

The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world

Women's role in improving community security

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In 2002 Liberian women, tired of war, wanted their men to arrange an agreement on the negotiating table. They followed the call of Leymah Gbowee to no longer have sex with their husbands. What was the strength of that intervention? They had a good view on the driver that in this case shaped reality: the hunger for power. They understood that the fight for power fails when women embarrass men by talking to the media about the "powerless" situation of their men in the bedrooms of their homes. The women also were aware of the possibilities of solidarity, because together one can achieve more. So, what in fact did these women do?

The Liberian women took the space they had to influence their world. Beyond that, they understood how to effectively address the issue from the position they were in, knowing what they stood for together and determined: to bring an end to violence and rape, to bring peace and to work on dignity from there. So what can we say about "their position", "their space" and about "understanding the drivers that shaped reality" to effectively address an issue?

The combination of danger and violence causes a strong increase of dopamine and adrenaline to the brain. It makes the archetype "warrior" feel strong and valuable, helps him to move away from fear but also disconnects him from other

human beings, according to Bourke (1999). Men who live in hostile situations are therefore dominantly led by gaining control and managing risks. The hunger for power as the dominant value decreases if the circumstances change: no more war, no more fights, decreasing hostility. I have observed this in my encounter with former DRC warriors and in my work with European policing officers who returned from Afghanistan. The change of circumstances did its work on the value level: there was mistrust and alertness before, back in a safer environment their base attitude towards the world around them changed. In the new situation we saw cooperativeness and openness for the rules and codes

of the society in a calm and responsible way.

So how are women to cope with situations of violence? Women have the beautiful position to really make a difference in community security. They are married to the men, mothers of the children and sisters of each other, and have intimate relationships with all of them. From their position they can sense, pre-sense, see and foresee, interpret and monitor what is happening in their communities, and their interpretations are therefore insightful into the development of conflict. After all, given this position they are well positioned to give meaning to what they sense and see and so develop a

deep understanding into the context of which they live.

Women can also use their space to become educated, to give impulses for change, and to take leadership in their communities.

The space of women is often limited in comparison to the male position due to traditions, law, and determination of men, external family or religion. So what can women do given the position they have, acting within the space they have, to improve the situation of community security?

My writing is based on my experience as an analyst and practitioner on social dynamics, community security and women leadership. I will share observations from real cases without disclosing identities of actors for reasons of confidentiality. I would like to explore here examples of how women can use a limited space to leverage the situation in conflict. Such examples provide insight into the leadership of women to create community security on a personal, communal and national level.

Coping with hostility

Safe places hardly exist. I learned this by working with a diverse group of people around the globe, either in groups or with individuals, in villages, offices and institutions. I am always struck when people mention the hostility they meet

in their lives. Mothers and daughters-in-law might fight over homework, power and privileges. In companies and institutions I have seen people fighting for the better-paid job, competing in a way that leaves no space for

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collaboration. In every environment there is insecurity.

So then what is a secure community? I consider a secure community a safe place which can have the size of a country or can be as small as a family, where people

can trust each other, where they know that no one will harm them, cheat on them or betray them. In a safe place there is dignity, respect and support. We have to face the truth; safe places hardly exist, so there is no other way than to purposefully deal with hostility. Hostility makes people cautious and withholds themselves from developing talents and sharing thoughts and ideas. In the end, an unsafe human environment is costing us what we so desperately need: trust and inclusiveness in an emotional, social, economic and spiritual way for peace and prosperity.

Some people confront unsafe

places heads up and with stretched backs; ready to act, gain control and diminish risks that they feel can undermine their status. Others lay back and act cautiously because they don't want to get involved in any serious threats. Young girls living in communities where violence is common often behave this way. When I describe their behaviour as "as an attempt to be invisible" they laugh, recognizing it. Some people measure their position carefully, consider the situation, calculate, avoid hostility as much as possible, and at some point take their chances to avoid the next violent threat. These are all responses to cope with hostility. A child soldier from Sierra Leone according to Mooy's work shows this in a clear way by stating, "I ate from the human heart so the ones who saw me were frightened.....as everybody was aware that I was a bad person they wouldn't dare to hurt me" (Mooy, 2008, pp.19)

All warriors share the desire to come to grips with insecurity through power and control. But unguided warriors are dangerous warriors. Thomas Sankara, the murdered visionary president of Burkina Faso, stated that a warrior without education is a potential criminal, according to the video Thomas Sankara: The

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Upright Man (Pan AfricanMarkets 2006). We therefore need to consider more carefully the coping mechanisms employed to address insecurity and hostility.

People are coping with hostility at all levels. World leaders avoid threats too and try to stay in control. Opponents of Stalin in Russia were executed and not allowed to become a threat. Later Breznjev made his competitors retire while Chroestjov sent them to far away countries as ambassadors for Russia, as mentioned by Yeltsin (1990). Gorbachov allowed his opponents to come back in politics to show the world that he was serious about the idea of "glasnost", meaning openness. In the same spirit, Obama asked his direct opponent within the Democratic Party, Hillary Clinton, to be his Secretary of State and overcame their antagonism by offering her a position next to him. World leaders act like all humans by having a personal view on the feeling of safety for themselves and their position. In geopolitical interaction, Gorbachov and Obama tried to let cooperation prevail. Their challenge was to cope with an environment that forced them to take position in a world shaped by hostility, control and power.

Identifying values as a basis for coping mechanisms

Coping with control, power and hostility can be done in different ways motivated by different values and according the circumstances. Mwenda put it this way:

"It is possible that a corrupt dictatorship in one country at a given time is what is necessary to achieve rapid change. But it can become dysfunctional in another country with different social and political dynamics. The building of a national identity and an effective state in homogenous Rwanda under a Tutsi president may demand honest government; but in heterogeneous Nigeria or DRC, corruption may be the glue to bring and hold diverse interests of powerful elites together. There is no one size that fits all." (Mwenda, 2014, pp 1.).

My argument is that in order to improve safety and security in communities it is crucial to understand that there is no standardised way to respond to violence. Circumstances differ, issues disputed over are not the same, cultures may differ and people respond in different ways. In trying to address hostility, a range of coping mechanisms can be used that are motivated by different values. Human behaviour originates in values. In order to increase the range of coping responses to hostility we need to review the values that underpin behaviour. In our attempt to understand a situation we should observe and assess the values of that community. This profile of values can provide

us with the information needed to determine what kind of interventions may be effective.

Let me give you an example. I worked in the Netherlands with minority leaders that have an African or Asian background. These leaders perceived reality in a total new way once they understood how to use the perspective of values and worldviews, considering the circumstances they were in. The

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younger leaders longed for more influence. They wanted to lead their community towards more involvement in the Dutch postmodern society. The elderly leaders didn't let them and they withheld information from the next generation and prohibited their actions or ignored their requests. During our meetings it was

identified that one of the crucial issues for the elderly leaders was the item of a dignified retirement. They felt responsible for the fact that they took their families to a new world and didn't succeed in their goals of pride, honour and prosperity. Without addressing these items properly, the elders stayed unwavering in post-modern questions and attempted to stay in control and by doing so, they withheld the youngest generation to fit into society. The younger leaders in our sessions understood they had to earn their leadership position by

gaining the trust of the elders by honouring them. They had to make clear that the experience and knowledge of the elderly would be part of their moral compass while navigating a new world. Only addressing the need for tradition and cherishing the culture and honouring the families wouldn't be enough to change leadership positions. We had to understand also the need for dignity and respect so that the elders could retire in a honourable manner. It would help them to be proud of their offspring to take leadership and behave in ways they felt were correct.

In unsafe places the urge for power and control is a dominant value. To increase women's leadership in community safety, it is important that women can identify how values impact choices and behaviour, knowing that everybody is coping with power and control in their own interest.

Educating male 'heroes'

Unsafe places in the domestic domain are quite common. One third of women throughout the world will experience physical or sexual violence by a partner or sexual violence by a non-partner as the World Health Organization (WHO) concluded recently (2013). Domestic violence is power driven. The violator is in control, the victim is calculating. In domestic violence situations the violator (often but not always male) does not postpone the satisfaction of his needs. This

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inability is a real threat for women.

Women can put domestic violence and rape on the agenda. The most effective way to do so is to reset or re-emphasise what constitutes a “code of conduct” for a man. This can be the impetus for an identity transition: from the archetype “warrior” to a “community man”. Violence and rape no longer fits this archetype. When men want to adapt to the new identity they have to leave the warrior archetype in which rape is common. The more men identify with the concept of “real men” the more they will reduce violence. Women therefore have to push male leaders to subscribe to the code against domestic violence and rape and to correct the men that are violating the code. Also men's involvement in maintaining the code is important. They should correct their peers so that the issue becomes a matter of honour, pride, embarrassment and shame. To maintain a new code, male involvement in correction and blaming is crucially important.

If we approach the violators in the archetypical role of

“warriors”, we can see that a key value is “to be in charge”. Using violence is a very common way for them to achieve their goals. We need to change the circumstances in a way that can provide the men with new roles, in which they are in charge again but in a different and non-violent way. A transitional process of male identity starts with the question of “What is a real man?” And beyond that, “How could a real man become a hero?”

Women can use their feminine qualities to start a process of support for men to become more open for what the community needs them to be: to protect the women from other men; and to build houses, hospitals and schools; to create perspective for the children; and to allow women to be their partner in the development of the family and the community. Men working on items like these deserve to be perceived by the community as “real men”.

Heroes could be described as real men (or women) who know how to empower the community and have an attitude of understanding and support. They are able to move away from hostility and find ways to

cooperate and facilitate dignity and social, economic and spiritual growth. Heroes could be described as leaders who serve the interests of all living creatures in the community.

I propose that a possible intervention for addressing these questions is to organize regular gatherings. As this issue is important for the whole community, it is important to get everyone involved. An example of such gatherings is the community meetings on the grassroots level in both urban and rural Rwanda that are initiated by the government. About 50 families living in a neighbourhood or village called Umutugudu have formed the lowest administrative entity in Rwanda. The Umutugudu gatherings are used by the government as an information channel where citizens can be informed on policies. The gatherings also are used by the community to deliberate on safety issues, social behaviour, and about conflicts between neighbours and conflicts within the home. The citizens choose the leaders of these gatherings themselves. Such an existing framework would be an excellent basis for the development of "real men" in community security.

In our case as we explore an intervention on domestic violence

and the transition of men from a "warrior" towards a "real man" who is of great value to the community, women leaders could start with gatherings in their village as supported by the leading and respected "real men". At the start, women leaders have to explain the central topic and give information on legal or policy requirements. Male and female leaders have to make clear that the community cannot prosper without everybody accepted as a member of the community and everybody taking their role. The question that is brought up is "what do we consider a real man?"

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The next stage of the intervention could be the invitation to reflect on the question. It urges participants to avoid talking about "me and myself" but to externalize and speak about "the man that is doing the things real man do", or "a man who is behaving without hostility, taking responsibility by finding ways to build peace, like heroes do". The women of the community can sit around the group of men and reflect on the discussion when they get the

floor. They can tell stories in which they express how they expect the men to contribute to the family and the community. This way the community can standardize the behaviour they think is useful to the group, for both women and men. Domestic violence is one of the issues on the agenda.

These are important post conflict tools and women leaders can make a start with this identity shifting process. They can organize and facilitate these intimate sessions where men and women work on the transition of the identity of men. In these meetings they can find ways to become "a real man" and a hero. Health and governmental institutes, policing forces and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can support the process by communicating information on behaviour that responds to a code for manhood that does not rely on violence.

Women's involvement in early warning in radicalization

The region of the Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa are threatened by terrorist groups like ISIS, Boko Haram and Al Shabaab. According to Kwok, these groups are growing steadily and financed by wealthy sources in the Middle East or Indonesia (2014). The extremists are receiving funds from Southeast Asia through oil in the caliphate or kidnappings in Africa. This extremism threatens women and men with their liberty and independence.

The geographical playing fields of these groups transcend the borders of nations. The Islamic State (IS) caliphate creates a situation that leads to a new possibility for meeting, talking and collaboration between the West and the Arab world. African leaders also have to decide on a strategy and to overcome differences so that they may act jointly and quickly before the situation gets out of hand.

Looking at it from the perspective of values, the members of the terrorist organisations are motivated by a desire for more power and control. The urge for power and control leads to the law of the jungle that is full of concepts as “eat or be eaten”, instant satisfaction, honour, pride, brotherhood and the idea of following leaders without questioning.

We have to understand the degree of attraction that these groups exert on young people. The attraction can lie in the idea of adventure, of being invincible, untouchable, unbeatable, and being a part of the winning team. These groups offer young people a way to make the world understand that they are fed up with what they see as humiliation

through Western oppression.

They find the legitimacy of their actions in the Quran. The groups take the view that everyone must take the holy book literally without interpretation. This view gives them full control over what they want civilians to think and how they want civilians to act. The similarity with the Christian Inquisition is rising. In late medieval times the Inquisition had the exclusive right on setting the standards and judging and punishing people. We are seeing today in IS a new manifestation of the values and behaviour that fit with dominance, male superiority and the value of hunger for power. We need to deal with this trend. Women are crucial in this process.

Young people who are considering joining terrorist groups need counterforce. They need to be firmly corrected by the people around them that can address and contradict both the defected logic and the urge for control. In these young people we have potential warriors that are falsely informed and who need proper firm guidance and adequate information which are well adjusted to their goals and values. Mothers should be encouraged to pick up on early

signs and to observe and reflect on new ideas of their sons and daughters. Communities can contribute by organizing an early warning service for policing forces and the military. Governments and donors could invest in television programming with debates that include experts on the issue as well as young people. This will help identify the defects in the logic of the jihadist movement, to prevent young people to become criminals.

Being mothers and sisters, women have the best position to sense and pre-sense changes as their sons and brothers become attracted to the jihadi movement. The men in the family can become informed by the narratives that are spread by fundamentalists in real life or through the internet. Mothers need to know (and should be informed) that they have the power to intervene. They have the position to help their children to see what is right and what is wrong. There are too many women who do not understand that this is within their power, especially when it comes to their sons. These mothers and sisters need to become the first responders. We could facilitate meetings where women can learn what the first signs are, how to respond and what to do. Community leaderships should support women so they can start to provide deprogramming training and provide psychological and spiritual support.

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The challenges to community security are serious. They have to be addressed with an understanding that values drive behaviour. To diminish hostility, values need to be shaped or reshaped. Community processes that intervene at the level of values to shift identity are therefore key to promote long-lasting community security.

At the local level women can play a very important role in resetting the value systems that define boys and men and identify new male identities that allow men to be valuable for the community in a non-violent way. Using their space they can make an important contribution to improve community security, like the Liberian women who responded to the call of Leymah Gbowee in 2002. The examples of the identity shift for men after conflict and the undermining of the support of extremism show how women can address hostility in a constructive way. In early

warning, which is increasingly relevant within the expansion of extremist terrorist organisations looking to recruit young people, women have an important role to play in education, identifying young people attracted to these organisations and addressing, as a community, effective responses. Men have an important role to play as peers, demanding non-violent behaviour that is valued and respected by the community as positive masculinity.

Unsafe places can become less unsafe over time, with leaders who respect their people and demand non-violent, constructive behaviour. The more secure society is, the more people can feel safe to work on social and economic perspectives. Women leaders can initiate this process and increase the number of women leaders leading communities, institutions and homes. Women can educate their children to become real men and strong heroes and heroines that understand how to intervene on

the hunger for control and power. As the poet William Ross Wallace wrote: “The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world” (1890).

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