Did You Hear?
Global Leadership in Charity’s World

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**ESSAYS**

Did You Hear?
Global Leadership in Charity’s World

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Forty-one women have become president or prime minister of their country in the past four decades, more than 60% of whom have come to office in the last 8 years. What are these women bringing to the world’s most influential roles of both political and business leadership? In which ways do their paths to power and styles of leadership bode well for the 21st century? In which ways do the women simply replicate the patterns of 20th century leadership most frequently exhibited by men? This article, told through the experience of Charity Ngilu, the first woman to run for the presidency of Kenya, highlights some of the emerging trends in global leadership as women increasingly assume the most senior positions in the leadership of countries and companies.

**Did you hear?**

Just this year, on July 9, Charity Ngilu declared her candidacy to run for president of Kenya. If she succeeds, Ngilu will be the first woman ever to become president of Kenya.¹

Ngilu's candidacy puts her in good company. Of the 37 women who have held their country's highest leadership position, 21 have come into office since 1990.² Thirty-five of the 37 women are the first women that their country has ever selected for their highest leadership position. Whereas there were no women presidents or prime ministers in the 1950s, only 3 in the 1960s, 5 in the 1970s, and 8 in the 1980s, 21 have come into office in this decade, and the decade is not over yet. More than the total of all the women who have ever previously achieved their country's highest leadership position have come to power in the past 7 years. It does not take a statistical genius to notice that there is a trend, and that that trend is toward an increasing number of women in the world's most senior leadership positions.

According to leadership scholar Michael Genovese, "Studies of... leadership have been remarkably non-gender specific."³ Genovese notes that "this is due
primarily to a tacit assumption . . . that leaders are men.4 Genovese goes on to explain that "historically, there is of course a good deal of validity to this assumption—almost all . . . leaders have been men."5 According to Genovese, referring to a generic head of state as "him" may be understandable, even if, as we exit the 20th century, it has become wholly inaccurate.6

Why might Charity Ngilu become the world's next woman president? Does she come from a politically prominent family? Did she grow up with wealth and privilege? Is she a lawyer with a degree from one of the world's most prestigious law schools? Did she serve for years in increasingly important positions in one of her country's dominant political parties?

Well, no, not quite.

Did you hear? Charity Ngilu, the daughter of a local Christian minister, the ninth of 13 children, just announced her candidacy to run for president of Kenya. Although she did go to high school, after graduation she became a secretary, not a lawyer. And only after she married did her husband send her on to college where she earned her degree in business administration and went on to become an entrepreneur, not a politician.7

So, how did Ngilu come to be considered as a very serious candidate for her nation's foremost leadership position? Had Charity dreamed of becoming a national leader from the time she was a child, or at least from the time she was in college? Because her own family comes from a very modest background, did at least her husband come from a politically prominent family? Did her party rally around her and eagerly nominate Ngilu for the presidency of Kenya?

Well, no, not quite.

Did you hear? Charity Ngilu, candidate for the presidency of Kenya, entered politics only 5 years ago. On that day, a group of women, each with leafy branches in their hands, none with briefcases, came to her back door in Kitui, 75 miles away from cosmopolitan Nairobi.8 Charity knew the women; most belonged to a local women's association with which Charity had worked for years to build both health clinics and better water supply systems. One of the women knocked on Charity's door. Charity came out, drying her hands on her apron. The women told Charity that they wanted her to run for parliament in Kenya's first multiparty elections. Charity's response? "You are joking! You are crazy, obviously!"9

Clearly, not the power-hungry response of the all too typical 20th-century status- and ego-driven aspiring politician.

Is Charity atypical?

Yes. But only if viewed through the career paths of most of history's recognized world leaders—only if viewed through the career paths of most male leaders.10 Bill Clinton is typical. Bill Clinton dreamed of becoming president from the time he was a little boy, and as is widely reported in the press, at age 16, after having shaken the hand of President John F. Kennedy, Clinton announced that he would like Kennedy's job, that he too would like to be president of the United States of America. To date, as children, none of the women presidents or prime ministers have dreamed about becoming their country's leader. You see, for most women leaders, it is not the desire for the position nor for power per se that motivates them to seek the highest leadership positions; rather, it is their commitment to a compelling vision of what society could be, of what society must be.11

Charity was an outsider to politics. Is Charity atypical?

Yes, again. But only when viewed from the perspective of most men's paths to political and corporate power. Most women leaders do not work their way up through the organization or political power hierarchy. Rather, they laterally transfer into the most senior position.12 Ngilu was an entrepreneur; 5 years later she is being considered as possibly the next president of Kenya. Tansu Çiller served as an economics professor in Istanbul; 3 years later she became prime minister of Turkey. Gro Harlem Brundtland trained as a medical doctor; 6 years after accepting her first government position, she became Norway's first woman prime minister.

Is the pattern similar among business leaders? To a large extent, yes. A disproportionate number of the women business leaders do not move up through the organization to the most senior position; rather, they laterally transfer into the top position of one organization after having built a career in another organization.13 As a double outsider, Marjorie Scardino, the only woman chief executive officer of a Financial Times–100 firm is a good example. Not only was she brought in from The Economist to assume the leadership of Pearson Plc, but as an American, she was the first non-English executive to hold a senior executive position in this esteemed British firm.14 Laterally transferring into senior leadership calls into question all of our discussions about the glass ceiling. Perhaps the route to the top is not to follow men's paths and attempt to break through the glass ceiling, but rather to simply go around the glass ceiling. (It sure would save a lot of headaches!) Why else might we be seeing
so many more women CEOs in entrepreneurial enterprises than in corporations? And one must ask, why should future women leaders follow the same paths in the 21st century that men have followed in the 20th century? Not surprisingly, such mimicry is neither good for society nor good for women.

Charity initially rejected her women friends' suggestion that she run for parliament. Is Charity atypical?

Yes, but once again, only if we believe that women should try to copy men's 20th-century paths to power. Typical of women but not of men, many of the world's women leaders decline senior leadership positions when they are originally offered.\textsuperscript{15} Golda Meir, for example, initially told her party no when offered the Israeli prime ministership. Corazon Aquino's first response to running for president of the Philippines was also no. Maria Liberia-Peters told her party no when they first offered to nominate her for prime minister of the Netherlands-Antilles. Her party then went on to unanimously nominate her, without her permission.\textsuperscript{16}

Luckily for Kenya, and the world, the group of women at Ngilu's kitchen door did convince Charity to take them seriously. She ran. And, with what the press described as unusually strong grassroots support, she beat the governing party's incumbent.\textsuperscript{17} Today, many of the more traditional, male, party-supported legislators—most of whom ignored Ngilu previously—fervently wish that the women at Charity's kitchen door had believed that it was obviously crazy for a woman to run for Parliament or, at least, that the women had failed to convince Ngilu to run. For you see, Charity Ngilu did not just win, but rather she went on to become "a stubborn thorn in the side of both President Daniel arap Moi and his ministers, upbraiding them on a regular basis for doing little or nothing for the poor, especially [poor] women."\textsuperscript{18}

From the perspective of traditional politicians, the problem with Charity Ngilu is that she does not want power for power's sake. She really does want to change Kenya; she really does want to make it a better place.

Years ago, Ngilu had been shocked that Kenyans were dying of treatable diseases while traditional government politicians continued to spend large sums of money on the trappings of power.\textsuperscript{19} It was Ngilu's outrage at the indignities of poverty that led her to run for Parliament in 1992 and, on July 9 of this year, to declare her candidacy to become Kenya's next president. Ngilu, along with an increasingly vocal number of Kenyans, had become outraged at President Moi spending the "colossal sum of $60 million to buy himself a presidential jet . . . [and] another $70 million to build an airport in his hometown. Then [as Ngilu incredulously observes], Moi has the audacity to go in front of women [and] say, 'Please vote for me.' The women he is telling that to are walking naked . . . carrying sick children on their back[s], and their homes have holes in them that you can see through, because of poverty.\textsuperscript{20}

Charity Ngilu has a vision, a vision for the people of Kenya. It is her burning desire to accomplish this the vision that drives her to seek the presidency. She needs the office to accomplish the vision; she does not need or want the office itself.

Did you hear? Charity Ngilu is a candidate for president. But, how did she get to be a presidential candidate? Yes, she's appalled at the poverty and equally appalled at President Moi's abuses of power. But, how did she get there? When did her party nominate her? Why her? Why now?

Good questions. But once again, such traditional questions do not lead us to understand at all how the story has gone. Ngilu's party did not nominate her. You see, Kenya's political parties—not dissimilar from those of many countries around the world—are defined tribally, with the main ethnic groups—the Luo, the Kalenjin, and the Kikuyu—dominating the largest political parties. Rather than celebrating her party's nomination, Ngilu defected from the Kikuyu-dominated Democratic Party when it became clear that it would not nominate her.\textsuperscript{21} Ngilu is not running as a candidate of the Democratic Party; she is running as a candidate of the much smaller Social Democratic Party.

Strange? Well, no, not really.

Hierarchical power structures, whether political or corporate, often fail to support women candidates for senior leadership positions. Most women draw their support directly from the people—whether via the ballot box or the marketplace—rather than from either political or corporate hierarchical power structures.\textsuperscript{22} For example, Mary Robinson, before becoming president, visited more small communities in Ireland than any politician before her. The opposition to Robinson now admits that they did not take her or her candidacy seriously until it was too late.\textsuperscript{23} Similarly, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto visited more communities in Pakistan than any politician before her. She was only taken seriously as a candidate when, on her return to Pakistan in 1986, far more people [turned out] than anyone—politicians, diplomats, or other analysts—had foreseen. Many people had doubted that Benazir Bhutto, a woman, would find the kind of support among the
people that her father had had, but her triumphant return proved them all wrong.24

Likewise, former President Corazon Aquino held rallies in more than 1,000 Filipino communities, whereas her opponent, Ferdinand Marcos, campaigned in only 34. Her victory was labeled the People's Revolution.25 Is not this, at its most fundamental level, what we call democracy? Broadly based community support that has not been orchestrated by a political or societal power elite? Is not this what is increasingly recognized as 21st-century networked power, as opposed to the hierarchic power that dominated the 20th century? Is not this what the management and the feminist literature recognize as empowerment, that is, power-with rather than power-over?26

It certainly does not surprise anyone who has been observing women in organizations that the strongest evidence for a gender-based difference in leadership style is in women leaders' tendencies to adopt more democratic, participative styles, whereas men tend to use more autocratic, directive styles. In more than 90% of the almost 400 studies comparing male and female leaders' behaviors, women exhibit more democratic behavior than do men.27

Unlike many political parties in Kenya, the one that Ngilu chose, the Social Democrats, has no particular ethnic allegiance. That she chose to run as a candidate of the Social Democratic Party is not in the least bit surprising. Ngilu is running, in part, on a unity platform. For you see, “Ngilu sees herself not only as a champion of women and the poor, but as someone who can heal the ethnic rifts that have divided Kenya since independence.”28 As Ngilu says,

This is a wounded nation. . . . People are very hostile to each other. There is open hostility and hatred between different tribes. Some neutral person, somebody with a difference, must sit down and moderate. . . . I don't have a score to settle with anyone.”29

For many Kenyans, “Ngilu represents a complete break with [the] divisive tribal politics of the past.”30 As one Kenyan recently observed, “Charity is talking about unity, and this unity will unite both men and women. . . . If we vote for a man, there will be no change. With a woman, there will have to be a very big change.”31

Is Kenya unique? Is there something particular about Charity Ngilu’s personality or behavior that leads Kenyans to believe that both change and unity are possible? From the details of Charity’s story, one might be tempted to conclude that it’s unique. Certainly, the rich history of behavioral and trait theories of leadership would suggest that it is something special in Charity Ngilu that allows Kenyans to hope for unity and to believe in change.32 But enlarging our perspective beyond the male leaders on whom almost all leadership theories have been based changes our perspective.33 Throughout the world, among political, business, and societal leaders, women bring with them the symbolic possibility of fundamental societal and organizational change. The combination of women being outsiders at senior leadership levels previously and completely dominated by men, and of beating the odds by having the first woman to lead her particular country or company, produces powerful public imagery about the possibility of other fundamental changes.34

If a woman can be chosen to be president, prime minister, or CEO when no other woman has held such an office and when few people thought that a woman could possibly be selected, then other major changes become believably possible.35 Mary Robinson’s presidential acceptance speech captures the coupling of the unique event of a woman being elected president with the possibility of national change and unity:

I was elected by men and women of all parties and none, by many with great moral courage who stepped out from the faded flags of Civil War and voted for a new Ireland. And above all by the women of Ireland . . . who instead of rocking the cradle rocked the system, and who came out massively to make their mark on the ballot paper, and on a new Ireland.36

The pattern of women leaders symbolizing change and unity is overwhelming. Both Nicaragua’s Chamorro and the Philippines’ Aquino became symbols of national unity in their strife-torn countries. Chamorro even claimed “to have no ideology beyond national ‘reconciliation.’”37 Chamorro’s ability to bring all the members of her family together for Sunday dinner each week achieved near legendary status in Nicaragua. Why? Because, of Chamorro’s four adult children, two are prominent Sandinistas, whereas the other two, equally prominently, oppose the Sandinistas, not an unusual split in war-torn Nicaragua. As the “matriarch who can still hold [her] family together, Chamorro gives symbolic hope to the nation that it too can find a peace, based on a unity, that can bring together all Nicaraguans.”38 Are these isolated exam-
people? No, Corazon Aquino, although widely condemned in the press for naiveté, invited members of both her own party and the opposition party into her cabinet, a conscious strategy to attempt to reunify her deeply divided country. In an attempt to bring peace and unity to Sri Lanka, Executive President Chandrika Kumaratunga chose to meet directly with the Tamil separatists, even though her husband is widely believed to have been murdered by the Tamils and such a unity strategy breaks directly with the policies of her father and her mother, both of whom had previously served as prime minister of Sri Lanka before Kumara-

gunta.

Given that women leaders symbolize unity and the possibility for change, it is not surprising that a woman business leader, Rebecca Mark, chief executive of Enron Development Corporation and not a male executive, was the first person to successfully negotiate a major commercial transaction following the Middle East peace accords. Mark brought the Israelis and the Jordanians together to build a natural gas power-generation station.40

Perhaps the best known woman symbolizing hope for the type of significant change that could bring peace is the elected prime minister of Burma, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.41 Even after being denied the opportunity to take office and being placed under house arrest for 6 years, Suu Kyi still chose to meet directly with the military opposition.

Perhaps the least recognized woman symbolizing the potential for change and unity is Rwanda’s former prime minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana. Uwilingiyimana was brought in as Rwanda’s prime minister only after it was decided that the war had to be ended and a peace treaty had to be signed. The former prime minister—a man—refused to have anything to do with peace, as did the majority of his male colleagues. Uwilingiyimana became prime minister knowing that she was risking her life to do so. She paid the ultimate price; she was killed, not by the opposition, but by members of her own people who could not move beyond the tribal animosity of war.42

What does the future portend? Does Charity Ngilu stand a chance of winning the election, which is expected to be held later this year? The odds are against her. President Moi has been in power since 1978, nearly two decades. Even the chairwoman of one of the major opposition parties thinks that Ngilu does not stand a chance “not because [Charity] is not a good candidate, but because . . . sexism is still too deeply embedded in Kenya. . . . Kenya. . . . is not stable now, and it will take these men time to accept being ruled by a woman.”43

Some political strategists disagree, believing that Ngilu has a fighting chance of winning. They observe that “hundreds [of men] in a mostly male audience cheered [Ngilu] . . . when she rose to speak” at a recent political rally.44 Some of the men “said [that] they were ready to vote for . . . Ngilu now.”45 They said “they were weary of the usual cast of opposition politicians, many of whom [had] served in Moi’s government at one time or another.”46

Will she make it? No one knows. No one can predict the next few months, let alone the 21st century, neither for Kenya nor for the rest of the world. Change comes at a price, yet continuing on our current path might well extract a much, much higher price—the extinction of civilization as we know it. Leaders are lightening rods for the dissension in society. Charity Ngilu is no exception.

On Saturday, July 12, only 3 days after Charity declared her candidacy for president, thugs with machetes attacked her after she spoke at a rally.47 “The government [of course] denies that its agents orchestrated the attack, but [Charity] . . . who was wounded, maintains . . . [that her] assailants were from the youth wing of the governing party.”48 As Charity explains, “I received a threatening telephone call, [then] the man [on the phone] said, ‘So, you are still running for [president] . . . after what happened [to you] on Saturday?’”49 Her answer is yes.

Societal change is not a game for cowards. Global leadership is not a game played by cowards. Charity Ngilu has a vision—a vision for a peaceful, democratic Kenya where all citizens, rich and poor, female and male, from all tribal backgrounds, can live in dignity. It is a vision worthy of the world, not just of Kenya. It is a vision more strongly supported by the people than by the current political and economic power elite. It is a vision that requires not only a shift in how we see society but also a shift in how we act within society. Ngilu’s vision is founded and based on unity, rather than any form of divisive tribalism. It is founded on broadly based networked power, rather than any form of hierarchic centralized power. Her vision is founded on broadly based access to economic and social well-being, rather than on extreme advantage only for those at the top of a hierarchic, predominantly male pyramid.

Societal change has never come without powerful symbols of change. Women leaders symbolize change.
But societal change does not come through symbols alone. To achieve the type of society that we might envision, the women and men leaders of the 21st century must be

- vision-driven,
- globally inclusive,
- multicultural persuasive and fluent,
- courageous, and
- humble.

What makes these women global leaders rather than national leaders? Partially, it is the dynamics of 21st-century society that challenge all of us, women and men, to think and to act within a global context. But for women, it is also the intersecting dynamics of time and place. Because women leaders are unique, the world press chooses to tell their story. Charity Ngilu’s candidacy was reported by The New York Times and spread throughout the world on the major wire services. Right or wrong, the world press probably would not have picked up the story had a man been nominated by one of the smaller political parties in Africa. Women leaders are global leaders because society is going global and because the world press makes them globally visible. And their global visibility allows them to act in ways that would be much more difficult, if not impossible, for less visible male leaders. All too many countries have been known to silence or to eliminate opposition politicians. Charity was placed under house arrest in 1992 after running for Parliament. She was attacked with machetes after declaring her candidacy for president. It is much less likely that Charity will disappear with the world watching than if the world were to remain oblivious. Global visibility supports courageous action.

**GLOBAL LEADERSHIP**

*To lead* comes from the Latin verb *agere*, meaning to set into motion. The Anglo-Saxon origins of the verb *to lead* come from *laedere*, meaning people on a journey. Today’s meaning of the word *leader* therefore has the sense of someone who sets ideas, people, organizations, and societies in motion; someone who takes the worlds of ideas, people, organizations, and society on a journey. To lead such a journey requires vision, courage, and influence.

But what about the ends to which a leader’s behavior is directed? Should not a true leader be viewed as a person whose vision, courage, and influence set ideas, people, organizations, and society in motion toward the betterment of the world? To become leaders, do women need to be fit into the predominantly male history of leadership theory? The answer is a resounding no; women do not fit and they do not have to fit. Is this obstinacy or fact? Luckily, the later. For you see, whereas there are more than 5,000 published works on leadership, there is not even a commonly agreed-upon definition of leadership. As noted by prominent leadership scholars Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus,

Decades of academic analysis have given us more than 350 definitions of leadership. Literally thousands of empirical investigations of leaders have been conducted . . . but no clear and unequivocal understanding exists as to what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders and, perhaps more important, what distinguishes effective leaders from ineffective leaders.

Perhaps, given the lack of any coherent, agreed-upon pattern to fit into, we should begin with the definition of British CEO, Anita Roddick:

Leaders in the business world should aspire to be true planetary citizens. They have global responsibilities since their decisions affect not just the world of business, but world problems of poverty, national security and the environment. Many, sad to say, duck these responsibilities because their vision is material rather than moral.

Is all this naively idealistic? The last gasp of a terrified public facing the inevitable destruction of civilization if our 20th-century ways of leading are projected very far into the 21st century? Is this some sort of strange variant of feminism, allowed to escape the bounds of extremism and thunder into absurdity? No, historic precedent would label the ideas we are discussing as conservative, not radical—albeit from a broader temporal perspective than is usually taken on the nightly news.

As increasing numbers of people are aware, the vision of a more peaceful, less hierarchical, more egalitarian society—and the leadership that would foster such a society—only appears naive when viewed from the parochial perspective of the past 7,000 years. As historians and anthropologists have revealed, “there
have always been legends [and writings] about an earlier, more harmonious and peaceful age.\textsuperscript{58} The Bible, for example, tells us of the Garden of Eden. But many, if not most, people assume that these are "only idyllic fantasies, expressions of universal yearnings for seemingly impossible goals. Only now, thanks to new scientific [dating] methods" and specific findings, archaeologists are beginning to expose the actual facts of our distant past.\textsuperscript{59}

"New excavations . . . reveal that these [supposed] legends derive from folk memories about real flesh and blood peoples . . . who organized their societies along very different lines from [our own].\textsuperscript{60} They are not mere idealistic fantasies. For example, at Çhatal Huyük and Hajilar, both located in modern day Turkey, archaeologists date communities to 57000 B.C.E., 75 centuries ago. These communities were located in the middle of fertile plains, not in defensible positions against stone cliffs or atop mountains. Moreover, these ancient communities were not surrounded by moats, stone walls, or other defense systems. In addition, their art—which was plentiful given their easy access to food on the fertile plain—showed no sign of either individual or community level violence, and only minimal indications of hierarchy.\textsuperscript{61}

Just as the early explorers' discovery that the world was not flat made it possible to "find" a world that had been there all along, the archaeologists' new findings allow us today to rediscover communities that have been organized peacefully and cooperatively with their neighbors. Their recent findings ground supposedly unattainable idealism in the reality of history. Perhaps not coincidentally, these communities were largely led by women.\textsuperscript{62}

Charity's story is our story, the story of civilization at a crucial transition as it either marks its demise or celebrates its transformation. Charity's story is our story, the story of leadership—whether by women or by men—that transcends history to establish new directions worthy of civilization. As Madeleine Albright, U.S. Secretary of State, reminds us, "We have a responsibility in our time, as others have had in theirs, not to be prisoners of history, but to shape history."\textsuperscript{63}

Afterword

In early January 1998, former president Daniel arap Moi was reelected as president of Kenya. All sides claim that there was fraud in the election.\textsuperscript{64}
of Canada’s film The Human Race, Part 3 The Tribal Mind, with commentator Gwynne Dyer. Director Anne Henderson. Producers Marren Canell and Catherine Mullins; For the NFB, Kent Martin. Available from the National Board of Canada (tel: (800) 267-7710).

43. McKinley (1997a), p. 3.
44. McKinley (1997a), p. 3.
45. McKinley (1997a), p. 3.
50. Ngilu’s opposition complains that “she is always covered [by the local and international media] when she speaks” ("Kalonzo Tells Ngilu to Bow Out of Race," 1997).
55. For a thorough review of the leadership literature, along with the conclusion that there is no agreed-upon definition of leadership, see Stogdill (1974) and Bass (1991).
58. The following three paragraphs are excerpted and edited from the back jacket of Eisler’s (1987) insightful book, The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future. Eisler has been particularly prominent in popularizing our understanding of the nonhierarchic nature of ancient society and the potential (and necessity) for the same in the 21st century.
64. Among many others, see Davies (1997), Lovgren (1998), McKinley (1997b, 1997c, 1998), and "Vote Fraud Charges Fly in Kenya Election" (1997).

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