

An Agenda for the 90s'



Do I dare to speak about an agenda for the 90s'? Do I dare to establish priorities, to single out trends and ideas?

Yes, I do. Because there is for me "a need and an urgency to anchor myself at this decisive moment of History, where my own personal history is unfolding itself".

Anchored in History - that is for me the existential reality in which I recognize myself as part of the movement of ideas and initiatives that we call The Grail.

It was that same need and urgency that had led me in April 1957 to recognize in the Grail my path through history. Then in the Summer of that year I visited (briefly) Grailville just to find an alive picture of what I had sensed in words.

The basic assumption of what I am going to say tonight is the unfolding of that initial vision: *personal and communal history interwoven with the big History, its movements, and demands.*

1. An era of complexity

Paradoxically, in order to establish an agenda for the 90s, I start with the first feature of our time: its unpredictability.

The world is alive with millions of systems - following their own logic, autonomous and yet in close relation and interdependence

with each other. Everything is interconnected with everything else. It is the era of complexity, at the same time, attractive and scaring.

Attractive because we see the reasons for deep intuitions concerning the mystery of life present in all things and events - we call them holistic.

We can acknowledge the value of a circular way of thinking - we run away from linear thinking.

And yet this era encompasses other trends that become scaring for some people.

We deal with uncertainty, that is, with the fact that events are probable, never hundred percent sure nor guaranteed.

We see ourselves and the world taken up in periods of turbulence of sudden movements agitating society in unexpected ways.

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We see that we are beyond the dialectic way of perceiving reality;

in opposition to "yes/no" of the computer's language we rediscover ambiguity as the coexistence not only of contradictory elements but also of all the shades that colour them.

- Complexity permeates the message people receive about the world they live in. As a message it may awaken fear, desire for over-simplification, stress of what is particular and not so vastly all-embracing.



For those who fear complexity there is often the trend to fall back on what they call "the essentials" or to shrink back to what they consider their values or their tradition.

There they are, the roots of all fundamentalism - escaping from history in its complexity.

The wave of fundamentalism now sweeping through the world is a threatening element as it divides the world and creates new antagonisms to replace the worn-out ideological battle. (Name of Saddam shouted in the whole Arab world and - for the first time in modern times - in the whole Islamic world, from Pakistan to Indonesia).

As Garaudy has demonstrated in a recent book, this kind of integrism finds its explanation in History and in the attitude of the Western world.

Fundamentalism cannot be reduced to political manifestations.

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The analysis of the ingredients that lead to fundamentalism as an escape from complexity is a most pertinent task for the years ahead.

Thus the agenda for the 90s opens up with this concern:

to face complexity, to dig into the intellectual problematic it entails (Jackie: regardless of what social class you feel you belong), to try to understand ourselves, society and History as complex systems and realities.

It is my assumption that women are bearers of complexity and, therefore, able to handle and to manage it.



This is not because of some innate qualities but rather because of the consequences of their own situation:

- having to deal with opposing duties and demands, divided between the laws of the public and of the private, asked to follow the logics of the industrial society and of the labour market, women have developed an attitude of ambiguity where the either/or has been replaced by the not only/but also;
- moreover they are asked to live in a situation of multi-functionality where the coexistence of many different activities and concerns expresses the complexity of daily life (women of South Korea keeping society together in spite of lack of fundamental rights). They may seem scattered in their numberless activities and yet they are the knot, the centre in a thousand processes.

Million of atoms dancing ...

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2. Global interdependence

At the world level, and as an expression of complexity, we have already entered a new era/new civilization of interdependence.

(Of course, during the Cold War decades, there was a specific type of political interdependence - the two blocks, maintained through the deterrent theory, were interdependent. But, let us be honest and say that the rest of the world was dependent of the moves of the two military superpowers.)

Today we are facing a new type of interdependence - it links peoples to each other in all aspects of human life and activity.

The management of this interdependence raises new problems.

As the Council of Former Heads of Government stated a few months ago:

"it asks for new instruments; a new definition of the relationship between national/world interests; and new forms of leadership."

A key question here is the relationship between national and world interests.

What do I mean?

I could speak of

- the monetary connection among all currencies or the globalization of the financial markets;
- the damage done to the environment in the Amazonia and felt in the whole world;
- the claim for a more integrated approach in the defence of human rights;

but I want to stress the change undergone by the very notion of nation/sovereignty.

Yesterday, when Janet and Audrey spoke about different programmes of the Grail here, they didn't mention one programme that I consider absolutely prophetic: "a world without boundaries".

All of us, at one point or another, have in our history considered the world without boundaries at the level of values.



It is time now to look at it in the incarnated/historical reality. National sovereignty has ceased to be untouchable.

It can be delegated - as by treaties, resolutions, membership in international organizations.

It can also be shared and enlarged.

Every time decisions are taken which concern peace and war, environment, interest rates or external debts, it is not only an individual country that is at stake: a whole group of countries (NATO, EEC, CSCE) or the whole world are affected. If we want to carry through the non-imperialistic attitude, we have to work towards a less "nationalistic" world. Whatever the size and the economic or military power, each country has the right and the obligation to express its view.

To say "solidarity" today is to accept that part of our national sovereignty is put into the hands of others; it is to accept that others have a right "to observe" our own national affairs and comment upon them. (The right to humanitarian aid is already the acceptance that boundaries are broken in special circumstances, that we are all stewards of this world where we live.)

To express this global interdependence asks for a leadership capable of going beyond national boundaries. The political goals have to go beyond the crisis management in order to reach long-term vision.

Such a vision cannot be concocted solely by those who have political power. It should represent a vision of the people. It is only when the individuals participate in the formation of a national will

that the factual interdependence may change into a desired solidarity.

I take as a basic assumption that the women's movement being the most international of all social movements, it is up to all of us to build this solidary world, to go beyond our national limitations. For the Grail, this is a fantastic challenge. (Young people go in this direction - Taizé).

The global interdependence in the political sphere expresses itself in the new fact that democracy is being sought by most countries.

The Eastern European countries were the first to struggle and to conquer their democracies.

But because economic aid would be granted only if they had democratic institutions, very soon the African countries felt that democracy would also be imposed to them.

This democratic imposition is known as "political conditionality" (a State of law, free elections, respect of human rights, multipartism).

We are facing a dilemma. The Central and Eastern European countries (as well as some African countries) are searching desperately for a democratic formula based on the only model existing so far, the Western one.

At the same time, in the Western countries, democracy is under serious questioning.

(Members of Parliament withdrawing; many parliaments seem to exist only to confirm decisions of the Administration.)



Most citizens feel that politics is far away from them, and abstain more and more from voting, the sole act of their democratic power. There is growing discredit about the political class and about politics as such.

The political class should represent the people. Instead, it "sells" its products, some times only its image.

The media play a negative mediation, being as they are in the hands of those who have power. (Otherwise how to explain the unanimity between the press and those who decided about the war in the Gulf?)

Opinion polls have led a European Prime Minister to say that legitimation comes from popular opinion rather than from votes ...

The participation of citizens in democratic life must become a priority around the globe.

If women want to cut across boundaries, if they know what it is to belong to the culture of silence, and if they want to give a voice to everyone, they have a task which involves all of them.

3. Economy at the service of humankind

In this new world order taking shape before us, there is now only one system: we are before a market economy at the world scale.

The powers that controlled the whole world remain as they were. The triad USA/Japan/Europe goes on leading the world.



Economies in Central Europe try to match "the market economy while the capitalist/liberalist market economy in the West is heading towards catastrophe".

The market economy is clearly defined by OECD:

"The ideological economy of all OECD countries is based on the deregulation of the State so as to allow the natural condition of the market to function".

Economies has invaded all the space of reality. So much so that we start the 90s' with the economical concept of "structural adjustment" having replaced smoothly the concept of "project of society" or "social change".

Structural adjustment defines itself as "the set of transformations which allow the balanced functioning of **economy**". It cannot be clearer: the economy is the summit of all social processes. - Society as a mix of inter-personal and inter-institutional processes is replaced by the accumulation of economic acts.

But market economy, which only deals with what can be expressed in money, is blind: it does not see "environment", "poverty", "women".

Again, women can become major social actors in working through the shortcomings of market economy and in trying to find its regulatory mechanisms.

Because two major questions have women as decisive subjects or actors.

One is the relation between consumption patterns/economic growth. This is a key question in the developed countries.



In order to reduce pollution, and to save energy, consumption patterns have to change. But how? It is not an individual moral discourse we are looking for - it is a way for the economy to function not under the pressure of production but under new choices in consumption. However this cannot happen by reducing economic growth - how to combine both ? (story of four names !!!).

Role of women as the main actors of consumption.

Liberalism of the market economy implies flexibility in the labour market: anticipated retirement, variable hours of work, fewer legislative constraints.

Again, women are the most interested in the flexibility of the labour market. Because its negative consequences. But also because of its potential as a means for a better quality of life: another balance between paid work and other occupation, possibility of different occupations at different stages of one's life cycle, etc.

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- While there seems to be so many hopes and urgencies in the extension of the labour market economy, we are facing an increasing international disorder.

What do I mean by that?

- a growing misery of the South hemisphere (300 millions starving in Africa, 170 millions unable to make a gesture to get food);
- the disengagement of institutions which traditionally came to aid (e.g. did not increase its development aid to South this year), for some even a de-linking process;



- the discouragement of people and leaders in the South in front of the self-centeredness of Europe and USA: it is clear that a new continent of under-development has opened up with the fall of the communist regimes, getting the full attention of Europe as well as of the USA.

4. Nature: a new social actor

Two centuries of uncontrolled industrialization and an overwhelming growth of world population led to a situation that seems already irreversible. Forests are disappearing (by excess or shortage of technology), the soils have lost their generative power, water is becoming a rare good. Nature has been violated by men. An like a living giant organism it is in full rebellion: acid rains, desertification, greenhouse effect, climate warming.

Nature says "no". In such a loud voice that politicians have to listen to it. As in past civilizations, nature in its mystery became sacralysed, now in its nakedness it becomes politicized.

As a social actor, nature evokes three main concerns:

- First, to speak of nature as a new social actor does imply that the principle introduced in some international agreements "the one who pollutes is the one who pays" is very short-sighted. Because the accidents with that social actor are impossible to be compensated.

It is my conviction that no public policy can take place nowadays without taking fully into account this new factor:



- it determines where highways and railways shall cross the country, the speed at which they can run;
- it leads to the preferential choice of means of transportation;
- poses conditions of industrial control;
- intervenes in the regulation of the urban space.

But how to do it if the market economy has no regulatory systems?

- Second, it raises basic questions about the path of industrialization process we have followed. Let me give the most crying example:
 - we know that we should not be using fossile fuels because of the CO₂ emissions and the climate warming;
 - we also want under-developed countries to get out of their poverty.

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Well, China needs energy to produce basic goods; it has coal; it is going to build 200 coal-based power stations. The amount of CO₂ emissions will make tremendous damage. How to get out of such a dilemma?

- It raises also the questions about national accounts systems. How do we internalize the costs of the damage done? If we find a honest way, can we say that everything is allowed?



A new paradigm in the relation with nature: a sense of limits: there is no endless "progress"; human conscience and ethics are asked to say where the limits are.

Which are the women's assets:

- the old bias of equating women/nature transformed into a re...dication by women of the rights of nature;
- influence on cultural patterns and life styles as a way of guaranteeing life-support systems.

5. Science/Technology

Underlying all problems of today, there is the paradigm of science and technology.

In the modern times, it is based on several assumptions:

- science is universal,
- technology is (treated as) a commercial good,
- both are led by the ideology of "progress" as an ultimate good of humankind,
- all resources needed should be available - hence the earth's exploitation.

Competition in technology is the strongest of all. Though directly derived from and intertwined with science, technology is not universal. It is subject to property rights.

How is this possible? Is knowledge not a universal good?

Hence the camouflage of language, namely the so called "transfer of technologies" which is a mere act of buying and selling. What happens is that which is sold to the South hemisphere is already obsolete and useless in the North?

(We all are ready to use the latest technology - we have to be aware of the destiny of the old.)

I would like to single out two fundamental problems:

- new technologies,
- energy.

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The new technologies are the vehicle through which a new type of civilization is emerging. They may be the means through which a new manipulation of people can occur. But they can also become an instrument for a new form of organization of work and a new instrument of social justice.

At every stage it is the shape of the new civilization that is at work.

Energy conservation/efficiency are talked and written about everywhere. But new sources of energy are still to be found. (Solar energy (photovoltaic), nuclear fusion, geothermics, are not yet in mass production condition.)



"Manhattan project" (difficulty to get it supported because of competition ...)

Women have a specific relationship to knowledge and to objects. This becomes explicit in the way they relate to science and technology.

I expect women to be carriers of new modes of knowledge;
of a new ethics of science;
of the conditions for technology to evolve and to be at the service of humankind.

I expect women to see science as part of culture and to put science and technology controlled by the supreme values of life.

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6. Population dynamics and human welfare

The last point in my agenda for the 90s concerns population dynamics and human welfare.

- 1) We are now 5.2 billions
In 2000 6.0 billions.

The earth cannot go beyond 8 to 10 billion people.

Hence a greater articulation of the nexus

population/environment/development

This will provide the context and conditions for large scale family planning policy and its implementation.

- 2) Women as decisive subjects in the evaluation and determination of new reproductive technologies - guarantees for human life in all its forms (Environment).
- 3) End of welfare state and need for new mechanisms capable of providing security for individuals.
- 4) Huge migrations and social unrest linked with such massive movements because the rich countries are too short-sighted and seem unable to give the official Development Aid necessary to get the developing countries out of their misery.

Women are arriving at the end of the century having gained access to all human activities. Of course the struggle for access has still to go on, as discrimination, invisibility, are still on their way.

But we cannot stop at the right of access. There is the danger of a new inequality - the one which is mere repetition of the same.

From objects of laws (protectionist or egalitarian) wome have to become subjects of History.

To do away with the victim syndrom. Into the assertive attitude of the one who is unfolding her destiny.



Because of their massive coming of age in an era of complexity with its multiple foci, women can become decisive social actors to help to shape the new civilization.

This is not rhetoric. It is a conviction, strengthened by hope.

Time is short. In ten years it will be too late. What is changing is changing now. After times of restructuring, of revolution, history brings periods where stability seems to become the only goal. (Portugal).

So the years ahead are decisive.

Together, it is essential

- . that we become able to let our own women's culture to come to the surface;
- . that we reinforce in each other the expression of the women's culture; *Fundação Cuidar o Futuro*
- . that we find new forms for that culture to evoke their inmost being in the women of younger generations;
- . to sparkle that same enthusiasm and commitment we heard about here.

Personally, we cannot depart from the deep labour in and about ourselves. No attempt to carry on any agenda in the 90s will succeed without that work done within ourselves. It is a voyage to our center, the only path through which time and eternity become one.

Maybe then, having accomplished our share, we can say with Marguerite Yourcenar:





"I have the impression of being an instrument through which currents and vibrations went.
And this is true for all my books and I would even say for my entire life.
Maybe for everybody's life;
and the best among us are probably also nothing else but crystals
through which currents went.

Everything comes from far away and goes much further than we are going.
In other words,
everything goes above us and we feel humble and amazed for being so pierced by currents which go through us and further than we go."

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Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo

The Grail, 1990

