

# creative women in changing societies

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Intervention ~~by~~ Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo  
at the opening Plenary  
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I approach the theme with some humility, as all the words in the title are so loaded with hopes and expectations... I cannot plunge into it without asking myself: Am I a creative woman? Am I helping change to come about? In other words, I would need to test everything I am going to say at the crucible of my own life...

1. Before I tackle any concrete aspect, let me state that for me creative women are not necessarily those who, in each field, have acquired some reputation and hold power in the traditional way.

The linear concept of human beings going up the ladder, following the clear-cut pattern of a career, "getting there", may still be the one where people are seen, always in the limelight, public figures once and for all. But, I ask, isn't there another form of being in history? The spiral evolution of the "ziggurat" in the Mesopotamia (I remember looking endlessly at one near Bagdad...) is not the image of another mode of intervention? Aren't women in their own lives familiar with cycles, understanding from within the meaning of a path other than linear? Isn't their sociological invisibility a present handicap from which an asset for a new intervention in society can be drawn? What is at stake is not an evaluation, a balance-sheet about how many women have done what! Is it not a comparison between women's and men's achievements in the different fields. At this stage of history, we can say that creative women are women who introduce in life, through their own means, other and new dimensions of the human. Their creativity has neither measure nor standard.

2. I would like to look at the questions put before us dealing with the so-called "political power".

They assume that women are "seeking political power". Are they? Are we? I am not sure. Certainly not in the same way as men. The concept of power at work when the expression "political power" is used is a mechanicist one. It is mechanical energy acting according to its laws. Power becomes a force exercised by A over B (person, institution, state) minus B's capacity to resist it !

In the institutions of power there may even be wide consultation, but, in the face of certain events and decisions taken alone by one man now and then, we can ask ourselves: aren't all those consultations a make-believe? aren't they the paraphernalia of power to disguise at once its diffusion throughout the social body and its concentration in the hands of one individual?





Born of rebellion, the "creative use of political power" confirms the thesis of leadership. The liberation is from some injustice towards some "promised land".

We can say that, already by this simple analyses, the attitude of women can change the nature of power. (But be aware: that is threatening to the establishment !)

Some people may simply say: "style has changed" implying that it is the form and not the contents. Soon they will have to see that "style" in itself is nothing. Form conveys content. The content may be radically changed. By doing so, men's aspirations will be met as well.

4. Another set of questions is connected with "women working together politically on issues of primary concern to women". Certainly change can come through it, but what kind of change? I can three types of situations.

First of all, the "reformist trend". Preferential Rights. Access to. Equal conditions. Assured promotion. Even the quota-system. It has many pitfalls (namely when the woman is discriminated positively - everybody bowing to her because she is a woman... and often charming !) However, it remains the one that is very often needed, or even the only possible one. It may happen indeed that the simple number of women, in changing its dimension, will change the nature of things.

Secondly, we can see woman's action as totally autonomous and exclusive. It springs forth usually from the new awareness born among women. Often it is the only action they can undertake. However, it runs the risk of isolation on the global issues of society. It can easily segregate women from society in general and close them in a ghetto. It is difficult to see when such an action is required by the situation women are in and when it omits the link with other forms of domination in the society.

Thirdly, there is the type of action which chooses for each situation the adequate strategy. It carries on its struggle at two levels: at the level of the women's questions and at the level of questions of all society. It asks at once for the liberation of all and of each one. It plays its role on the realm of the status quo and at the level of the Utopian society. In a world shaped by men, it says something else making visible values and insights that all human beings can grasp.

It is not clear which of the three types of action is needed. According to the type of decision-making, the impact of the institution, the type of action may be chosen. A thorough analyses of society is always needed.

It does seem to me that these situations can also tipify certain societies. When I say this, I am not putting all societies either in the North or in the South hemisphere in the same line. Within the same geopolitical boundaries the strategy for women's exercise of "political power", or rather, of leadership, can be very diversified. The correlation between women's struggle and the struggle of the whole society can only be perceived from within, not based on empirical, quantitative factors but rather on a very refined qualitative analysis.



The Belgium group "Les cahiers du Grif" wrote two years ago: "is it time for guerilla or monastery? Is it time for solitude or for conveying effort? Is it time for autonomy or for subversive getting in?".

5. Creative women do not fit into the culture around them. First of all, because they are women. They are part of a sub-culture which so far had no possibility to shape society and events. Every time they make a genuine gesture in society they introduce a new type of creativity. Like in the labour force, the point is not in adding neutral, asexual figures to the statistics of available manpower. The point is rather: the new "things" women create, the new gestures they make - what do they mean, towards what are they pointing out? Do they "speak" of something else or are they only another voice in the general chorus?

They are creative women in a twofold way: by what comes out of their hands and just by being. What is at stake, in creative women, is at once the object of the creative act and its subject.

Of course, I am aware that the total freedom <sup>from</sup> the split subject/object is found in <sup>the</sup> dialectics of conscience/unconscious. At once intensity of consciousness (total absorption, being caught up in, wholly involved) and birth of the insight from the deepest levels of the unconscious.

We hear people saying about such women: "a singular event", "a new phenomenon". But we are at pain to analyse the phenomenon or to attempt to describe the event.

In the case of women, not only are they emerging from a silent sub-culture but, as individuals they have to overcome the millenary predicament of other's judgements according to established norms. Their act of creativity has, at its base, the courage to expose oneself to others. Vulnerable. Naked in their feelings. Transparent in their intentions.

6. Creativity can be said as "representing the highest degree of emotional health, as the expression of the normal people in the act of actualizing themselves" (3)

Thus, the extreme importance of emotional health. So often it is said of women that they are "emotional". But couldn't the world do with a bit more of emotional concern, of involvement, of caring? "Creativity occurs in the act of encounter and is to be understood with this encounter at its center". (3)

Haven't women been so far relational beings? In a world where human beings are fleeing from each other, women can cultivate encounter. "Creativity cannot exist without a centeredness within our own being." (3) There is in all women an unexplored continent - themselves. Their creativity, springing forth from that centeredness within, is at the same time the very condition for their own liberation as human beings. Regardless of the scattered aspect of one's own life, the task ahead is the discovery of ourselves, whom do we want to become, who can we be, as one of us writes so clearly: "Finally, there is 'my place' which is distinct from the 'the



place'; and in fact 'my place' is a psychological time and space - which can occur at any time of the day or night - and to which no one is admitted. In 'my place', a woman can discover how she really feels about her immediate world. Unlike the 'third place', therefore, which is an emotionally sanctuary, 'my place' is a working laboratory where the professional woman strives to understand her real feelings" (Maria Perinbam).

So, the creative act is at once outward-oriented and flowing from an inward movement.

In order to change society, women have no models. This is at once an asset and a handicap.

It is an asset in so far as there practically no norms for women; most women entering traditional masculine fields have the conditions to be creative as there is no model for their lives, but only the personal process of "change" can enable one with the freedom to create her own model. Again quoting one of us: "Women must be awakened to the fact that they cannot "follow somebody" all their life..." (Keiki Higushi).

It is a handicap as "creativity arises from the tension between spontaneity and limitations". Those limitations are not always very clear. They tend to appear on a far away horizon, thus projecting the energy of women on "what could be" instead of what can be. And it is from <sup>what</sup> can be that the creative act emerges.

Which society are we committed to change? Just our little corner?

It is my deep conviction that we, the women of today, in our new awareness, are the most integral <sup>internacional</sup> of all social movements. Therefore, our struggle is a planetary one. Wherever we are, our destinies are particularly interwoven. This is why I couldn't agree more with E. Broner when she writes: "We could be the most radical force of all, refusing to allow drawn borders to separate us, insisting that all maps are wrong and that our experiences be translated, transferred from one tongue to another." The same tune of change rings in the forceful statements of the Three Marias:

"Those who draw closer to us or spy on us can already hear, between this exercise of ours and the pattern that each of us is tracing in her life, the surging tides of love that are swelling between us, tides not of nostalgia or of vengeance, but rather, like those between mothers and daughters of one and the same house, or what is even more scandalous, like those between women workers confronted with the same resistant material, competent workers, competing and drowning cares and setting our boots down at the edge of the bed, living the disciplined life of the barracks or the convent, withdrawn from the world, guarding against the corruption of hierarchies and strict rules, instituting the law of a new sister (brother)hood - do outsiders realise the danger?"

It may be a danger. It is also a tremendous possibility. Who will be afraid of it, if it is a changed society which is at stake?



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