



A RISING PUBLIC VOICE

WOMEN IN POLITICS WORLDWIDE



Edited by Alida Brill

A RISING PUBLIC VOICE WOMEN IN POLITICS WORLDWIDE

**Edited
and with an
Introduction
by Alida Brill**

**Foreword by
Gertrude Mongella**



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at The City University of New York
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*For
the endurance and strength
of our grandmothers,
the vision and the patience
of our mothers,
and to the dreams of our daughters,
we dedicate this book.*

FOREWORD

Gertrude Mongella

As a former minister in the government of my native Tanzania, and in my current capacity as secretary-general for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, I have been acutely aware of the importance of women's involvement in decision making at all levels. It is reasonable and just that women and men should have equal access to political power, yet women continue to constitute a minority in the decision-making arena, both nationally and internationally.

Today, women are more politically active and visible than ever before. Many governments have established special offices for women's issues and taken steps to increase the numbers of women in parliaments. But in spite of the general increase in political participation by women over the past twenty years, the overall numbers of women at the highest levels of government remain unacceptably low. Women's representation at the cabinet level is less than half that in national legislative bodies, and nearly one hundred countries have no women in parliament at all. There are, of course, encouraging exceptions, many of them in the developing countries.

The Fourth World Conference on Women will pay particular attention to the gains women have made in the political arena, and to what steps are necessary in order for their role to be further strengthened. The delegates will take a critical look at power sharing, analyzing obstacles to women's advancement and recommending action to overcome them. It is my hope that nations will be persuaded to address gender imbalances with greater urgency, for it is through increased participation of women in politics at all levels—local, national, and international—that women and men will be best able to work effectively together to meet the challenges and demands of the coming century.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All anthologies are collaborative efforts, and this is especially true for this volume. It would have been impossible to bring this book to closure without the hard work and commitment of many people. First, special thanks to all the contributors to this book, who took valuable time from very busy schedules to make this volume possible.

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The contributions of Ulrike Bode deserve special mention. She put aside important work of her own to come to the aid of this project. She suggested the essay on India and accomplished the task of acquiring it and others with great ingenuity and resourcefulness.

Kathleen Paton, of whom it has been appropriately said that she “could research the shell off an egg,” did just that. In a very short period of time she put together the materials for the “Women First” facts, as well as working on the research of a number of profiles, locating photographs, and other tasks too numerous to enumerate.

Levis Guy was involved in the preliminary research stages of the project and conducted the interview with Dame Eugenia Charles.

Frances Madeson and Christopher O'Connell provided research for the profiles section.

Many other individuals helped in a myriad of ways, from suggesting and helping to locate important contacts, to helping with translations, transcription, and similar work. Heartfelt thanks are expressed to: Christina Gilmartin, Helen P. Young, Isabel Crook, Lisa Stearns, Li Xiaojiang, Xiao Ma, Annette Rubinstein, Marilyn Romain, Radhika Lal, Lida Junghans, Hongjin Kang, Sucheta Mazumdar, Frances Fox Piven, Colette Shulman, Martina Vandenberg, Robin Morgan, Joann Vanek, Charles Hale, Minor Sinclair.

At the United Nations, Tina Jorgensen was an early advocate of this project and she and Joanna Piucci guided it through the various offices there with practiced skill.

Steven Scheuer was, as always, patient and tolerant beyond any reasonable expectation, and generous in full measure. His unflagging loyalty and his determined faith and belief in a world of equality and kindness are the foundation for any endeavor I attempt. Lani Reynolds and Professor Rebecca Klatch saw me through difficult passages and I thank them for their valuable friendship and assistance.

Finally, this volume cannot be, nor was it intended as, a replacement for much of the other exemplary scholarly and analytical work on women in public life previously produced and published. Each of us owes a debt to the work of scholars, professionals, activists, and writers in our own regions and countries who have gone before to lay paths to understanding. I am personally indebted to the work of many, far too many, in fact, to list all of them. However, I have been deeply influenced and guided by the work of three feminist thinkers, who bear individual mention here. Dr. Joann Vanek, a sociologist, wrote the first article ever published about the meaning of housework. It was this article that began a new way of envisioning women's work—teaching us that not always did the hard work of women get counted as meaningful. Joann Vanek's mission to couple theory with meaningful statistical presentations about the conditions of women globally has informed much of my own thinking about the status of women. Since 1980 Dr. Vanek has been a part of the international secretariat of the United Nations. As a focal point for work on gender statistics, she has continued her commitment to, and work on, projects related to women worldwide. As the chief of the Gender Statistics Unit of the United Nations Statistical Division she coordinated the production of the first United Nations global statistical report on women, *The World's Women 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics*. A second volume of this important publication is now available. It is precisely because of work such as this that we have begun to see where the missing women really are, not just in public life but throughout the areas that matter—from career paths to health conditions of women and girls, survival rates, education, and of course,

women's work in global economics. *The World's Women*, volumes I and II, contains many essential facts and data and should become as common a presence on both personal and public library shelves as dictionaries.

The work of the political scientist Barbara Nelson has been a touchstone for me throughout the last decade. Her insights into the "politics of everyday life" have guided many of my own conclusions about the paradoxes of women's place in a political world. With Najma Chowdhury and an able team of researchers, Nelson produced in 1994 one of the most important and complete research reference books on the topic at hand. *Women and Politics Worldwide* should be under the arm of every one of us working toward the world the novelist Ama Ata Aidoo envisions. It is a portable world congress of women.

Finally, I could not begin to edit a volume about global perspectives on women in politics without acknowledging a personal tribute to the early work of Robin Morgan. In 1970 Robin Morgan transformed the rhetoric of the women's movement with her ground-breaking and now classic anthology *Sisterhood Is Powerful*. In 1984, after thirteen years of research, editing, and networking, she published *Sisterhood Is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology*. This volume assembled research about women in eighty countries—and combined both statistical and original essays from women in each country. In many cases, the voices and the data she included were appearing and being heard for the first time. The book continues to be a relevant resource and the work she initiated continues under the auspices of The Sisterhood Is Global Institute. Morgan's work made the world for women a more accessible place, making sisterhood both global and powerful.

Alida Brill
New York, New York



Women Hold Up Half the Sky
International Women's Tribune Centre, Inc., New York, NY

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INTRODUCTION

Alida Brill

“A woman’s place is in the House
...and in the Senate.”

—*American feminist proverb*

I was a college student before it occurred to me that women might have a real chance at becoming public, political figures. It happened the way these revelations often happen, with one action, in one moment, but that life snapshot remains etched in my mind. While I was rushing to class, another student called to me, from a table in the “quad,” “Don’t you want to sign up and help Shirley Chisholm’s campaign?” I put on a political button that said “Hit the Chisholm Trail—Elect Shirley Chisholm President”¹ and I have never been the same. Shirley Chisholm, an African-American woman, ran for president of the United States when the power was still overwhelmingly entrenched in white, male pockets of privilege and entitlement. I hit the “trail” and have continued on, in one way or another, ever since. The campaign, although unsuccessful in nominating Ms. Chisholm for president, nonetheless was successful, as many first steps are, because it untied the tongues of many women, and forced us to confront our own strength and the world of possibility that could lie before us, if we moved from a more private sphere into the world of public and political life.

Despite the occurrence of a late-twentieth-century women’s movement (a rebirth of feminism in some countries as well as new movements for social change in others), much is still wrong with the picture of women in government. We are missing from the official portraits of government in most places. Yet, women are ready, qualified, and eager to serve in decision-making posts in each region, country, city, and town on the face of the globe. Sadly, we still occupy only a shamefully small number of high-level jobs. Even in countries where women have been enfranchised through suffrage and where we have had the ability to run for office for the better part of the century, the statistics are still shockingly tiny. (There are a few points on the world map where this is not true, but only a few.)

In both the developed and developing worlds, women, who constitute more than half the world's population, still account for only single-digit numbers as heads of state, heads of government, and other top leadership roles. Among elected representatives there has been considerable progress but the numbers change by gradual increments. As Barbara Nelson and Najma Chowdhury concluded in their excellent book, *Women and Politics Worldwide*, "in no country do women have political status, access or influence equal to men's." As we enter these last years of the twentieth century, these are unacceptable facts. To many of us it is an often enraging predicament, especially coupled with the grim fact that the enfranchisement of women is still not completely universal. Although the struggle to achieve political parity is a difficult and exhausting battle, we remain unbent.

All of these caveats and roadblocks to our participation notwithstanding, we nonetheless come together in the United Nations

W O M E N F I R S T



**1986:
CORAZÓN
AQUINO IS
FIRST WOMAN
ELECTED
PRESIDENT
OF THE
PHILIPPINES.**

Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995 to celebrate our achievement, endurance, perseverance, and courage. We also come to assess the work ahead of us. In many ways this book of international collaboration is a celebration of the victory of our journey. We recognize that struggle is connected to victory. While the journey is far from completed, we note that women have moved into places of power and politics that would have been hard to envision a few short years ago. Today, girls coming of age in virtually all regions can imagine that they might

grow up to be a prime minister, a president, a member of parliament, and the like. In short, the dreams of a young woman today incorporate the belief that she can be an influential member of her nation's government. While vast inequities remain, this book tells new stories and looks forward to a future different from the past.

For many women the path to power has been difficult and even onerous. Women continue to shoulder responsibilities at home as well as fulfilling their public duties. The eternal balancing act women must perform between the domestic sphere and the public sphere is dramatically evident in the lives of the women portrayed here. A public woman is one of the most crucial weapons we have in the war against stereotype and gender bias because it is a fundamental challenge to the assumptions about gender organization and sex-role assignment. The famous British feminist thinker Virginia Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own* of a "magnifying mirror" women have traditionally offered men, by which men could then see their images at least twice their actual size. With the advent of more and more women living lives previously reserved for men, men, especially those in powerful positions, have had

to see themselves in a realistic mirror reflection—simply their own size—not glorified and magnified. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that in many places men have fought so hard to keep women out of official realms.

During the many centuries that women were left out of politics one way that some women came close to power was as the spouse of a political man. In that role, custom and tradition defined behavior. Increasingly even the role of the first lady is in a process of transformation, as one can see in the case of Hillary Rodham Clinton, the first lady of the United States. She is a professionally trained lawyer, has ideas about major issues, and has been a leader in her own right. Mrs. Clinton has played a visible and vocal role as first lady, in a style and manner not seen since the days of Eleanor Roosevelt, who was first lady from 1933 until 1945. Mrs. Clinton's desire to be herself and to offer her considerable intelligence to the nation has been acclaimed and supported by some. Unfortunately, many Americans are very threatened at the appearance of this first lady, who is as able as her president-husband, and who might once have been considered "presidential timber" herself. Thus, she has been the target of severe and often unfair criticism and derision by both the public and the press. Betty Friedan, one of the founders of the current American feminist movement, was so angered by the "double standard" to which Mrs. Clinton was being subjected to that she wrote an editorial, which was widely printed in newspapers across the country. "Stop Pillorying Hillary," Friedan implored. The unhappiness with Hillary Clinton continues; she is a victim of deeply held resentments and has essentially been punished because she has refused to hide the power of her mind. She stands as a symbol of the difficulty of the personal and the political. Mrs. Clinton has attempted to destroy the cultural limitations that have diminished the personhood of numerous first ladies, but the traditional assignment of that role has proven too rigid to break through. Yet, she represents another kind of "new public woman" and as such reminds us how difficult it is to be given a voice—as a serious person—when wedged inside a circumscribed and narrowly defined gender role.

Throughout this volume you will hear the voices of women who have had to fight to gain acceptance, who must constantly remind men in power of the importance of their presence and of the equality of peoples. Is there a woman's voice in politics which is unique? Does it really make a difference that women have achieved political office? Would it be just as good if there were more men in politics worldwide who were sympathetic to the woman's agenda? In the first two instances the answer is yes! In the last, a resounding no! While it is critical to have enlightened men in power who are not contemptuous of women's issues, which are basic human issues, it is not the same. Without our own voices being heard inside the public arena and halls of government policy and debate, we are without the right of accountability—a basic

entitlement of those who are governed. Neither do we have any assurance that concerns crucial to our well-being will be addressed. This does not mean that every woman leader has taken a point of view or has an ideology that has been good for women. In large part, however, the

W O M E N F I R S T



**1992:
CALIFORNIA
ELECTS TWO
WOMEN,
DIANNE
FEINSTEIN
AND BARBARA
BOXER, TO THE
U.S. SENATE.**

woman's voice has been one that has worked for issues and in areas that have often been forgotten or overlooked or misunderstood when there has not been a viable female presence in a vast array of governmental levels and positions. Questions of reproductive health and its choices, general areas of concern to women's employment and education equity, equality of opportunities, the occurrence of femicide, nutrition and health of children, and the well-being of the environment, to name only a small number, are issues that have been vigorously taken up by women internationally.

Simply stated, ensuring a "women-friendly" country is most efficaciously achieved when women have access to the corridors of power, policy, and change. This is not to suggest, however, that the role of the political activist, grassroots organizer, protester, or dissident should be overlooked or underestimated. Frequently it has been the work of women in movements for change, who are seen as "outsiders" to the official work of governments, who have led the way to social legislation that has remedied unfair or harmful practices. In the course of the lives of many political women, it has been their work in areas outside the official public world where they have first received their training as leaders. A woman can be an outsider one day and in power the next, as the lives of some of our contributors attest.

To some extent this book has been organized in the manner in which women's lives have been organized and lived. Taking up the real world of politics and examining it with analytically open eyes is the task of Part One, "Reality Politics." In this opening section the problems and sacrifices of the public woman are contrasted to its rewards and triumphs. Janine Haines begins this section with a powerful case study, the examination of women in Australian and New Zealand politics from 1893 to 1994. Her essay, "Not For Want of Trying," takes the reader through the paradoxes of this region. Despite the fact that women have been in political life in Australia since 1903 and in New Zealand since 1918, women still only comprise 20 percent of the elected national and local offices. (When seen in a comparative global context, however, the 20 percent figure is, in fact, better than most countries!) Haines describes the historical legacy as well as speaking from a personal perspective, having been elected to the Australian Parliament in 1978.

The euphoria resulting from the collapse of the Berlin Wall dividing Germany from itself was followed by the need for some extremely

difficult and delicate work. Hanna Beate Schoepp-Schilling was the first director general for the Department of Women's Affairs in the Ministry of Youth, Family, Women, and Health. In "The Impact of German Unification on Women" Schoepp-Schilling provides a careful and insightful analysis of the role and experience of women in rebuilding a united Germany and in influencing its policy.

China, whose culture is one of the oldest in the world, is home to Deputy Wu Qing, who sits in the Municipal People's Congress of Beijing as an elected member. In the conversation recorded for this volume, Wu Qing shares her own views about women in Chinese politics, about their achievements, and about accomplishments and obstacles that have to be overcome.

In "Political Women and Women's Politics in Asia," author Radha Kumar states that "the South Asian predilection for women premiers has so often been commented upon that most Indian feminists merely snort at its mention." Yet, Kumar fully recognizes the stunning fact that the four chief countries inside the subcontinent, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, have all had women prime ministers. Kumar draws parallels between the contemporary and historical perspectives of the region.

Bulgaria has experienced great upheaval and transition in recent years. Blaga Dimitrova is a noted Bulgarian writer and poet, who became vice president in the "new" Bulgaria. Of her personal journey, Dimitrova says: "...in Bulgaria, politics and poetry are linked by tradition." Dimitrova's journey from poet of protest to leader is a personal story of courage and many private transitions.

In the Middle East, confusion, hostility, and sorrow are often present. For this most volatile region, where misunderstanding and ancient and current conflict are the hallmark of its history, the Palestinian and the Israeli contributions stand side by side. They so appear in the hope that they will stand together as a metaphor for hope. Hanan Ashrawi was the only female spokesperson for the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East peace talks. In "The Feminist behind the Spokeswoman" she talks about her people, the promise of peace, and the importance of dialogue. In the next selection, a documentary filmmaker from a seventh-generation Jerusalem family, Lilly Rivlin, has a dialogue with a younger Israeli woman, Ilana Bet-El, who has been an active voice in Israeli public life. "Israeli Women in Two Voices" illuminates the importance of telling our stories to each generation in order to continue to grow, and to learn.

W O M E N F I R S T

1993:
AGATHE
UWILINGIYIMANA
IS THE FIRST
WOMAN
TO BECOME
PRIME MINISTER
OF RWANDA
(SHE WAS
ASSASSINATED
IN 1994).

