

"Leadership in the political world"

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Leadership in the political world



Introduction

The question of "leadership" has become, after several elections in the last years, a most fundamental issue.

In the past two weeks, several events - from Pakistan to USA, from Germany to USSR - have evoked many diversified comments on leadership. And have somehow thrown a clear light on its main components.

1) In Germany, regardless of the Jenninger's weak mastering of the oral speech, what is basically the question is the capacity of a leader to touch in acceptable terms the past history of a group. Is a leader there then only to claim the beautiful legends? How can a group, an institution, a people take the present in their hands and prevent past mistakes to repeat themselves if they don't dwell long enough on the reasons behind such mistakes?

2) In USSR, it is obvious that the situation in the Baltic nations is a most dangerous one for the government. But, in fact, it is not there that the Soviet government has to act more carefully. It is the way in which the Azerys, the Armenians (who have nowhere to go and whose hope for a solution rests with Moscow) will see their problems tackled that will decide the final outcome for the Baltic nations. In such a situation, leadership has to be exercised through a continuous dialogue, using the interplay between total openness and firm holding on the situation.

3) In USA we have all seen and read the emptiness of the presidential campaign. Very consciously, both candidates were

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holding back the truth. So much so that it is clear now what President elected Bush thought of some basic issues (twin deficits) about which he didn't whisper a word during the campaign.



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1. The context of leadership - a world of complexity

Looking at the world picture, we are sure to come to some basic ingredients seen both as threats and challenges of our time. There is some kind of consensus in the last years of this decade about such issues (arms race, economic disorder, demographic growth/deterioration of environment).

The generalized awareness of the nuclear threat has led to a popular support of the arms reduction, particularly of the 3 percent of the nuclear weaponry included in the medium-range nuclear missiles agreement.

This has opened the way to the arms talks about conventional weapons as well as about other nuclear weapons. At the same time a question has emerged: will Europe become a denuclearized zone at the mercy of the two super-powers?

- The energy question (the most clear case for the peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology) seems at first to be equally solved, as Chernobyl and Three-Mile Islands have shown the dangers.

But another great threat is clouding mankind's future. The environment - the human life-support systems - is under a tremendous attack, which may lead to such drastic changes that major disasters will be in sight. The disappearance of the forests (both boreal and tropical) are to a large extent connected with energy. The acid rains which destroy boreal forest are due partly to the combustion of fossile fuels. The destruction of the tropical forest (apart from the criminal exploitation of precious timber) is to a great extent a result of the human needs for fuel to cook and to heat.

In most international discussions, besides the obvious recommendations for good management of natural resources, it is becoming more and more clear that a major subsidiary source of energy is needed. And the argument goes as saying: so far, the only possibility is the use of nuclear energy!



This is but one example of the intricacies and the extreme complexity of the contemporary issues.

We could multiply the examples, adding to their intrinsic contradictions the almost incompatible levels at which goals are defined and decisions are made. For instance, even putting aside any moral consideration, the question of stopping the demographic growth as "a condition for development" leads to strange things such as: can you tell an African to stop at one child because the GNP must grow so that development can take place???

- These are the issues, intertwined, highly complex, demanding the mastering of many different factors.

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Because the situation is so threatening and has so few possibilities to answer to it in a rational way, there is no doubt that most leaders "cannot cope with it". They don't know it. If they know, they don't want to acknowledge it. If they acknowledge it in private, they want to deny it in public.

Why? For the simple reason that the complexity creates such a high level of anxiety/fear/uncertainty/confusion that most people would resent the leader who would tell them the truth.

In the recent Congress of the Club of Rome, one American Professor Donald Michael talked about the question: "Can leaders tell the truth and still remain leaders?".

The truth he was speaking about was neither some doctrine nor clear facts. It was most of all the uncertainty of present times. As he said:

"The complexity of the human condition is now so great that it is probably incomprehensible or, at least, inexpressible."

We spoke at the same panel. The analysis of a complex society led me to the statement that the more uncertain is the situation or the more interwoven are the problems, the more we need a long-term perspective. *Leaders cannot be equated with caretakers - leaders are those who enable everyone to situate different problems in the long-term perspective.*

We have to acknowledge that leadership has emptied itself of any concrete proposals for long-term actions. Why? The fear of change acting as a negative force upon the electorate. The unknown is not anymore a frontier - challenging, stimulating, gathering together persons and groups - but an obstacle, a threat to stability. (Most elections in the world having as a plea "the stability" - sub-liminal message of "Generation Mitterrand" with baby and hand of old man. "We are all the same if we follow the same path for ever and ever." I know of other examples: my own country.

Two main difficulties come up then:

- first, how to reconcile the long-term perspective with the very short duration of electoral term of office, at the end of which new people will come up? (need to appraise the state of the art)



- second, though problems ask for long-term answers, the people involved with and affected by the problems demand an immediate solution. Populations cannot cope with floating anxiety. They ask for some regulatory mechanisms to pacify their confusion. Hence the wish for simple answers. They imply simple solutions, simple problems. But this is not true!

I am touching (targeting?) a key question in public life. The "simplifying effect" denies complexity and the very nature of problems. *How can such a manipulator rise up to complexity once elected?*

And how can the one who sees the complexity deny oneself in order to be elected?

Let us be clear about it: women see more sharply than men the complexity, maybe because of the multifunctional role they have held. But they have to suppress it. Can they do it?

Donald Michael stated two things which, coming from a specialist in social processes and social change, seem very important to me.

First, he stated the importance of "unrecognized, unconscious and unacknowledged forces that express themselves in subtle and sometimes overwhelming needs for prestige and power, or to nurture, or to understand, or to dominate, or to submit."

Second, he said that as "there exists no reliable theory of social change under turbulence", we do not yet understand the effects of "the radical shifts in public positions" brought about by the women's movement.



I am concerned in the next part of my talk with those unrecognized and unconscious forces playing at the root of women's presence of women's participation in political life.



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2. The unconscious socio-cultural forces at play in the exercise of women's leadership

When women assume leadership functions, they do so not only in the general context but also in a socio-cultural frame of reference for their actions as women.

There is no split between leadership tasks and the rest of human life. On the contrary, it is in a continuum of experiences and expectations that leadership is exercised.

A lot could be said about such socio-cultural context. I will use two situations: the TV and women in elected office. Taking into account that 50 per cent of the Western population get their entire information, that is their 'mental programs' exclusively from the TV, it would be interesting to see what is the content of such programs.

In a recent study (september 1988) 25 channels in ten countries of EEC have been watched from 6 to 12 p.m. in different weeks (430 publicity spots, 77 TV news, 29 episodes of TV services - a very important cross-section).

What does it show?

who? the presentation of the news is done by 1 woman against 6 men (14.5 percent): they are young/charming/ short hair, soft make-up, sober appearance, no spectacles (while 35 percent of men wear them!)

what? news of particular interest to women cover only 1.4 per cent, three quarters of which are presented by men!





interviewers only 16 percent are women!

short reportages only in 6 percent of cases do women stand*
in the central place.

how? 41 percent of women at work/39 percent in
socio-political activity/5 percent at home.

This is one of the most thought-provoking figures published recently. This provides one major case against women in leadership positions:

Women are not "notorious", they are not known, they don't occupy any stable place in the daily memory of people! How can they be elected??

We should add to this the publicity spots. It is more and more known that sub-liminal images do influence the human mind in a special way - they are recorded without any support from our will; they act directly upon our mental recorder. What are we recording then?

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- In most countries (exc. Ireland and somewhat France), most people playing in publicity spots are women (68 percent in Germany and in Greece);
- they show how things work (22)
use the product or eat it (49)
buy it (8)

But the voices off advising, explaining, telling the TV public what to do are mostly men (94 percent in Italy(??) to 72 percent in Luxemburg).

- In short, men argue and advise,
women buy,

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- women generally are silent
- women are shown at home (43) (40 housewives, 19 wives, 17 mothers)
and at work (18)
- publicity presents a clear clivage between women of different social classes; as women of high social classes present beauty products, cars, clothes and alcoholic drinks, reserved women present clothes for babies and children, medical articles, food, ...

How to establish the social bases for women in leadership if women are not seen in full equality among themselves?

This context leads us to another type of question. As leadership today deals with the complexity of reality and is somehow "obliged" to have a strategy in relation to it, women's language is a fundamental instrument for their exercise of leadership: to reach its functions and to be effective in such functions.

There are many studies done on women's language and words and discourse. The connection between women's language and social roles is well established. All the studies show a women's language expressing a sub-culture of its own.

For many authors women are supposed to adopt the masculine language.

A concrete study done among sub-urban women in the city of Geneva (and yet to be published) shows that women are afraid of entering the semantic universe of men. As if they would feel that their identity would be threatened by it.

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Fear of failure/fear of success

- A major obstacle for women on the way to leadership is their ambiguity in relation both to failure and to success. (Rosiska/Geneva)

Her field research has shown that fear of failure is often a disguise for the fear of success. In a process of formation, women expressed a self-castration attitude whenever the steps taken were about to bring them to a real change.

A very complex chain of reaction seems to take place. Women are dissatisfied, ambitious, desiring independence and autonomy. But such feelings seem to go together with culpability. Failure appears in some instances as the result of that culpability, proving that finally women could not do it.

The fear of success springs forth from the suspicion that it may not be accompanied by the fulfilment of women's basic desire to be loved. To be successful in leadership roles appears still in our societies as being deviant.

"Deviance refers to being or behaving in ways which are significantly different from expectations based on the sex norms and the gender stereotypes (...).

"Women's fear of success may not be a psychological trait, but an expectation that if they come close to the male stereotype, they will be deviant and punished for it."

Ten years later, in a more popular book, it is said:



"To succeed seems to terrify an incredible number of women who have the qualities to do something worthwhile in their field."

This is confirmed by contemporary psychanalytical research: women seem to be able to face life only in terms of a dual-relationship. Most of all, this seems to be the result of a never fully achieved separation from the mother. The young boy when the moment comes to start his process of individuation turns from the mother to the father; the young girl has nobody to turn to. She would go through life placing such dual relationship above everything else and thus refusing opportunities for success. ("Why didn't you have more women in your government?").



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3. Psychological conditions for women's leadership which are at the core of women's identity

(Recently the General-Secretary of a political party with 90 percent of support in his party withdrew. Why? The reasons he gave were mostly:

- the lies propagated by the media;
 - the antagonism of his predecessor;
 - the lack of practical support from his party companions.
- Food for thought: what about women?)

Women are linked to each other by a common psychological process in the first steps of their existence. To the autistic phase of symbiotic unity with the mother, the child is thrown into separation from the mother.

The two stages are decisive factors in the life of each woman. It is the "psychic birth", the decisive moment where the sense of personal identity begins. (iconography: popular art; Leonardo de Vinci).

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There is a tremendous silence about that period of individual story of all women.

It is obvious why it is so. If all women were aware of the symbiotic unity and of the separation effect on the girl-child, they would take different decisions about their place in the labour-force, about the combination of work and children's first years.

No doubt that many norms of the world of work would be broken: nobody would be interested in contributing to a diminished self in their daughter while later they will do all kinds of sacrifice to give her a good "education". They would



know that the basis for the success of that education was launched much earlier!!

Of course, society is interested in keeping things in this way! It goes so far as accepting the camouflage of women's cause represented in our time by the women who want to abolish all kinds of protective measures concerning women under the pretext that they are also forms of discrimination! (Costa Rica: 1/2h for men! for breast-feeding).

Most women are alien to the understanding of basic laws of psychological evolution. In the past for Christian women this was substituted by a hyper-valorisation of motherhood (seen as "dimension of women's vocation"). Today it is the overwhelming concept of autonomy that is permeating all relationships. But there is no hope of real autonomy where the first autonomy was not lived well!

A great woman speaks in a different way:

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... I have the impression of being an instrument through which currents and vibrations have passed. This is true about all my books; maybe also for all my life. Maybe for all lives. The best among ourselves are but crystals which have been crossed by currents.

... There are people through whom God has loved me.

Everything comes from further than ourselves and leads further than ourselves. In other words, everything is bigger than ourselves, and we feel humble and in wonder for having been thus (traversée) and (dépassée) crossed by and bypassed.



• Another decisive ingredient for leadership is a strong super-ego. In Freud's Vienna, the frame of reference was mostly constituted by the values coming from the patriarcal society. Freud was conditioned by it and overlooked the specific frame of reference for women.

Such an idea has prevailed for a long time. But some of his disciples made it clear that the super-ego of the young girl is shaped by the identification process with the mother or with other women.

(Enquiry among University students of industrialized countries: no interiorized models; rupture with previous generations in historical terms (not with the mother); replacement by "career" and infinite freedom!)

This leads me to question the current social emancipation of women. Are there values corresponding to a clear identity or are women just recapitulating what men have already done?

Some of you may doubt about the importance of the super-ego. It is there that the management of pulsions, the general direction of life take place.

Today's world makes very difficult the process of identification. There are too many images, they occupy the mind for a very short time, their reliability cannot be verified. The building up of the super-ego is undermined.

Paradoxically, the super-ego is the realm of values. There is so much talk about the crisis of values as if it would only consist of abstract ideas, noble ideals, strong moral st.... No, values are generated in the process of the human chain - otherwise we would have to start from zero. Somewhere that chain has been broken.





(Christian women are not an exception. Because they think that they are inaugurating history, they often reject the very process of identification without which they would have no psychological consistency.)

("Girl before a mirror" - who am I? a puzzle of different impressions.)

Sociological conditions for women's leadership

Official reports on women's participation in political leadership point out to a rather positive picture... Women's numbers have grown in national/local elected bodies. But if it is possible to say that in the last ten years there is a "take off" of women's presence in elected bodies we still have to say that their number is very small:

DK	25.6	Greece	4	Italy	7
NL	17.3	France	5.9	Belg.	7.5
RFA	15.4	Spain/Port.	6	Ireland	8.4
Lux.	14	UK	6.3		

(You can see by yourselves the numbers in local governments).

We should complete this picture with another three sets relating to the European Parliament.

i) When asked if they trust a man, a woman, or both in the same way as their representative at the EP, most say it is the same (67 percent men, 6 percent women) but it is the difference that it is worthwhile to look at:

- 26 percent men trust more a man
 - 4 percent men trust more a woman
- while
- 19 percent women trust a man
 - 12 percent women trust a woman!

ii) People are asked if to be a man or a woman has more, equal, or less importance than his (her) political trend. Amazing results from people who put equal trust in men and women:

- 37 percent men more or equal
- 40 percent women more or equal.

Of course, we don't know if this means that they would chose a woman! (of course not, because of results in n.1).

iii) People are asked if things would go better or worse with more women at EP:

	- 28*	percent better	11 percent worse	49percent
equal				
. men	22	14	52 (cf 67% 1)	
. women	33	8	47 (cf 66% 1)	

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* this is the minority who may help things change.



4. Beyond the ideology of equality

In sharp contrast with the views expressed in the EEC countries, the Scandinavian women say something else. Their presence in the elected bodies is above their counterparts on the continent. And yet it is from there that we hear either very practical questions or radical questioning (cf. Sweden).

Alike many other women, I have also believed that the situation of equality, when lived by a great number of women would lead to a qualitative change in different fields of human activity. There would be profound changes in work, in the economy, in the public services, in politics. I believed...

The paradox we are living is quite striking.

From one side we are still far from equality, as we just saw.

From the other side, we are far from noticing any qualitative change brought about by women.

On the contrary, women seem to reinforce the statu quo, with a growing adaptation to men's norms. (To challenge the norm is badly seen by "coopted" women.)

Such an adaptation has heavy consequences.

First, as the norms of men are not basically challenged, the vast majority of women (employees, peasants, workers, teachers, nurses) are under a inhuman overload of work, sometimes without any social recognition.

Second, such an adaptation (which has gone on quite calmly) has taken place at the expenses of a total silence of women's culture, of their own approach as women, of their



agenda on world issues, of their contribution to the inter-connections of world problems.



The principle of equality is a guarantee that there is no discrimination because of differences. It does not legitimate uniforming - it safeguards difference. It is not a mechanism - it welcomes newners as a healthy contribution.

But often the principle of equality is twisted into its own caricature.

The big institutions for which change is a threat are prone to all forms of "ideology of equality".

Group techniques, which pretend that everybody can do everybody's else job and that the rotation principle is always at the service of equality, are basically a defence mechanism of a society, group or institutions afraid to cope with those who are different.

Current psychanalysis (in German?) states clearly that such an ideology is the outcome of jealousy and totalitarian trends present in every person.

It has been my consistent (constant??) approach since many years to defend that equality between men and women, in order not to become sheer uniformity, has to be "inédite and subversive equality".

Equality raises always the question of the "norm". This is why equality between man and woman, still unwritten, is potentially subversive. It will affect and transform the norm.

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If this is so, women carry with them another face of power: a potential change in basic laws of relationships between individuals and groups is at stake.

How is this possible?



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Mark 14,1; 3-9

It was two days before the Passover and the feast of the Unleavened Bread. (...)

Jesus was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper; he was at dinner when a woman came in with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the ointment on his head.

Some who were there said to one another indignantly: "Why this waste of ointment? Ointment like this could have been sold for over three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor;" and they were angry with her.

But Jesus said:

"Leave her alone. Why are you upsetting her?

What she has done for me is one of the good works. You have the poor with you always, and you can be kind to them whenever you wish, but you will not always have me. She has done what was in her power to do:

She has annointed my body beforehand for its burial.

I tell you solemnly,

wherever throughout all the world

the Good News is proclaimed,

what she has done will be told also, in remembrance of her."



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Women at the threshold

Painting at California:

- . the house
 - . the empty space
 - . the light within
 - . two women at the door (we don't know their faces, anonymous)
 - . they keep the door open so that we can see the light
- ...

- "the guardians of the threshold"

- Church of the Threshold

"Here comes a creative era"

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"Time for straight-talking leadership"

"It is a matter of using talent"

"Will people listen to uncomfortable truths?"

"Don't let them hold us back"

"All issues are basically a cultural problem".



Women in the exercise of leadership can thus be the continuous dissidents confronting the one at political level:

- the ideology
- party
- regime
- man.

They denounce the myth of the ONE, the uniform, the trend towards the same.

Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo (New York ???, 1988???)

or Harlem, 9 november 1988?

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