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How to Become a Resilient, Adaptive Leader in Turbulent Times: Lessons from Women in the Middle East

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted us on a global level and, has consequently pushed leaders to think more earnestly about what kind of leadership becomes essential, both in managing the current crisis, and for any such turbulent time in the future. We need more effective tools for resiliency to survive in times of adversity and adapt in order to thrive. We have learned that the epicentre of chaos, with the beginnings of COVID-19 in China, can shift, and that we are all impacted by change, no matter the origin or apparent localization. Solutions must include new, more global ways of seeing, being and doing. Many regions have many lessons to offer in helping us understand how to move beyond a blueprint for action of an outer orientation, in particular, to value and strengthen inner dimensions of leadership. This paper presents a case study on women the author studied in the Middle East over several decades; these women aptly demonstrate the very leadership capacities needed in turbulent times through their collective struggle, and with resiliency and adaptability at the core of their being and seeing. This paper argues that such facets are necessary to address the complexities of our current collective challenge, and for turbulent times ahead.

Keywords

Resilient & Adaptive Leader, Wome, Middle East Turbulent Time

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Introduction

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the world in a way that most people have never experienced. It has impacted us on a global level and has consequently pushed leaders to think more earnestly about what kind of leadership becomes essential, both in managing the current crisis, and for any such turbulent time in the future. Specifically, the chaos this pandemic has created has pointed to the need for preparing for the inevitable times of turbulence ahead. For many, it has highlighted that we need more effective tools and means to withstand and survive in times of adversity. At the same time, it has pushed leaders to think and act differently, and look towards others to come together to address the challenge. In addition, countries, though some later than others, have looked towards the epicentre and beginnings of COVID-19 in China, together with the surrounding countries in the region, to gauge the initial spread and understand the strategies to contain the spread and devastation. The value in doing so is in recognizing the epicentre itself can shift to other localities, swiftly and unpredictably leading to global impact.

In the same vein, I propose that we look to regions and people that, being at the epicentre of socio-political turmoil, in addition to other challenges, have a great deal of practice in navigating and overcoming challenges. These are not least challenges, such as war, extreme poverty, acts of terrorism, political and economic repression, and various forms of marginalization from equal opportunity and access, leading to extreme stress. Human impact is often intersectional and gender specific in nature. In particular, beyond the pandemic and in the years to come, it will be important to locate and learn from women who have demonstrated leadership capacities during stress and crisis, as experienced by compounded social, political, economic and systems forces. In particular, the impact of complex challenges requires learning how to become resilient and adaptable to deal with those complex challenges. Many regions

have many lessons to offer in helping us understand a blueprint for action of an outer orientation, and, perhaps more importantly, inner dimensions of leadership.

The women I have studied in the Middle East over several decades aptly demonstrate the very leadership capacities needed for creating that inner strength with resiliency and adaptability at the core of their being and seeing, necessary to address the complexities of our collective challenge. This paper offers their lessons as a guide for leaders searching for ways to navigate turbulent times with resilience and adaptability in their personal lives and in their ability to lead others. The leadership we need more immediately and in the times ahead requires a shift from the purely outer to incorporating an inner dimension for leadership learning, beginning with personal resiliency and adaptability.

Expanding Our Horizons

Leaders are not born; the premise of the current argument is that leadership can be learned, and particularly through applying and aligning leadership concept to context and need. Education is central to teaching leaders how to succeed (Masakowski 2018, p. 243); hence, times of crisis call for the dissemination of leadership knowledge, skills, and competencies. Though I refer throughout to times of crisis, chaos, or turbulent times, it is hard to deny that we were already on a trajectory towards destroying our planet and perhaps civilization itself. Furthermore, “times of crisis” or “turbulent times” might only denote moments for heightened awareness due to more noticeable spikes along that trajectory. Yet, the pandemic has taken us on a global journey which offers opportunity for our greatest growth into leadership; that is, if we can embody critical leadership lessons. Adding to the challenge, Masakowski

(2018) argued that leaders are often presented with crises, for which there is no blueprint or set of rules (p. 238). I hope we might all recognize that we are leaders in our own right and have ability to learn and embody the qualities and capacities necessary to lead effectively. During disasters, we can reach out to other nations, each having different capabilities we can learn from (Masakowski 2018, p. 239).

There is a growing literature of international case studies which demonstrate that leadership effectiveness is contextualized and, furthermore, is often demonstrated by regions other than those that have dominated the literature. Chin and Trimble (2015), for example, argue that the other global and local demographic contexts challenge existing western-based models that presume western models can be applied in all contexts. Mahavandi and Krishnam (2018) demonstrate through their case studies in non-western contexts and in highly diverse environments, with the examples of Iran and India, both deeply Indo-European, that leaders in such other environments, in fact, often illustrate high levels of competencies in innovation, while demonstrating care of people in different ways from “western” environments. They argue that such competencies are under-researched and, thus, their value is poorly understood; western research neither explores the underpinning of these practices nor the deep cultural traditions and roots that drive them (p. 107).

This work draws on wisdom, knowledge and experience from women I have worked with, studied, and spent years with, who pursue change, often in very difficult circumstances and against all odds. My interest is to capture and share what I have observed, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to learn, as indispensable keys to navigating and transforming situations of incredible challenge. While Middle Eastern women have been thought of as the least likely to create change, my research demonstrates they are among the most important leaders for helping us understand how to lead in difficult times,

like the pandemic, and in times ahead. However, our ability to learn from their lessons will require us to first expand our horizons from seeing the West as the cradle of civilization and leadership, to recognizing other regions as possible contexts for evolving leadership, in line with what is needed globally during turbulent times.

Expanding our horizons will require shifting our mental models around geography for locating the regions that inspire and inculcate capacities of global leadership, resiliency, and adaptability. It will require recognizing that those who are marginalized, and those framed as inconsequential to the political and change, can teach us what we cannot go without. A key barrier to recognizing the agency and wisdom of non-westerners comes from an assumption, both implicit and explicit, that only the West can claim knowledge or understanding of “best practices” regarding sustainable development, peace, and leadership. As a point of interest, historically, the sciences, mathematics, inventions, religious texts, literature, mythology, and teachings and principles of leadership come from Indo-Europe, Asia and the Middle East, and have been appropriated by “western” cultures, leading to a biased perspective that they originated in the West.

Another bias impeding our ability to learn from women is that many cultures typically look for leadership examples from men. The assumption is that action-orientation leadership, purportedly a “masculine” approach, is of greater value in pursuing change than the building of resiliency and adaptability. But what if an inner dimension, an arguably more feminine way of being and seeing is of at least equal value to navigating our turbulent times? Action-orientation can be said to fall within the masculine and preferred mode of behaviour when we envision change. Moreover, the proclivity towards dominance and power-over is, in fact, the preferred approach and also an

unhealthy masculine approach, leading to repression that has resulted in inequity, marginalization, and war. Such an approach is a bias that requires a mental shift to taking an appreciative stance for the feminine. A barrier to overcoming these biases is placing action orientation over being-ness as a more significant and necessary value.

Furthermore, the western worldview that considers women in places other than the West (referred to as the *developing world*, the *global south*, the *third world*, or even the *fourth world* of communities within the West) as needing to be saved is an added bias shared, too, with neo-liberalism and most western feminism. Feminists, activists and ‘good-doers’ are not immune to this mindset, and therefore may be biased in determining what approaches and forms of activism are needed and significant for empowerment. In other words, the West frames these women as victims, both by focusing on the disempowerment of women in particular geographical settings and also by situating neo-liberal western thinkers and practitioners as the saviors in the dynamics of community development and empowerment initiatives. As a result, we are missing key and diverse forms of agency contributing to change in turbulent environments that would provide insights for a world entirely at risk of greater chaos.

In such a dichotomous and binary approach, the public domain as the public sphere has been placed in hierarchy over the private sphere. In that, action that takes place in the public sphere is granted value and action in the private sphere little value, economically and politically. From an intersectional perspective, Middle Eastern women’s activism and struggle are discounted due to this dichotomization of the public and private; due to the study object, where religious, their religious identify is left aside to the private sphere (Klemkaite 2018, p. 136); due furthermore specifically to the endeavor to restrict Islamic expression from public space, and due to its framing as incompatible to western cultural norms and civility (Cesari 2009, p. 2); and, lastly, due to these

women's perceived repression and therefore passivity in Arab culture. Middle Eastern women are depicted as passive actors in the public domain (Hale 1997, p. 31). In this hierarchialization of the masculine over the feminine, Arab Middle Eastern women have been framed as passive and oppressed, unable to facilitate their own transformations and change.

News, the media, research, or most anything on the Middle East tend to affirm and re-inscribe an '*a priori* landscape of domination and resistance' even though this untenable dichotomisation is not supported by empirical nuance derived from rigorous inquiry (McGranahan 2016, p. 320). As a result, a key assumption about women in the Middle East is that their agency is centrally state-created and therefore state-deferent (Arenfeldt & Golley, 2012). When they are not seen necessarily protesting on the streets – although the Arab uprisings did see women take to the streets – it is assumed that they are passive, too repressed, or uninterested in change and transformation. They are depicted as weak. This is particularly the salient view of authoritarian states where the state is theorized as robust and community too repressed to counter the state in yet another dichotomous pitting of the state apparatus and community. In this hierarchialization of the state as the nexus of power and the community as an apolitical and repressed sphere, our focus is diverted from the numerous acts of courage and leadership to simply the state. Yet, an overview of the various initiatives in turbulent geographical areas reveals that power for change is often wielded by the “marginalized”. Women's struggles, in particular Middle Eastern women's struggles and activism, are, therefore, often missed “within the logic of subversion and resignification of hegemonic terms of discourse” (Mahmood, 2014, p. 155).

Those who have often been framed as victims and in need of being saved are often those who have much to contribute in terms of wisdom and practices

for these large scale challenges we are up against globally. The women with whom I have conducted research in the Middle East have had to find innovative and creative ways to secure a more peaceful and sustainable life and future, and are therefore poignant examples of how leaders navigate the challenges of our time, and chart a future for global sustainability. These women's means and actions can be captured through everyday practices, and various forms of activism in difficult times, such as during the Arab uprisings, though are often invisible and unaccounted for because of bias against these women's forms of agency, and these women categorically. Yet, these women create change within their own systems, and the global systems of oppression, by creating personal power and collective resiliency and adaptability, cultures of tolerance, trust, collaboration, and reciprocity by significantly embodying these qualities.

We have numerous biases to overcome. Yet, I propose we strive to overcome these as if our lives depended on it, because we need solutions to our current and overwhelming lack of leadership wisdom, if we hope to navigate change and turbulent times ahead successfully. I argue that by overcoming these biases and assumptions, we might learn how these women empower themselves and others to create change during turbulent times, and we may thereby gain valuable insights into how to promote collective wellbeing and global health, which has relevance to all leaders, both during the current pandemic, and in turbulent times which inevitably lie ahead.

In the next sections, I discuss the need for global leadership, the critical capacities to thrive, let alone survive our turbulent times, and then I follow with examples of competencies enacted by Middle Eastern women, who are often deemed ill-suited to lead change by the literature. They demonstrate how they critically rely on global leadership, resiliency and adaptability, and how they can help us evolve a global understanding and practice of leadership. My goal is to illustrate and provide means of developing capacities for leadership in

times of chaos with specific recommendations. It is possible to become a resilient and adaptive leader for turbulent times by examining the forms of agency and processes of transformation at the subjective, praxis, collective and systems levels, as demonstrated by women in the Middle East. They especially demonstrate the inner feminine capacities we need to embody as we all enter greater turbulence and complexity globally now with the Corona virus pandemic and into the future.

I will focus on women in Egypt, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates as cases for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Arab Gulf. This learning evolved through multiple methods. These include action-oriented research in which I participated with these women over several decades in several forms of activism, interviews, and observation while participating in their activities. In part, I include and draw recommendations from my own first-person research through which I not only observed and participated but allowed myself deep reflection on the value and impact of my own work through living in the Middle East, consulting, researching, and volunteering in multiple capacities since 1991. Thus, the paper concludes with recommendations around how to embody these leadership competencies.

Global Leadership

The current experience of humanity, both in the western and non-western world, is one of increasing turbulence and crisis (Ife, 2016, p. 9). Such accelerated changes require new ways of learning to address these challenges (Zuber-Skerritt, 2012, p. 4). The COVID-19 crisis has brought recognition of the numerous shared global challenges that face humanity: future pandemics, climate change, water shortage, poverty, wars, and terrorism, as reflected in the UN's 17 sustainability development goals. The West does not hold the truth to

the “good life;” nor does it hold the only path to sustainable socio-political and economic development, regionally and globally; rather, the inherent weaknesses, flaws, and unsustainability of the capitalist-consumerist agenda are becoming increasingly apparent. Instead, it is essential that we investigate other approaches to understanding and attending to turbulence, crisis, and change. This approach must include an understanding of the competencies that are most critical in turbulent times. That means we need approaches that enables us to withstand the multiple and overlapping stresses that come with crises. These are first and foremost resiliency, adaptability, and global leadership.

The definition has drawn heavily from management literature, which has also served to inform much of the leadership thinking around performance and organizational culture. Osland (2013) argues, however, that the definition ought to draw from diverse fields, such as international affairs, economics, anthropology, and cross-cultural psychology (p. 21). Furthermore, the field of global leadership is better informed through the study of power relationships. These must include sensitivity to the cultural, social, and political aspects of the environment (Earley and Ang, 2003; Eisen, 2015; Krause, 2012; Masakowski, 2018; Terlizzi, 2014) as well as the economic (Krause, 2012, 2018). Cultural sensitivity and awareness is key for leadership effectiveness (Earley & Ang, 2003; Van Dyne et al., 2012; Masakowski, 2018). Sensitivity to the cultural, socio-political and economic aspects of the leadership context must help inform understanding of, and take into consideration, the multifaceted and diverse nature of struggle in addressing, navigating, refusing, and transforming these power relationships. There is growing consensus that global leadership includes core characteristics related to context-specific abilities, and universal abilities (Mendenhall et al, 2013, p. 65). The global leadership literature has taken a context approach to focus on identifying competencies. A definition that moves

us from the management literature into other arenas of leadership and embraces multiple and evolving ways of being, doing, and knowing is as follows:

“Global Leadership is the capacity to lead and support oneself, others, organizations, communities, and complex systems in ways that enhance the well-being of communities and the planet, both today and in the future. An orientation to diversity and global citizenship is fundamental to our understanding of Global Leadership and allows us to recognize and value the multiple and evolving ways of being, doing, and knowing. Global Leadership acknowledges that all communities are global communities and that we are fundamentally interconnected. Global leaders are guided by principles of mindfulness and compassion and work to promote dignity, humanity, and justice for all (MA Global Leadership Program, Royal Roads University, Consultative Committee).”

An approach appreciative of context helps us recognize that a universal approach cannot support effective leadership everywhere at all times. It is impossible to develop a fixed plan of action, because each crisis has its own unique set of issues (Greene Sands, 2014; McFate & Laurence, 2015; Soeters & Manigart, 2008, Terlizzi, 2014, Masakowski 2018). Mendenhall et. al (2018) argue that “global leadership involves hearing and understanding the multiple, dominant, and marginalized voices within all cultures, including one’s own” (p. 65).

Also, researchers do not appear to agree on essential and non-essential leadership competencies (Mendenhall et al, 2013, p. 76). The competency approach fails to answer the conundrum of exemplary global leaders who succeed (ibid.). Hence, it is important to describe global leadership in view of both specific contexts and the sense making that occurs through interaction

with the specific environments that demand specific competencies (Osland et al. 2009). In regards to turbulent times of socio-political and economic inequity and chaos, it is imperative to consider specifically the competencies that help one navigate, survive, and thrive. The key competencies in this direction include becoming resilient and adaptive with broader understanding of global drivers and systems and local understanding of the social, political, and economic environment. To be resilient and adaptive requires attunement to what supports individual and communal dignity, humanity, justice, health and wellbeing. Global health, wellbeing, and civil society depend on keen awareness of context-specific health, wellbeing, and civil society.

A global leader is global-minded and conscious, understanding that the world is interconnected and interdependent, indeed one. Attunement to context helps us expand our horizons from parochial, biased thinking and assuming that the developed world must teach the rest of the world civility, and embracing a broader world-centric view that is encompassing, inclusive, and holistic – one that recognizes that the sum of its parts is larger than the whole itself. In this view, the global leader knows the extent of their influence and purview within this interconnected and interdependent world, and seeks to strengthen, heal, and support those they can. They seek to identify the nodes where change in this larger system can take effect and focus on those. They have the wisdom to know what they cannot control or influence directly, yet trust they are influencing the whole indirectly. Western cultures tend to focus on action-orientation (Nahavandi and Krishnan, 2018, p. 114). In many cultures, we can observe the embracing of an inner dimension of influence and focus on and attention to the self within systems as the leverage for change. Key to leading effectively in turbulent times is embracing and practicing capacities that are developed first on the inner dimensions. This cannot be done “on the fly” while

reacting to a crisis, but requires long-standing commitment to self-knowledge and a willingness to face uncertainty without a plan.

Resiliency and Adaptability

Resiliency has been defined in multiple ways. In sum, resiliency and resilience theory has been presented as three waves of resiliency research. The identification of resilient qualities was the first wave, which was characterized through identification of development and protective factors. The second wave of resilience research is about a disruptive and reintegrative process for accessing resilient qualities. Here, the community resists adversity and avoids change; its resilience is reflected by how much adversity it can withstand without collapsing or dramatically changing (Anderies et al. 2004; Ott 2004).

The third wave exemplified the postmodern and multidisciplinary view of resilience, which is the force that drives a person to grow through adversity and disruptions (Richardson 2002, p. 307). This study views the second wave refashioned to still offer currency. Those who recognize the adverse impacts of systems of dominance and destruction can do so through resisting such negative impacts and sometimes necessarily so. But in other times it is necessary to find innovative ways to refuse by choosing other means to essentially sidestep the negative impacts. This study also builds on the third wave and adopts the view that reflects the idea that sometimes adaptation to cope with adversity is the better strategy. In this vein, the community adapts to adversity by changing how it functions, or by using resources in innovative ways (Community and Regional Resilience Institute, 2013, p. 9). In this sense, there is no contradiction between adaptability and resiliency; the two are part and parcel of global leadership. *In fact, to withstand, refuse, overcome,*

navigate, move past, and then transform requires both the capacity to be resilient and adaptive, individually and in collaboration with others.

Adaptability means the ability to change in order to become successful. To become adaptable is an inner being and a shared capacity with others. It includes learning and having the capacity to learn, to be persistent, to find ways to motivate oneself, remain positive and hopeful, exercise faith, notice patterns, strategize, innovate, problem-solve, move forward with inquisitiveness, be open to working with changed circumstance, and integrate approaches. Importantly, it is the capacity to understand and work with, navigate and innovate the self and with others in larger systems; hence, it involves being systems aware.

Perhaps COVID-19 has shown how critical it is to think more seriously about survival and then transformative and global thinking, being and doing in the face of globalizing forces. Time is seemingly spinning faster, and philosophers, such as Michel5, have been arguing we will crash as a civilization if we do not begin to take measures to counter the speeding up of time, measures which he calls enacting “counter-time” through mindfulness practices (2016). Such entails going inward – not merely outward. Such practices entail focusing inward – not merely outward. If one is truly concerned with leading competently, effectively, and sustainably, it is imperative to focus on the self in the wider systems. The self must be healed, strengthened, grounded, and able to withstand and transform change. Especially during times of greater uncertainty, unpredictability, stress and change, leaders ought to be concerned with how to become resilient and adaptive, individually and collectively.

The learning, practice and expansion of resiliency and adaptability are choices. So doing involves the exercise of power because concerted effort in their learning, practice and expansion is the means for being and supporting

change. Foucault explained that power cannot be understood merely within the framework of domination as something possessed and used by persons over others; instead, it permeates life and produces new forms of desires, objects, relations, and discourses (Foucault 1978, 1989, cited in Mahmood 2004, 17). Eisler (2008, 147) argued that as history has shown, it is not enough to change who controls the means of production, and that one kind of top-down control will simply replace another. Exercise of *power over* only produces either resistance or compliance as a masculine rational dichotomous approach, which blinds one to the existence of various other forms of power, often exercised by women but can also be exercised by *Power with* “involves a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackles problems together” (Rowlands 1998). *Power from within* is the strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human (ibid.).

Leadership Lessons from Women in the Middle East

Those who have struggled in turbulent environments have a great deal to teach the rest of us who are just beginning to see the effects of a world in crisis. As argued above, women I have studied and worked with have a great deal to offer the world in way of demonstrating how to lead in times of chaos. Much of the research and work I have been involved in over the past decades in the Middle East has been with women living their everyday lives in some form of struggle within some form of ongoing crises related to, for example, poverty, gender discrimination, terrorism, war, state repression, and struggling from impacts from often multiple sources. In part, though I am privileged in many ways, I struggled alongside many of these groups of women, organized formally through organizational affiliation or loose networks. Together we struggled against trafficking of women and children, the neglect of orphans, the

repression of *bedoon* (Arabic for those without citizenship), extreme poverty usually of others, unjust criminalization, and a host of other challenges. I stood shoulder to shoulder with the hundreds of thousands of men and women on the streets during the Arab Uprisings, while they protested for their rights and change, and, among the countless serious challenges to basic rights and human security I've been witness to, I have also been close to a terrorist bombing that took lives, and through inquiry sought to listen to stories of how women survived much, much more.

Very often, I have borne witness to tears of joy for all the good work and successes the women experienced. The reward is not often external. The reward is also internal. Similarly, what enables them to be resilient, flexible, persistent and innovative is the exercise of internal capacities. I have learned from their struggles of resilience and adaptability the importance to dig deep for gratitude, strength, and spiritual grounding in the face of external stress. I have learned from these women how to distinguish between the trivial and the important, and they have demonstrated how to love and hold onto a politics of hope that keeps one going through the most difficult and desperate of times.

They can do this because they expand the critical capacities for global leadership through every day practice. They practice these forms of seeing, being and doing in choosing their subjective being and collective action, as tested, in numerous ways. I believe we have much to learn from these women whose lives have been contextualized by socio-economic and political repression and who, not merely despite these oppressive structures but *because* of them, have learned how to create resilience and work together to adapt to change. They illustrate the kinds of qualities humanity needs to navigate crisis, end extreme poverty, protect the health of the planet, and create a better and more dignified future. While my main methodology to unveil how resiliency and adaptability are important to global leadership with the example of these

many courageous women, my lived experience working with these women has also provided insight into the centrality of these capacities, and which I seek to emulate and share today.

Resilience and adaptability were developed relationally through the exercise of practicing *power with* one another. They developed and honed these capacities when they worked literally around the clock in face of threats to their lives and multiple other challenges to support one another in their growth. In numerous examples, they taught other women about their rights or simply skills to become more independent, such as, how to read, or develop skills for employment. As a result, a woman's life could be transformed. I sat with women in the different countries engaged in learning to read, often starting off with reading Qur'anic verses and listening to their stories of how empowered they had become. Women shared that their husbands could no longer tell them things that were not in the Qur'an to restrict and oppress them, because they could read and interpret the script for themselves. Women shared they could participate in their children's education and essentially functionally in their children's lives, with the ability to read, a skill many of us take for granted, yet hard won for women in many parts of the world. The resilience these women had to develop to pursue barriers to learn these skills, despite protest, shame and poverty, was significant. Other examples include offering workshops that teach spiritual principles that help women survive emotionally. They also facilitated networking so women could share provisions for survival, such as food and clothing, through times of scarcity.

Women often navigate change through innovative ways used to circumvent the system and in the process, create bonds of solidarity. For example, one group of women I worked with in the UAE founded the first women's shelter in Dubai. They did not do this as a registered group because they would have

been viewed by the government as a threat to political order and squashed. Instead, they adapted their way of organizing by forming a network of solidarity with like-minded women - and men - who could take on different roles to help women and young girls who had escaped from trafficking. In this process, they saved hundreds of children from such an existence. They also brought attention to the issues of trafficking to those in power positions who saw these women off as sex workers and jailed them. Instead of protesting for rights – they adapted their strategy to the political and cultural context by a) seeking the help of *wasta*; that is, leveraging their networks of power, and b) spending time with those who framed the women as sex workers to educate rights using religious references. After creating the shelter, these women went on to implement the first laws on trafficking of children in the country. They did not do this by challenging the state overtly. Instead, they had to adapt strategy working with specific individuals within the state and educating. Simultaneously, these women collected foodstuffs, clothes and money to run the shelter.

To mitigate worsening economic circumstances, especially following the Arab Spring, the women explained that they rely more on the acts of reciprocity, sharing and interdependence to meet needs of the poor. The need to pay attention to the economic aspect that drives agency is more critical than ever. In this endeavor, it is also important to pay attention to the qualities these women embody in their quest to end extreme poverty, create opportunities and enhance dignity. Some women networked to create their own economic well-being through the act of reciprocity where they traded their produce. Others pooled foodstuffs and used clothing so all could take what they needed and sell the rest. A group of women helped a women's organization get its start by taking turns baby-sitting the entire group's children so that each woman could eventually contribute her skills and experience. Such impactful contributions

are often provided by women and rarely accounted for. In fact, the UN's 2017 SDG 5 progress report found that "[th]e average amount of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work is more than threefold higher for women than men, according to survey data from 83 countries and areas. Available data indicate that time spent on domestic chores accounts for a large proportion of the gender gap in unpaid work" (UN Sustainable Development and Knowledge Platform, 2015).

Resilience and adaptability were developed internally through the exercise of practicing *power from within*. Many of these women claimed that resiliency was most essential since the Arab Uprisings, and with the Muslim Brotherhood government, in Egypt, destroying the economy further. With worsening conditions and no end in sight throughout the chaos and violence, women expanded the *power within* themselves to continue their struggle. Even without external indication that their economic situations would improve, they often turned to faith – a politics of *hope* - to sustain them and enable them to continue. Such translates into a greater capacity to endure and become more resilient. They *embody* leadership on the subjective level.

Their practices are very often grounded in a religious consciousness and sense of duty or what I describe as 'spiritual activism,' which is "creating change through bringing spirit, love and therefore light where needed through action" (Krause 2013, p. 16). They taught me that the way forward to creating positive and sustainable change had nothing to do with victimization, and everything to do with these inner transformations linked to the values they lived and embodied in practice. In this way, they create a politics of *hope* through activities that empower the marginalized and transform power relations. "Hope names the effort of prospective energy, self-creation looking forward, reliance on ourselves, and trust that we shall manifest better values in

the world” (McGranahan 2006, p. 113). Many women expressed that their motivation lies in simply doing *khair* (good deeds). A participant shared, “Allah created the souls with *khair*. Our ideology is to develop *khair* in people. *Khair* is a seed that you plant, but the growth of the seed depends on activism”. Through meaning-making these women could develop resiliency and respond to practices that constrain rights and threaten wellbeing.

The feminine can take many forms, including a mothering and nurturing proclivity which moves one to action. An interviewee said to me, “I love to help people, especially the poor. It is something that fulfills me in life.” Asserting a feminine approach for seeing, being and doing was exemplified when another participant stated, “I love to see everyone helping to protect children.” It can be argued that women’s feminine nature demonstrated through mothering and nurturing acts helps these women give of themselves and, in fact, keep going in the face of adversity. In fact, numerous women articulated that they would carry out charity work without even without seeing any immediate results. The arguably mostly feminine capacities of patience, flexibility, and courage to keep going were exercised despite frustrations with worsening conditions. In all the numerous Islamic charities, not specific to women, I have entered I have quickly noted, and when asked confirmed, that the ratio of women to men is almost always higher. Even women donations were dwindling, women continued to provide supports to women. What was notable was their nurturing of each other to rely on and further develop an inner strength to keep going with patience, and very often also sacrifice.

Recommendations for Resiliency and Adaptability

To withstand, refuse, overcome, navigate, move past, and then transform requires both the capacity to be resilient and adaptive, individually and in collaboration with others. The above examples illustrate the ways in which

these women embody essential means to navigating extreme stress. In particular, resilience and adaptability were developed relationally through the exercise of practicing *power with* one another. Resilience and adaptability were developed internally through the exercise of practicing *power from within*. *During COVID-19, quarantine, isolation, overwork, misinformation, contradictory messaging, new ways of working, losing work, being obliged to feed extended family, and a host of other socio-politically and economically driven sources of stress contextualize a situation for learning and enacting leadership lessons. Because these drivers impact people differently, the experience is not monolithic and hence how resiliency and adaptability will need to be exercised and practiced will necessarily be different. You are a leader in your own right; key is that you choose to become a resilient and adaptive leader.*

Because public messaging is contradictory, it is imperative to access and share informed and scientifically grounded information through multiple sources and in ways that are easy to grasp. As the example of some women above illustrated, access to sound information is part of empowerment, and although literacy rates in the developed world are incomparable to the developing world, literacy should never be assumed and, moreover, people of different age groups, or backgrounds, for example, process information differently. Information, however, should not be merely about the pandemic but go further into how to navigate the challenges it brings to society and individuals. Information needs to include leadership learnings on improving engagement, conflict management, emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence, to name a few competencies illustrated above.

Ways in which these are fostered are through engaging in collective work, such as volunteering, listening, demonstrating empathy and compassion by

giving things or giving presence, or supporting extended family, neighbours and friends acknowledging the diversity of needs and circumstance. It is cheering others on and ensuring your actions are felt as empowering to them, and, as such, in the ways that matter to them. In the example of the women above, most women shared disempowerment on some level with other women; yet, they gave of themselves to support and empower. Support to others, even – especially - when you feel your world is in chaos, lends purpose to your personal and public leadership. Some of the women made meaning of their situations and their obligation to support others through spiritual or religious guidance. These acts of extending supports to serve expand resiliency within oneself and with others. The stress experienced can be extremely acute - work to promote dignity, humanity, and justice for all.

For practicing power from within, there are various means to expand and develop resiliency and adaptability. Hold onto a constant. Whether we are experiencing isolation as extreme stress or overwork as the stressor, a constant will ground you. Holding onto at least one thing, whether that is education, work, volunteering, or some sort of everyday routine, will help you gain inner strength through turbulent times. Then allow yourself to adapt to changing circumstances by pushing your mental model of the world and the way it works to shift. Shifting the way you see things rather than controlling things themselves can grow your capacity to adapt. Allow yourself to acknowledge globally we are being pushed to think differently and do things differently. Indeed, we are being pushed to recognize our interdependence and our fundamental connectedness as individuals and as sojourners on the planet. You are not alone in this challenge. Allow yourself to adapt by seeing, thinking and doing things with acknowledgement that you are not alone. Life itself is always changing and it is just changing faster at the moment than habits and some systems you are attached to do.

*For practicing power from within and expanding resiliency and adaptability you will sometimes need to just put one foot in front of the other. It is better to be sure footed than to lose balance. Several of the women I worked with taught me a precious lesson articulated in the words of one: “slow is fast”. We may go through epidemics as with COVID for a longer period of time than imagined possible and, if not in this instance, in the next epidemic or similar to come. Live in the now, be present, and do not push change. As the women above, patience and the wisdom to practice acts of refusal (by creatively and innovatively navigating) rather than resistance may mean you keep going in the face of chaos. Ultimately, you want to keep going. Part of resiliency and adaptability is practicing “counter-time” by slowing down, resting, and ensuring you are the pillar for yourself and others. Through the decades I have worked with these women, and in my own experience, I have learned another precious lesson around sustainability. Some projects lead by women I worked with no longer exist due to various political and economic factors, but also often because of neglecting oneself as pillar – one’s own health and wellbeing. *Global Leadership entails developing the capacities to lead and support oneself first before you can support others, organizations, or communities, and serve to enhance the wellbeing of communities and the planet, both today and in the future.**

Learning to practice *power with* and *power from within*, I believe, is of incredible significance, not just for your ability to survive and thrive at this time. These new ways of being, seeing yourself, others and the world around you, and acting in the smaller and larger systems, have political import. Your ability to become resilient and adaptable, therefore, is not merely about you. You are learning new ways of how to act in and influence the world. *By recognizing and valuing the multiple and evolving ways of being, doing, and*

knowing, you are meeting the larger challenges at capacities of higher magnitude required to be the change.

Conclusion

Through our current paradigm of seeing progress and growth, we miss how the agency of others in especially the *non-developed world* is linked to our struggle and, as a result, miss what contributes to change in a world which, is in turbulent times now and will see waves of chaos in times to come. Today's global problems are created by short-sighted, mechanistic thinking of the current economic paradigm (Laszlo 2006, 39). I argue that it is imperative that we inquire into how others, including those we have thought ill-suited for leading change, are leading with the very capacities we need to learn how to develop. In a study on values in Qatar that influence change in organizations, Al Dulaimi and Saaid concluded that masculine aspects were negatively correlated with an affective commitment to change, while femininity better correlated with productivity and a readiness to embrace change (Al Dulaimi & Saaid, 2012, pp. 182-91). The embodied feminine aspects of an inward focus rather than merely an outward focus becomes key in an endeavor to lead effectively through our challenging times.

Central to this learning is an integral and inclusive approach regarding diversity of seeing, being and doing, as well a deeper understanding of the global leadership capacities needed to navigate a world in crisis. The women who experience crisis, stress, and in face of these and because of these innovatively, resiliently, and adaptively navigate, refuse and transform their conditions are showing a way forward. We need only listen and inquire into how they expand these capacities. The way we may choose to live and practice these capacities can take multiple forms, as we see these women do so in multiple ways. The women of this study illustrate that countering a global

breakdown necessitates the transformation of consciousness that occurs through everyday practice and exercising agency towards the transformation of the self and of power relations. They also demonstrate that moving through these times successfully is in solidarity to create trusting relationships, reciprocity and enduring forms of collaboration, and in creating internal capacities. These women show how to leverage power with one another and a *power from within* – a very different mode of being and acting to a distorted, though our often more well-known practice of a *power over* to resist change or ensure systems and people comply. Indeed, these women provide us a deeper understanding of evolution and our place in the unfolding drama of life on this Earth. We, too, can choose innovative and new ways as these women do to create sustainable change, human flourishing, and global health in the midst of turbulence and crisis.

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Bio

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