

Gender in Power

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GENDER IN POWER OR GENDER EMPOWERING

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Gender in Power or Gender Empowering

Whichever turn of phrase one picks doesn't really matter: what is important is to recognize that women are under-represented in many walks of life: as leaders, as negotiators, as politicians, as CEOs, as parliamentarians - just to mention a few of the occupations where we have far less than the 50% share of the population. Just few women occupy the prestigious "corner office" from where power emanates.

It is really a matter of catching up: men had the vote long before women, and even in Europe, women obtained the vote mostly only in the 20th century - the "suffragettes" of those days had to fight for their rights: they were belittled and harassed, yet they persisted - and won the right to vote. It can only have been a man who coined the phrase of women being "the weaker sex" - we women know differently!

Let us not forget that the UN Charter was the first international document to inscribe the equal rights of men and women as part of fundamental human rights. There were three women delegates at the San Francisco conference that adopted the Charter in 1945, and they were all from Latin American countries: Brazil, Dominican Republic and Uruguay. Their leader was Bertha Lutz from

Brazil, and she, together with the other two women-delegates and the few other women who participated, demanded an explicit reference to women's rights in the Charter.

This was thus not an idea that came from the West; in fact, not only was the West opposed to have gender equality in the agenda, but they also tried to remove it from Article 8, which I had quoted above and which says that women and men can participate equally in all UN bodies. In her memoir, Lutz wrote that delegates from the US and UK told her "not to ask for anything for women in the Charter since that would be a very vulgar



It is clear we need more women who are powerful and visible. More heads of State, more legislators, more role models for girls and young women to emulate and aspire to

thing to do"¹. Yet Lutz and the other women delegates persisted, and we now have several references to the equality of women and men in the Charter, as well as a reference to non-discrimination on the basis of sex.

Today, more than seven decades later, there are four women heads of a State in Europe: Angela Merkel (Germany), Theresa May

¹ E. M. Lederer. "Researchers: Latin American women got women into UN Charter". Associated Press. 2 September 2016. Access at: <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/049889e630b748229887b91c8f21e3d2/researchers-latin-american-women-got-women-un-charter>

(UK), Erna Solberg (Norway), Beata Szydlo (Poland). Four. There are only three more in the world: Bangladesh, Namibia and Myanmar, for a total of seven. Seven out of 193.

In Parliaments, the situation stands at 22.6% in 2015, but the increase has slowed. In 2015, it only rose by 0.5%. Impediments to women running for office are the lack of adequate campaign financing and the lack of commitment from the political parties in changing the status quo.

It is clear we need more women who are powerful and visible. More heads of State, more legislators, more role models for girls and young women to emulate and aspire to. That is what societies need today.

What Are The Best Ways To Secure Gender Balance In Power?

Looking at the situation in the Nordic countries we can see how a high percentage of women in power was achieved: by quotas. I used to argue against quotas in the context of the UN recruitment and promotion exercise. First of all, it is not compatible with the UN Charter: in Article 4, it says “the United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs”².

Yet in the course of my career, I have witnessed the powerful message that is being given when a woman is appointed to a high office and is visible as a role model, such as: who wants to be a quota woman? I have changed my mind and now I am a fervent proponent of quotas. They work, they are measurable, and they are powerful. But they are being resisted.

Just look at what is happening with the 30% quota set for company Board memberships in several European countries: men are bemoaning the situation and saying that no qualified women are available. I used to hear the same arguments in the UN 25 years ago – and that is total nonsense. There is plenty of remarkable female talent. Christine Lafarge – now at the IMF – tells the story that she pulls out a list of names whenever this argument is put forward. Gro Brundtland of Norway – who served three times as a Prime Minister – chuckles when she speaks to young boys, who think that only a woman can aspire to be a Prime Minister, considering that one has held that position for so long.

Role models are important for the younger generation of women. And senior women tend to hire more women, as I have done myself. So let us have quotas for women.

Is Foreign Policy a Male Business? What Can Women Bring to This Sphere?

Just because it was mostly men, who conducted foreign policy, does not mean a woman is unable to do the same - or better - job. We have had three powerful and remarkable women carrying out the foreign policy for the European Union: Benita Ferrero-Waldner of Austria, Baroness Catherine Ashton of the UK and now Federica Mogherini of Italy. All won high praise for the way, in which they carried out their role with decisiveness and gravitas.

For myself, I filled a number of posts at the United Nations as a “first”: first woman director in Public Information, first woman director in Political Affairs, first woman Assistant Secretary-General in Political Affairs, and first Under Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament. I was not proud of being the “first” in all these cases: there should have been more senior

² Charter of the United Nations. United Nations. 1945. Access: <http://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/>

appointments before me - and regrettably, at the senior-most levels of Assistant and Under-Secretary-General, men succeeded me.

Women can bring a fresh look at problems: just think of the UN Security Council, which



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has traditionally been a male domain. Just a few years ago, there were four women on the Council - and they were seen to be powerful and action-oriented rather than wringing their hands at the many crises the Council is confronted with. At present, it is only the US who is represented by a woman. And the number of women Permanent Representatives in New York is only about 10% of the total - and many of them come from smaller countries.

Does Participation of Women In Peace Processes Have Influence on Its Durability?

I would definitely say so. Just look at what is happening with the peace negotiations in Colombia, where a decades-old conflict is being settled - with the active participation of women. Even ten-fifteen years ago, (when I had been involved in the negotiations) this had not been possible: women just were not taken seriously as negotiation partners, sitting at the same table with men and having an equal voice.

While the world is changing, there are also influences that can be brought on this change. Security Council Resolution 1325 is one of those: it was adopted in 2000, and it had three goals³:

(i) To increase representation and participation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional, and international institutions and mechanisms for conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding (op. paras. 1-5);

(ii) To bring a gender perspective to the planning and implementation of peace operations and peace negotiations (gender-sensitive training of personnel, an expanded role of women as peacekeepers etc), (op. paras. 6-9); and

(iii) To increase attention to the protection and respect of women's rights, including protection against gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict (op. paras. 10-14).

What is important here are not only the goals that were set, but there was also a request to the Secretary-General to regularly monitor progress and to report to the Member States. This was really the important part: progress was measurable, it was transparent and there for all to see (and applaud or criticize, as the case may be). It placed women and the question of gender firmly on the agenda and made it part of the formal UN discourse on peace and security.

It is thus clear that women in peace and security has become a central part of the agenda, both on the political front as well as in humanitarian and social development contexts. It is a topic that cannot be shunned. I should also like to note that Resolution

³ The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000
<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>

1325 was the first of the so-called “thematic resolutions”.

Women in Army or Women in Peacekeeping - Do We Need Both?

Of course we do - as we need men in the kitchen and in child-rearing and other tasks that are traditionally considered “women’s domains”. Again, we need to do away with the old stereotypes. When Justin Trudeau was



The business of war has changed - and with it, the men - and women - who are needed to carry it out

elected in Canada last year and he staffed his cabinet with 50% women, a gasp was heard around the world, and he, with an unflappable expression, countered the questions with the explanation: “why - it is 2016, after all”. What a wonderful phrase that was - and how one wished that other powerful men would feel the same way.

When I was a deputy in a peacekeeping operation and routinely had to address hundreds of soldiers, I never encountered any hostility or dismissiveness. If you have a job to do, you do it to the best of your ability - but you do not get it done unless you convey seriousness and determination - and not a single doubt that you might not have the right gender to do it. Men never seem to be plagued by self-doubt.

Women in the Armed Forces? I would like to see more of them. There used to be criticism (from men) about their unsuitability for fighting, and the difficulty of integrating them into the male-dominated military. Yet how many armies are still fighting on the battlefield? The business of war has changed - and with it, the men - and women - who are needed to carry it out. While I would like to see

war disappear altogether from the earth, it is unlikely to happen in my lifetime - and while it exists, it has opened up opportunities for women - such as conducting military analysis or operating remote-controlled drones - that did not exist fifty years ago.

Some Final Remarks

So where does this leave us today, in 2017? The balance sheet is uneven, and in my opinion, too slowly being advanced in favor of women. However, I have noticed that the “gender issue” is now being raised frequently, whether in politics or in private business, and the awareness that something needs to change has risen exponentially, in many countries. The “old boys” network is alive and well, but its role is diminishing. There is a perceived need - on the part of men, I should add - to actually do something to change the situation, and not only to give lip service to the advancement of women while happily maintaining the status quo.

My generation faced a very different situation. I came of age in the bra-burning era, at the time of women’s marches for emancipation, for equal rights, for equal pay, for equal status. We burned with the injustice of it all, and we asked for changes, at times aggressively and at times abrasively. The young generation now has different issues. Gender equality as a concept is not something that needs to be fought for anymore - but now, here and everywhere and every day, gender equality needs to be implemented. By all of us. Jointly. Every day.

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