

WOMEN IN PURSUIT OF PEACE

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Summary

Peace is prerequisite to lasting progress and sustainable development on our planet, and a challenge for both men and women. However, for women and mothers, as the strongholds of families and peaceful family values - it has a special significance. This chapter highlights the various aspects of the role of women in pursuit of peace, and in

the possible development of a new “Peace Culture System” (PCS), through literature and the arts, and through activities in Peace NGO’s. The women’s PCS and The Women’s World Television by Satellite for Peace Network (WSPN), would counter the rampant global culture of violence, and establish a new general culture of peace and harmony.

The promotion of women to key positions in governments, municipalities, educational institutions, and as leaders in the creation of the crucially needed new PCS - will not only abate the violence against them, but also gradually eliminate it. Furthermore, their contribution to the building of a World Beyond War and Violence, would contribute to the process of sustainable development on our planet and to the wellbeing of the whole of humanity.

1. Peace as a Woman and a Mother

“As a woman, my country is the whole world...” Virginia Woolf

Women create life, and women are 52% of the world. The present chapter is one on women's pursuit of peace, through literature and the arts and through peace activities. Therefore, the author would like to start it with one of the poems from her book: *"You and I Can Change the World,"* which illustrates several of the ideas concerning women and peace, examined here.

Peace Is A Woman And A Mother

*How do you know peace is a woman?
I know, for I met her yesterday
on my winding way to the world's fare.
She had such a sorrowful face
just like a golden flower faded
before her prime.*

*I asked her why she was so sad?
She told me her baby was killed in Auschwitz,
her daughter in Hiroshima, and her sons in Vietnam,
Ireland, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Rwanda,
Bosnia, Kosovo, Sudan and Chechnya...*

*All the rest of her children, she said,
are on the nuclear black-list of the dead,
all the rest, unless the whole world understands –
that peace is a woman.*

*A thousand candles then lit
in her starry eyes, and I saw angels
bearing a moonlit message:
Peace is indeed a pregnant woman -
Peace is a mother.*

The underlying theme in the poem above is that as women have so much suffered from wars, they can stop the practice and the very concept of “War” by virtue of their numbers and power. Women can succeed in their effort to prevent the suffering and destruction caused by wars, by virtue of their creativity and contribution to a newly required peace culture system, and also by a caring and responsible governance of the world. If women succeed in their effort to be empowered - that is, gain influential key positions (as for instance, the women in Scandinavia), they would succeed in not only saving their children from being killed, but also in saving the whole of humanity from an impending Third World War that may be a horrifying nuclear war.

In a recent documentary made by the NGO “Peace X Peace,” called “*Women on the Frontlines*,” about women in war-torn countries around the world, one woman looks into the eyes of the interviewer and asks with a shrug, “*What is peace?*” She continues to answer her own question: “*For me, peace is being able to feed my children, having a safe home for my family, being able to send my daughter to school.*” This is the essence of what peace means for mothers all over the world, and they yearn to create a better world for their children and for our global village.

However, wars suffocate women's creativity. More women and children were killed in wars than soldiers. In the past decade some four million women and children have been killed, and 8-10 million disabled by wars. We get continuous reports concerning these tragic facts from various parts of the world, where more than forty senseless wars are still being waged. Even at the commencement of the third millennium following a century of mushrooming nuclear weapons, humankind does not show any signs of having learnt the lessons from the past; more and more rivers of blood of helpless women, children and men, are continuously flowing everyday in wars and terrorist attacks, most of them caused by economic, cultural, and ethnic conflicts.

By virtue of their biological, neurological and cultural characteristics, women are in a unique position to be capable of carrying out the needed peace tasks at hand. Women are good at creating literature and the arts, and at promoting peace values and peace culture. Many women all over the world have joined Non - Governmental Peace Organizations (NGO's) that condemn the thwarted belief that wars can solve conflicts. Echoing the women's peace values, the NGO's maintain that the whole concept and practice of war have to be rapidly thrown into the anachronistic dustbin of history, where they belong. Women can be a tremendous force for peace, for they are more than half the citizens of the world. If the women of the world succeed in being united (together with all the peace loving and democratic men of the world who also yearn for a world beyond war), together, they can succeed in an effort to attain global peace.

Women are indeed the best ally for promoting peace, and researches that have been conducted on this question, report that there is a close link between gender and the yearning for a culture of peace. In our new era of globalization, when there are profound cultural shifts and new social relations, it is necessary for women to be equal partners in the building of a world beyond war and violence. And the need for a new systematized culture of peace is becoming more obvious and urgent.

The Russian writer, Tatyana Mamonova writes: “*Women give life and appreciate life... they are organically against war, and they can really save the world if they are permitted to play an equally active part in government*”. And Sai'da Nusseibeh, a Palestinian women leader states, in: *Women Creating A World Beyond War and Violence*: “*What price has peace? How many more must be killed, before the two nations wake up to look at their blood-soaked hands? There is so much anger, hatred and fear, and the wall between the two nations (the Palestinians and the Israelis), is getting higher – both sides are getting away from reality, and closing their ears, eyes and hearts to the suffering of the ‘other’. We should look into ways to bring down the wall of fear, brick by brick, for all the mosques, synagogues and churches in the world – are not worth the blood of one killed child.*”

"*Women Creating a World Beyond War and Violence*" depicts several important aspects of women's struggle for peace through research, articles, poems, stories, and letters. This book shows that there is no greater challenge in the world today than that of living in peace, respect, and harmony with one's neighbors. Women instinctively know that. Some of the questions examined in the book are: At a time when the world is still caught up in the clutches of wars, terror and violence, will humankind know how to “listen to women for a change?” War is not democratic, as most of the people of the world do not want wars. Will women, who are the majority of the citizens of the world - together with all the men who also yearn for a world beyond war - succeed in achieving their democratic right to live in peace? The book also includes, among other important documents, a correspondence with Mrs. Jehan El-Sadat, wife of the late President of Egypt, Anwar El-Sadat. It also includes a section on: "*The Four Mothers*" successful campaign to promote the retreat of the Israeli army from Lebanon, and to: "*Leave Lebanon In Peace*". The "*Poems from Lebanon*" that appear in the book, are inspired by moving letters that protest against war, and written by the soldiers, while still in Lebanon.

2. Women and Peace Education

"*She playfully showed with a smile and a wink, and a Teddy Bear hug - it could be the beginning of a honey-laden decade in a brave new world - by wisely trading guns for Teddy Bears*"

A.A - You and I Can Change the World

Women are the major educators of the children at home, and continue to be so as they grow up. The quotation above shows that it is possible and necessary for mothers to change the very toys and concepts that boys grow up with (that is unfortunately, often the gun), and exchange them for the toys that bear the concept of love, like for instance, the hugging of a Teddy Bear, as we see above.

Any effort to promote peace and to protect women and girls against aggression, which does not involve the early Peace Culture training and peace education of boys, will necessarily be short-lived. This includes the violent toys boys are attracted to and play with, under the general ambience that a toy gun makes them manly and "macho." In a pertinent research on this subject, entitled: "Children's Perceptions of Aggressive and Gender-Specific Content in Toy Commercials," by Klinger LJ, and Cantrell PJ, the

results suggest that boys are particular targets of aggressive marketing of guns and other violent toys, and are more desensitized to aggressive content than are girls.

Children's Television and Media programs are inundated with violent content, reinforced by stereotypic sex-role behavior. All this has to be drastically changed, and peace culture toys should replace violent toys in schools and homes, and on the market. How can we achieve such a tremendous change? Only through a colossal new Peace Culture System discussed in the following that would build a harmonious ambience where boys would want to hug teddy bears, instead of brandishing guns. Then the market too would change and produce teddy bears instead of guns.

Education worldwide today is mostly run by women teachers, and this can provide an important channel for the revolution needed in the creation and establishment of a powerful and effective PCS - Peace Culture System in schools. The boom and expanding dimensions of communication technology, at which women are so good, can offer various new opportunities and directions for the promotion of a new PCS that would include peace studies, literature, and education. In the framework of the PCS, international co-operation and cross-disciplinary research, promoted by electronic technology and information services, can indeed greatly enrich peace education.

Recognizing the importance of this new trend, UNESCO convened a conference on "The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Teaching and Teachers," (Khvilon, Patru, 1997), in order to strengthen international co-operation in pursuit of peace and international understanding. More conferences of this kind should be convened, and special attention should be paid to the possibilities of peace culture, literature and the arts in pursuit of the development of global peace. The links and partnerships between the teachers, both women, and men, that are created through such conferences, promote multicultural views, based on understanding and cooperation. Teachers and youths participating in such intercultural projects, acquire the potential to move beyond narrow ethnic and group identities, and acquire a wider knowledge and assume a new additional identification, as global citizens, and as promoters of peace culture.

Even in the few schools where peace education is taught, around the world, the curriculum in peace studies does not give due attention to the possible contribution of peace literature and the arts. The subject of peace studies and peace literature in general, has received relatively little attention in education, and not enough serious research has been conducted on the role that women, literature and the arts can play in promoting peace culture. Women's organizations have called on ministries of education and culture, globally and regionally, to correct this, and to include peace studies, peace culture, and peace literature, as required subjects, at all levels of schooling, from kindergarten to college and university. However, up to now not enough has been undertaken toward the goal of creating a new PCS.

Schools and colleges are suitable forums where values, identities, as well as ideals and worldviews are formed. Women have pointed out that curricula should pay attention to the central events that mark our era, such as conflicts, wars and terrorism, and address the necessity of the building of a peace culture and a general and powerful PCS to

counteract them. Worldwide Institutions, and peace educators need to organize and carry out programs and agendas that would give young people and children, as well as adults, a vision of what could be, a future view that would draw on their imaginations to create new visionary dimensions of a world beyond war, conflict and poverty. These themes have been tackled by peace researcher Elise Boulding in her "*Image and Action in Peace Building*" workshops (Brock-Utne, 1995). An additional example is the work carried out by Ian Harris with the teaching of non-violence, conflict resolution, and peace education in the Milwaukee Public Schools, and at the University of Wisconsin (Harris, 1995).

Women, in their pursuit of peace, have also pointed out that attention should be given to the transition between tradition and modernity. The traditional view of education is that it principally represents a vehicle for the transmission and reproduction of established values, and the passing on to the young of the accumulated wisdom and knowledge encapsulated over the years in the cultural heritage of nations and civilizations. However, there have been major changes in recent years, such as the advancement of girls and women in education and in all walks of life, including in the arts, and there is a need at the start of this new millennium, for a different, modern view of education and culture, which would include equality of women and men, and the creation of new peace values and norms, encapsulated in the PCS, in addition to the transfer and transmission of important knowledge from one generation to the next.

In this new PCS modern framework and agenda, peace should be considered as a central value and should inspire and influence all aspects of culture, education, and of life. Violence in most cases arises from the mistaken notion that force is the only way that can solve disputes and conflicts. The study of peace culture would demonstrate to young people, as well as to adults, that it is otherwise, and it should be applied to all subjects. In the teaching of history, for example, due attention should be given to the policies that lead to the successful conclusion of Peace Treaties, and not merely and mainly concentrate on the waging of the wars, as is often the mode in the present times. The two sides of the conflicts should be presented in an authentic and convincing way, and non-violent means should be taught on how to resolve conflicts. Historical novels are a very good vehicle to present peaceful conflict resolution, in a convincing manner. One of the books that present this is: *From The Nile To The Jordan*, in which the two friends, Palestinian Moaskar, and Israeli Inbar, decide together that if women had the task of resolving the Arab – Israeli Conflict – it would have been resolved a long time ago.

In the study of literature, lives of heroines and heroes, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, who have advanced the cause of peace, and the creation of the culture of peace, should be extensively studied, and presented as models, both in educational curricula, and through cultural programs and films for the wider public.

One of the possible examples is the peace heroine, Thea Wolf, who was a woman of many admirable qualities. She succeeded in saving many lives from the Nazi Holocaust, through the Hospital in Alexandria, with the aid of Egyptian officials, such as the port authorities, and the police. Young people can emulate her by reading her biography which is an extraordinary story, and the book could be studied as an example of a heroine who advanced the cause of peace. *Not In Vain: An Extraordinary Life* (Ladybug

Press, California, 1999), has been translated into several languages, including in Arabic and Hebrew, and is being used in schools and colleges.

Women's literature and organizations, point out that the attitude towards education and culture, which is used and absorbed on a daily basis, have an important effect on the society as a whole, for the dilemmas that confront the educational and cultural systems are a microcosm of the contradictions and struggles of the whole of society. The promotion of a Culture of Peace and an innovative and revolutionary PCS, through education, is therefore of central importance in trying to establish the dynamics that mark the interplay between society and peace.

3. Women and the Innovative Peace Culture System (PCS)

What would the women's new needed PCS - the Peace Culture System - consist of? It would consist mainly of 1. A new global Peace Culture education, 2. A popular mass peace culture, widely transmitted through the electronic media, mainly TV, Cinema, Internet and Radio. It would have the power to inculcate the sense of new peace culture patterns, attitudes and behavior, and the values of peace at all levels. 3. This essential new Peace Culture System would create and transfer peace traditions, norms, and intellectual refinement, between generations, nations and civilizations. 4. It would be largely propagated, among other means, through powerful satellites, such as the WSPN – the Women's World TV by Satellite Peace Network, described in the following.

Women organizations maintain that the general PCS, in all its various aspects, should become an integral and crucial part of life. We absorb culture daily, like we absorb our daily bread, and it should therefore be based on peace programs through Television and Internet programs, literature, films and the arts, that can become important factors for the promotion of moral, ethical and democratic values. Peace culture, peace literature and peace films and art, are means for fostering consciousness and sensitivity to the shortcomings and deficiencies in the world, as well as promoting the willingness to take creative action to build a better world.

Culture is important at all ages and to all classes in our global village, and even when the cultures vary widely, there are many features, which apply to all of them. One of the most important requirements is to understand the necessity of establishing a cultural agenda that excludes violence, and promotes a culture of peace that would ensure the sustainability of the life on earth.

In the framework of the PCS, departments of Literary Peace Studies should be nationally and internationally established and empowered. These should promote the publication of Peace Literature periodicals and journals, including Electronic Peace Journals, such as the IFLAC Pave Peace daily Digest: at: www.iflac.com . It is also important to establish "peace museums," as part of the PCS educational system, all over the world, which would organize, exhibit and present to the wide public the fruits of peace research, art, films and literature, as well as hold public lectures and symposiums on the development of the global peace culture. There are more than a hundred such museums already established in Japan, and other places in the world, often run and

promoted by women, and the rest of the world should emulate those lively and important peace museums.

In the framework of the PCS, there should be a wide distribution of grants for peace research and the encouragement of the writing of peace literature, film-scripts, and plays, as well as the organizing of Peace Drama competitions, awards, and prizes that would have an advantageous and high payoff. Peace Books, videos and Internet Programs displaying various aspects, including entertainment based on peace literature and the arts for all should be produced. These should present in an attractive manner the various themes and aspects of peace, as well as their great advantages. Peace literature and peace culture educational resources should be collected, researched and studied in global and regional educational institutions, and disseminated through satellite telecommunications and the regular media all over the world.

3.1. Global Culture can be repaired with the Help of Women

Culture, literature and the arts, to which most people of the world are exposed through Television and Films, and at which women are so good, transcend all frontiers and all epochs. Culture enables human beings to enrich themselves and to enhance knowledge and refine being. This is why it is so important that the cultural aspects to which the people are exposed be vehicles of peace.

The Global and regional cultures today are in need of repair, and they can be repaired with the help of women, and the proposed innovative PCS: The Peace Culture System described above. Women NGO's and Peace NGO's can help create the PCS; however they would need an enormous support from the governments of the world, and the UN as well as the private financial sector. To establish the PCS, it is recommended to create a United Nations Women's Peace Culture System Task Force, to help curb and eliminate the rampant global culture of violence, and transform it into a culture of peace. This should be in cooperation with the Task Force of the United Nations; UNESCO, UNIFEM, and Institutes for Peace Research all over the world, such as the U.S. Institute of Peace, as well as other international and national institutions. Task Force Experts from the CSIS, the Task Force of the United Nations, the Hills Program on Governance, the Council of Foreign Relations, and the Heritage Foundation, as well as the World Bank and major financial corporations, should likewise be part of this tremendous Cultural Revolution, which is highly necessary.

In addition, it is important to create a "Women for Peace Culture Independent Oversight Board" with audit powers to act to eliminate terrorism and to peacefully resolve conflicts and prevent wars. Senior female officials should be appointed, to manage daily operations of the PCS Secretariat, similar to the role of - Chief Operating Officers. The PCS Board should be empowered to appoint a PCS Secretary General, with the authority to appoint her top officials. To be able to successfully found and develop all of the above, it is necessary to generously and appropriately fund the Women's Peace Culture System Task Force, for the establishment and smooth functioning and development of the PCS, including all its amenities, such as the WSPN as discussed in the following.

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Biographical Sketch

Professor Ada Aharoni is a sociologist of culture at the Technion: Israel Institute of Technology, in Haifa, Israel. She is also a writer, poet and editor, and she writes in English and Hebrew. She has published twenty-five books to date that have been translated into several languages. She believes that culture and literature can help in healing the urgent ailments of our global village, such as war, conflict and famine, and promote equal status and opportunities for women and men. The themes of a new global Peace Culture System, Multiculturalism, peace and conflict resolution, toward the sustainability of our

fragile earth, are major ones throughout her works. She studied at London University (England), where she earned an M.Phil in English Literature, and at the Hebrew University (Jerusalem), where she earned her Ph.D. degree on Literature and Sociology. She also taught at Haifa University, and at Penn State University and the University of Pennsylvania. She has been awarded several international prizes and awards, and has been elected as one of the 100 Global Heroines (Rochester N.Y. 1998).

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