

As Mulheres, a Cidadania e a Sociedade Activa

Eng^a Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro



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I - A woman's perspective about this Congress

The first event is the public recognition and the possible contribution within the space of the European Union of the "women's studies" or "feminist studies".

When the women's studies started in USA, they acknowledged the invisibility of women in social life and its link with the absence of women in research at the academic life. The voice of women, when heard, did nothing else but to reinforce the dominant discourse. The women's studies intended to follow new methodologies, to open new paths and formulate new proposals in different fields of knowledge.

In the European space, the women studies can be this "something that has happened" if they follow consistently the initial vision, in the interdependence of reflection and action. Moreover, they appear as the most obvious case which confirms the intuition of Schrödinger, who, contrarily to some of the Physics scientists of his time (and even of today) questioned the pure objectivity by stating that "in all observation of an object, the subject is also conveyed in that observation".

The theme that gathers us in this Congress cannot therefore ignore, from one side, the concrete conditions of the object, namely, the content and the compelling need for reinforcement of the citizenship in Europe and, from the other side, the position of the subject, namely the women in the multiple interfaces so well suggested in the very title of the Congress: bonds that change, boundaries that are displaced, leading to a mobility that manifests itself through diverse and unusual forms.

We are dealing then with two distinctive bodies of thought, two new realities. I contend that their interaction opens a window of opportunity for a change affecting both the European Union and the women. There is a synergy which leads me to the conviction that in the building of Europe as a polity, women can contribute to accelerate the process in the dynamic way that recent events so clearly ask for.

The central question becomes then to find out where are the entry points, the openings of the European construction and to invent the ways by which the conceptual new frames brought by women may insert themselves there.

I stress again that this is not a process of parallel findings. If as Doris Lessing says in her Golden Notebook, "it is possible to measure the world by describing the life of a woman", I believe then that the analysis of the lives of women can indeed become a source of new measures of the world and for the world, of new measures for the reform of the European Union.

I am pleading here for a new approach to study and research. I share the theoretical position of Lou Andreas-Salome who has put it clearly long ago in her "open letter to Freud":

"the theoretical questioning is the one that springs forth from the work, from the path of a human life and which, when it has weight in society, brings change and movement in other human lives."



II - The citizenship of women in Europe - a new path

A fierce battle is taking place in Europe: the enlargement of the concept of citizenship as a condition for a truly democratic Union and an indispensable dimension of the European Union with a real status of a political entity.

The European Parliament and the European Commission have made serious efforts to include in the revision of the Maastricht Treaty the civic and social rights. The idea was to build the embryo of a Bill of Rights to be discussed, scrutinized and decided upon by all Europeans. But the Amsterdam Summit made only a small step. It included the Charter of Social Rights of Workers and the Social Protocol in the Treaty. It enlarged the Schengen agreement to 12 Member-States.

How far away this was from what I heard in many national Conferences of NGO's, trade-unions, academics, in 13 of the 15 Member-States! I found there a strong will to go beyond barriers and to build a European Union capable to help, through its political unity, to free the world from the unipolar trend that is increasing since the end of the Cold War. Only such a Union could, in the views of these thousands of Europeans and NGO's I heard, help to build a multipolar world, shaped by the diversity of cultures and civilizations.

Thus, the small steps taken in Amsterdam didn't change the profile of the European citizenship, consisting of: freedom of movement; vote for the European Parliament; vote for local bodies when living for 5 years in a given municipality outside of one's own country; protection from the Embassy of any Member-State when in the territory of a third country.

Indeed, as Habermas notes, "the European passport is not yet associated to the rights which constitute democratic citizenship".

I see it more of a symbol of what should be and is not there yet than the sign of what exists already.

This is why the civic and social rights that shape true democratic citizenship are the most pressing demand of the European peoples.

Three weeks ago the Foundation of Social Scientists of Europe gathered in Amsterdam stated vigorously:

"the Union whose citizenship does not encompass social rights cannot have our support"

They produced concepts that overcome the fallacy of mere "quantity" that characterized policies of past decades. It is true that a critical mass is necessary for those who are deprived of basic rights and only that critical mass can unleash the quality of life they deserve as human beings.

At the same time, there is in the sequence of human values and goals, a precedence of quality over quantity. The goal of introducing social rights in the Treaties of the European Union will raise the social from a mere correction of or adjustment to

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the hazards of economics to the level where it should stand: a category of thought, policy and action bound to life and to the right for everyone to lead a life worth living.

I am not referring only to the many who are utterly destituted, unemployed, homeless. I am thinking also of the unmet needs of the overstressed manual workers and of their executives, of the young without horizon, of the old being easily disposed of, of the impossible dual task of the generation of women between 25 and 45, coming out of the care for their children just to face a life of care for their elder relatives.

Citizen's rights are needed for millions of Europeans to face with dignity, hope and joy their lives. But the old concept of rights was an abstract one, which presumed as its subject a man, of course white, in good health and able to defend himself in all situations.

In the last years, our societies in Europe are discovering that their composition is diversified and that every individual human being is at the same time a subject of rights and of vulnerabilities. The more vulnerable we are the more our rights have to be safeguarded. It is the role of the State to ensure that protection, promotion and safeguard are there, whatever the agents may be in different societies with different cultural traditions. In this regard, citizenship in the European Union can not lag behind.

And the women?

It seems, at first sight, that there is no distinction between men's and women's citizenship, understood in the very limited sense spelt out in the Treaties.

I don't need to elaborate much on this aspect, so well known are the discriminations to which women are subject (with the acknowledged exceptions of Nordic countries). Given the weak powers of the European Parliament, the number of women in European Parliament doesn't change much to the analysis.

But the other rights? Food, education, health, housing, social protection, good environment? There we find a paradoxical situation. The safeguard of these rights (not envisaged then as rights) have been seen through the ages as duties to be fulfilled by women.

Is this outdated? By no means. If it is possible today to have a meeting of the European Council who is unable to mobilize itself towards the inclusion of social rights in the Treaties (accepting the ditat of one Member-State), it is because the social contract is still built on the implicit sexual contract by which all the tasks needed for the exercise of those rights are accomplished by women.

Am I putting women in the place of victims?

Yes, in so far as this constitutes the heavy burden of most women.



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No, if I look into the future.

What I am trying also to stress is the implicit recognition that women have an aptitude to exercise in the future a multiple citizenship and to be today the main activists for a citizenship that will encompass all human rights.

This aptitude is the fruit of their history as a social group. There we can find the driving forces for their economic, social and cultural mobility and their meaning for the most needed quantum leap towards a true citizenship of all who live in the European territory.

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III - Economic and social mobility of women

Something has happened, I said in the beginning. Another very important thing happened: the economic and social mobility of women is one of the main events of the XX century. It produces a cultural earthquake in the social contract.

Though women started entering the labour force during the beginning of industrialization, it is in the second half of this century that their presence, step after step, is felt in the labour market. Today, in several Member-States of the European Union they represent almost half of the labour force - in my country they are 48%.

The increase of paid work fulfilled by women is a fact that, leading to their economic independence, induces radical changes in other spheres of society. It is the marriage or non-marriage, the age at which it takes place, the composition and the very concept of family, the number and spacing of children, the growing need for community equipment to replace many of the tasks done until then by the women at home. All this happens within a short time-span. It cannot be reduced to ethical questions neither to demographic factors acting, as it were, per se.

In the earthquake that shake the social contract one of the first questions to be dealt with is the redefinition of work.

A redefinition in the very contents of work - it is necessary to get away from the binary equations belonging to the beginning of industrialization, mainly the one who was at the root of the Cold War: capital/labour. Berlin's wall didn't fall on this side.

Today production is encapsulated by the information and technology, by the terciarization of all processes, by the marketing and its overwhelming publicity. In such a context, it is **absurd, scientifically wrong and ethically unacceptable** that every time there is an economic difficulty in an enterprise, only labour will be penalized.

The presence of women in the economic life cannot translate itself only in adding more numbers to the street demonstrations. It is up to women, as a group, to force the attention on the new factors of the production schemes and to work out the necessary alternatives.

Moreover, work has to be seen in practice (in research it is already so) as a continuum, a wide gamut of activities ranging from non-paid work to the traditional full-time employment. It covers all activities which bring benefits both to the individual and to society.

But in order to think work in such a way, we need to enter into the active society. Some basic ingredients are needed:

- the corridors by which different forms of work can be used by individuals without losing a basic income;
- the working out of those corridors as "transitional labour markets" (as defined by Günter Schmidt, from Max Planck Institute in Berlin);



- the inventory of the tasks fulfilled invisibly in society (e. g. care for old people);
- the replacement of the unemployment allowance by pro-active allowances in fields where labour is short;
- the inflection of education and the over-coming of hyper-specialization by the concentration on the learning of "transferable skills and talents" and the adequate learning corresponding to different periods of the life-cycle;
- the abandonment of the sequence of learning-employment-retirement in favour of a more dynamic, creative and enjoyable perspective of the human life-span.

We are then at the heart of social cohesion, within the society of each Member-State and among the societies of all Member-States, that is, at the level of the European Union itself.

Collective security at the social level is a task of research and of political action which we are far from being accomplished. And yet, one of the remarks to make to the praise given by President Clinton to the "global economy" is the strong affirmation that we need global mechanisms to manage global economy. At the basis of the necessary vision is the need to raise world social and economic security to, at least, an equal level with military and territorial security (making the Security Council able to deal with those huge threats to peace in so many regions of the world).

Social cohesion should stand out in the women's agenda. Not only has it been affirmed, though with other words, in the UN Conferences of the first half of the 90's, but it is asked in our region by the astounding figures of poverty and utter destitution. In all big cities of Europe I have heard reference to those who are not only jobless but even homeless and sleep in the streets. The figures must be repeated loud and clear so that everybody may feel compelled to face the challenge. 17% of poor in the European Union, to which no country escapes: 6% in Denmark, 11% in Germany, 17% in France and - I say it with shame and rage - 25% in my own country and also in the UK.

Such figures are unacceptable. They are not, however, exclusively the responsibility of the politicians. They are the result of the pruned global economy and of the indifference and neglect of those who should actively claim their own capacity to be full citizens and responsible social partners in all matters affecting the basic civic and social rights of people. It is time for Europeans to be mobilized against this flagrant violation of human rights.



IV - Cultural mobility

By their economic mobility and the double task that they have to carry, women in the European Union are faced with the dialectical interplay, source of suffering and of difficult solutions, between the immediate and urgent - the sickness of a relative, the need for taking care of a child, a moment that may never come again - and the vision, plan, dream for the field institution in which they work.

They bring with them, in their unique experience, the living contradiction of the short-term and the long-term, one of the most difficult, if not the most difficult problem of governance of our time.

It is impossible to cope with the problems of today without a vision of the long-term, demanded by the change of civilization with which we enter the III millenium.

This is particularly true with the short-term decision-making concerning the European Union. Political decisions concern the management of the short-term. In the European Union the short-term is indeed very short. As the European Council has the final decision-making power, we are, in fact, dealing with periods of 6 months leadership. (Thus the attempts to start with its preparation or to give an outward appearance of a long-standing exercise of power.)

But indeed, how can a country in the presidency of the European Council, looking at the long-term and its consequences (the enlargment of the European Union and the global economy), say what is obvious in such a perspective: we have to change, "more of the same won't do"?

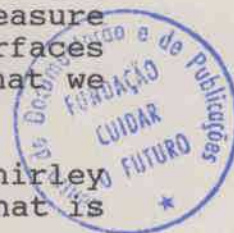
The short-term is doomed to fail if it doesn't follow already now the logics demanded by a vision of the long-term.

The governance of contemporary society, and particularly of the European Union, asks for two types of actors. While the short-term asks for the immediate answer of the political decision-makers, the long-term asks for the research, the innovation worked out by those whose task is "to think".

Today, the balance between these two dimensions is at the heart of any political activity. Their interplay gives the measure of the vision of both groups. It is in these different interfaces of different actors, working within different timeframes that we can find the solutions for equity and fairness to all.

In a letter to me, my colleague and friend Baroness Shirley Williams, from the House of the Lords, states very clearly what is there to be done in this regard.

"There is some recognition of the importance of NGO's and research networks by the Commission, and in particular by DG.5. But a formal recognition of the NGO's as a social partners entitled to be consulted about proposed Community social legislation, and to be involved in its implementation, is not yet accepted by the Council of Ministers, or by some of the Commission's directorates. The idea that NGO's and research networks should be consulted in key areas like economic and monetary policy is still regarded as unacceptably



radical, though a number of NGO's pleaded at the conferences that they should be heard on such matters too. However, in certain member-states, the partnership status of NGO's and research networks is beginning to be promoted. Examples of local partnerships administering structural funds, or special funds like the Irish Peace Initiative, can be found in Scandinavia and in both parts of Ireland, South and North. We need continuing activities to establish the NGO's and research networks as social partners, co-ordinated with one another."

No doubt that the system has to be changed in its very premisses.

It is clear now for all those involved that environmental questions cannot be solved at the national level. And yet the leaders of the European Union have accepted to participate in the II Earth Summit without being able, at least, to maintain the commitments they had taken with Agenda 21 in Rio and even earlier, in what concerns emissions of CO₂, in the Hague Conference convened by Rocard in 89. Here we have to recognise that "something did not happen".

The question of work for all is similar to the question of the environment. None of our countries alone can face the globalisation of the economy. But regionally, as European Union, we can. We have the human and the material resources - the biggest population, the greatest Gross Product, the biggest market. Different possible solutions have been proposed. They encompass basically sharing work, sharing time, sharing profit. If one country, however rich it may be, does it alone, it will be crushed by competitiveness. But if the European Union takes a bold step together in this direction it is likely that we may solve the problem, and remain competitive.

To move into this direction, a capacity to change from well-known terms of reference to still fluid ones is a daring gesture. But isn't cultural mobility exactly that gesture? And isn't this fluidity part of women's experience?

I think, in terms of the problems we are dealing with here of a Wangari Mathai from Kenya, of Vandana Shiva, from India, who certainly made things move in the understanding of the environmental dimension of economics. More boldly even Marilyn Aitken, from New Zealand, challenged the way national accounts are made, leaving in total invisibility unpaid work done by women. And what to say of Hazel Henderson who having been a member of the Committee for Technology Assesement at the American Congress went on developing elements for "economic paradigms in progress"? They - and women who thought, spoke and wrote like them - were laughed about, listened to complacently... Today, more than 300 economists from all over Europe state the "social factor" of economics, affirming that economics cannot be limited to its financial indicators but stressing that economics involve today "growth, work, social protection, environment", all that is, in short, called the social factor within economics itself. Indeed, with the work of that kind of women "something has happened"...



V - What is still to happen then?

I am committed to the women's movement because I believe that we can make things happen. Sometimes not in the place where we had intended them to happen; very often not immediately but still within our life-time.

We need "a politics of action defined as a production of meaning of our personal life".

We can exercise full citizenship if we put into motion two convictions.

The conviction that, however modest, our capacity of cultural creativity is enhanced by the mobility that makes us encompass always new worlds and be surprised by new questions.

Second, the conviction that the multiple exercise of our diverse solidarities is the best antidote to the role of spectator, even of scholarly analyst. There is laid open the path to simple and modest commitments as actors.

It is upon such attitudes that the European Union can be built, a polity whose configuration we don't know yet but one that we will help to shape by being open, active, committed citizens.

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