irritated by the fact that a woman, a weak creature, dared to risk her life to rescue the children.... This weakness, which is assumed to be a woman's character, is perceived by us women as a strength, which we have to recognize and mobilize."

Similarly, Anne Itto from Sudan stresses women in conflict have long had a traditional role that should be built on rather than ignored. In her own words, "When we talk about conflict resolution, I think women should be given priority. Because, you know, traditionally they are the ones who can actually make a man take his spear and fight. And they can stand firm in front of a man and say, 'Look at your children. I can't raise them.' And very often, men will not go."

Clearly, if there are capacities for peace inherent in the gender roles normative in local communities, they must be developed and utilized fully. This is central to the leadership task of enabling communities to tackle their own problems. Still, there is a paradox here, and the logic is compelling: "When does capitalizing on women's strengths in peacemaking become perpetuating traditional sex role

stereotypes, stereotypes that rationalize domination and inequality, which are the roots of violent conflict?"¹⁷

The clear connections between gender stereotypes and the militarization of society¹⁸ demonstrate the danger of contributing to such gender images. However, the deliberate use of traditional gender roles may not necessarily end up reinforcing these stereotypes; rather, they may serve to challenge them, provided women are in the position to "own" the stereotypes, and are in the position to use them strategically to further their own objectives. There is a clear distinction to be made between the image one projects, and the paradoxical context in which that image is projected. Although traditional female roles include "softness" and "nurturing" characteristics, Sumaya used her femaleness with a strength and determination, which is more often and more easily associated with masculinity. Indeed, this use of gender stereotypes may be part of constructing the very "informal authority" many women require to be effective.

Perhaps this is a more subtle side of "women's liberation," the power of women assuming ownership of stereotypes, and using them to their advantage. Though somewhat controversial, women can challenge the very stereotypes of dominance and inequality and make effective changes.

CONCLUSION

Even as the delegates' work demands that traditional understandings of leadership be challenged to include leadership without authority in areas that have traditionally gone underexposed and under-investigated, they also demand a reconfiguration of the concept and achievement of security. Security is transient when it rests on building up defenses. More lasting security relies on building sustainable relationships with actual and potential adversaries. As our lives become increasingly interdependent, both across and within societies, we are no longer safe in our isolation. We defend against the outside world, whether building castles or constructing massive, and increasingly sophisticated, armies. As Rita Manchanda writes regarding the Pakistan/India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy, "The task is truly a revolutionary one: to redefine the relationship, to impress upon governments that true security lies in good governance and development, and not in conventional and nuclear weapons."

Similarly, the delegates' work demands that we re-conceptualize the notion of peace as an active process, not a simple absence of war. The delegates are forceful on the point that the key to peace is co-existence, and that war is no solution. Tanya Gallagher of Northern Ireland put it this way: "We cannot exist separately. We have got to find ways in which we can inter-depend that respect with our rights of diversity and our traditions, but that guarantee us all equity." Peace

demands full participation by all members of society, not simply by politicians. Moreover, peace requires an absence of gender-based violence.

Finally, similar considerations apply to "democracy." Democratic governance is not simply guaranteed by elections. It rests on full civic participation and on the wide variety of issues that concern the populace. Communities that are marginalized have important roles to play in democracies; hence, for instance, the presence of delegates concerned with disability rights and advocates for children alongside those concerned with conflict transformation. The delegates' roles in bringing about security, peace and democracy in their own countries are highly important as they work on issues dear to their hearts. They are highly motivated and active. They empower people to find creative solutions to their own problems, working with those who lack power and with marginalized constituencies and bringing issues to the fore that would otherwise be ignored. Moreover, they do their work in ways that capitalize on whatever comparative advantages their gender may give them. Thus, they play a crucial role in the creation of democracy.

These women often work in life-threatening ways, at odds with people in their own communities. They work with enormous creativity and flexibility, unconstrained by some of the limitations that accompany formal power and authority. In some cases, their gender can work to their advantage; in others, it works against them. How much impact the women have is situational, and cannot be deduced a priori. However, these are highly dedicated and hard-working women, whose impact could be considerably magnified with greater resources, institutional support and funding. Yet, precisely because they lack the formal authority of high office, on which most people focus, policymakers, the media, academia and funders often neglect peace building women and their vital work. That disregard comes at a tragic cost, for in these women we find seeds of hope, sometimes startlingly successful, sometimes not, but always persistent and focused on the greatest of all goals: peace. ■

NOTES

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