

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP REVIEW

Introduction

When I accepted the invitation to write an introduction to these essays, I considered it as something of a challenge or even a dare since I have often been accused by some of my colleagues of not incorporating gender in my analyses of Caribbean politics. I was asked whether I did not believe that some of the obvious inadequacies and dysfunctions of the Westminster model as it works in the Caribbean, and the deficits generated thereby could be ameliorated and transformed by having more women involved at all levels of the political process, but especially at the top? While I readily admitted that democracy could not be gender blind, and that the "glass ceiling" was an anachronism, my oft repeated response to the question was that the Westminster paradigm itself was flawed, and could not be improved upon simply by having women occupy a proportionate share of the management roles to which they were entitled by reason of their demographic equality. One of my key concern was with what lay beyond the numbers. What attributes and styles of management did women bring to the table that could help transform our political processes and make them less confrontational, more just, more equitable, more transparent and more participative and inclusive?

Was patriarchy the source of our political malaise, or was it the structures of the system? Were the structures such as they were because they were created by masculine authoritarian types with game rules, declared or undeclared, that privileged men? Did these structures block women from pursuing "agendas of equity, democratic processes, and sustainable livelihoods"? Was there something that was peculiar to the androcentric political style from which women were by nature largely exempt, and which would be neutralised by an infusion of feminine leadership attributes, or would the former subdue and subvert the latter and transform it? Was it really true that women in politics give more priority to concerns such as social security, national health care, and children's issues, and that the key to civilising our society was to ensure that more women are ushered into the mansions where power is brokered? What would occur if women were

given "hard" portfolios such as finance rather than "soft" portfolios? Is it true that power stings the hand that wields it whether those hands belong to men or women? Would a female leadership elite really behave fundamentally different from male elites? Can a transformational holistic style of leadership, whether exercised by men or women, be sustained in the contemporary global environment in which the scope for transformational leaders has become more circumscribed, the democratisation of technology notwithstanding? In sum, can women change society or the world? These were some of the questions that I have, and which I hoped the authors would themselves ask and answer to the satisfaction of the many skeptics that abound.

The three papers, in their very different ways, give the reader a status report of the leadership roles performed by the many groups and individual women who have consciously or unconsciously sought to change the nature of Caribbean society and the organisations which operate within it, especially in relation to gender balance. The paper by Lynette Vassell does an excellent job of identifying some of the individuals who over the years and across the region have impacted their environments and transformed them in various ways. Some have been proletarians like Clothilde Walcott who sought to organise domestic workers, while others were notables like Dame Nita Barrow who rose from the status of nurse to become the Governor General of Barbados. Some groups were more traditional in their approach to gender issues, while others were more militantly feminist. In the end however, many realised that they were all, in their various ways, working towards the same end which Eudene Barriteau in her work on Barrow, defines as "working for space for women to get stronger, and quietly and very effectively taking on in equalities."

Some criteria had of course to be used to identify persons who would be deemed transformational in the roles they performed. Drawing on some of the existing literature, and on UNIFEM's conceptual definition of Transformational Leadership, Vassell focuses on the personal change experienced by the leading personality, and the engagement of her "soul, spirit, and behaviour," behaviour that is defined as "feminine energies and ways of working." Vassell also makes the important distinction between the qualities *of*

transformational leadership and qualities *for* transformational leadership, and emphasises the fact that the latter is what should be pursued since transformational leadership is never an accomplished fact but "a work in progress not easily defined."

Persons and groups who wish to transform their environments, she advises, must, *inter alia*, develop the habit of reflection and of learning from experience, and of linking with a spiritual source; they must also be fearless and honest with self and others, must listen to and acknowledge other people with empathy, and be rooted in their cultural reality and context. One learns a lot from Vassell's paper about the nature of women's struggles for a place in the Caribbean sun.

The paper by Ingram Roberts draws its inspiration mainly from the Haitian and Jamaican experiences, especially from those which showcase the entrepreneurial activities of low income women. In her recommendations for action, Roberts urges those who design programmes for Caribbean leaders or would be leaders to focus not only on current obstacles to transformation, but also on "historical obstacles and their incarnations in ongoing patterns of unsustainable development." Such programmes, she tells us, must be comprehensively infused with feminist orientations.

In terms of specifics, she calls for the strengthening of the role of women in media work, the "expunging" of the Westminster model from Caribbean politics which she claims "fosters marginalisation, alienation and underdevelopment in small states, and its replacement by a new form of government based on consensus building." Important too, for her, is the need for women leaders to seek to transform a leadership style which emphasizes the role of the patron who is invariably male. As she writes:

... in the small States context of the Caribbean, this patronage permeates all the arenas. As an instrument of control and therefore a mechanism of leadership, patrons target the household, the workplace and the community, as arenas from which to harness human resources for use in power struggles. Within these arenas, patrons dispense resources drawn from the State and markets as the "spoils" of this type of system of leadership.

Roberts places a great deal of reliance on agencies in civil society, especially those controlled by women, to build capabilities that would make obsolete patrimonial styles of leadership. For her, a transformational leader is one who works himself/herself out of a job and makes room for people in civil society who will work with facilitating (not controlling) state agencies, to fulfill sustainably and equitably such material, security and spiritual needs as they might have.

Roberts likewise calls for the inclusion of popular cultural images in discussions about leadership so that leadership is not merely envisioned as that which is formally acceptable. She makes the unorthodox point that DJs and Dons could be transformational leaders in the same way as middle class politicians can be. As she argues, "despite their violent and risky methods, the Dons have negotiated the right to rule on their terrain, and this provides the community and the households with a safety net." True as this is, it seems that in replacing the old "patron" with the "don," one might do no more than "jump from the fire into the fire." One needs to be reminded that civil society is not all benevolent, and that it includes non state actors who work for the positive transformation of society as well as those who seek to capture and subvert it.

Roberts makes some pertinent remarks about globalisation and the manner in which it is impacting on Caribbean society and the status of women therein. She observes that "the globalisation agenda is rapidly undermining economic and social stability throughout the region. With its ability to create globally available goods, [and] its emphasis on services and finance, globalisation is unveiling a certain kind of economic and political reality in the Caribbean."

Globalisation has not only served to eliminate or reduce the need for certain kinds of jobs which Caribbean women had come to regard as theirs – jobs in the garment and assembly type industries – but has also reduced the space within which they could deploy their talent for transformational type leadership styles. In this age of globalisation, the real enemy is not so much men, but the structures and the mechanics of the market which trample and marginalize both men and women who, if in the wrong kind of place and the

wrong economic activity, are simply rendered obsolete appendages to the engines of world economic history. Political leaders and experts alike, whether men or women, will progressively to have reduced space in which to operate, and will have to master and display exceptional negotiation skills to prevail in the environment being created by the WTO and the FTAA regimes, a point that Roberts emphasizes. As she advises, that “gender-sensitive positions appropriate for the region on several matters, including trade and currency, natural disasters and poverty, crime, movement of labour and capital, among others, need to be developed.” She also rightly observes that these issues will need to be tackled at the local as well as at the national level since sustained effectiveness can only be achieved if resources and opportunities are exploited creatively and holistically.

Barriteau's essay was instructive theoretically. She tells us from the very beginning that we should not blithely assume that women's leadership will automatically promote gender justice or democratic practices. The concept of women's leadership "merely tells us about the physiological and biological make up of the leader, and leaves us to impute or anticipate certain kinds of behaviours." While it is assumed that women bring a bundle of characteristics to leadership based on their socialisation, there is no guarantee that a particular outcome would result from the activities of those who become leaders. Making positive negative decisions is not a gender-specific trait, but a common human one.

One must thus distinguish between traditional leadership and transformational or charismatic leadership, the term Max Weber used to describe the latter type of leader. The transformational leader, we are told, is one who is not merely concerned with ensuring that *women* are leaders in the state and civil society. "Women's leadership begins to be transformational when it seeks to alter the conventional practices and experiences of authority and power, and has a vision of the new practices and processes that are to be put in place." Like Vassel, Barriteau makes the critical point that transformational leadership is an ideal, something that is easy to achieve, and, as is the case with men, very few are capable of being.

Unlike some feminist theoreticians, Barriteau rejects the notion that men's power is always negative and destructive, and that women's power is always positive even though she does believe that there are distinct patterns that characterise male and female styles of leadership. As she tells us, "there is enough evidence to refute an essentialist, biological reading of power. Instead, it is more helpful to acknowledge that power is deployed differently by different types of male and female leaders for different purposes." This is a perspective with which I concur. In sum, like male transformational leadership which can be used either for benevolent or malevolent ends, women transformational leadership can be deployed in the pursuit of positive as well as negative goals. The term, in my reading, is ethically as well as gender neutral. One then has to make a distinction between what *is* and what *ought* to be. Women's transformational leadership, to quote Barriteau, *should* be distinguished by "the promotion of gender, justice, and the tackling of a range of dominating, unequal relations such as racism, sexism, ageism and other forms of political, economic and social abuse."

Like men, women hold up half the world, and can improve it, but that capacity is not derived from any complex of essential feminine attributes, but as a result of the vision and sense of purpose which *some* women come to possess, whether by natural instinct, experience, or specific training or a combination of all of these characteristics. Having more women involved in leadership roles can help to improve and transform the quality of organisational life. This transformation will however not occur automatically as a result of some feminine dividend or miracles performed by civil society. The hoped for results will have to be striven for against great odds, the strongest of which in this age of globalisation will not be male opposition to that greater involvement, but the impersonal forces of the capitalist economic order which do not respect to any significant degree, the claims of gender.