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"If you think you're too small to make change, try sleeping in a cupboard with a mosquito."

With that bit of proverb, Irish author Margaret Gallagher leaves her audience, many of them gender-issue activists, just that bit more upbeat. A particularly valuable state to be in as battle fatigue now threatens those engaged in the brave war against the "pattern of exclusion" of women in media.

For that is not only one brave war, it is a protracted war.

And who more than Gallagher to know that? Today a free-lance consultant on gender and media, she has put in years of work in this territory. Long before 1986, the year she established the European Commission's Steering Committee for Equal Opportunities in Broadcasting, and way after 1900, when she became consultant to the European Commission's biennial television prize, the Prix Niki, she served steadfastly in the war to improve the portrayal of women in media. Recently, she authored the book *Gender Setting: New Communication Studies*, a commissioned work for the World Association of Christian Communication and published by Zed Books.

She is the first to say that the "pattern of exclusion" remains "universal, deeply embedded, and taken for granted."

But she is also, not surprisingly, the person to provide the upbeat tone. For Gallagher has consistently exhibited the kind of refined and thoughtful intelligence which manages, just when the enemy shows itself more entrenched, to find yet another strategy for winning the war. Even if she has to invent it.

For imagination is another one of those things she has plenty of in her arsenal.

Only imagination? as much the ability to see beyond one's position as the ability to boost that position? could have made it possible for her to recognize her flank's internal flaws. Indeed, she and her comrades spent years browbeating media professionals into shame and submission. Using "generalised criticism," the strategy naturally brought "only limited results." Now Gallagher? with colleagues from Uruguay, India, Jamaica, among others? has moved on to the more sophisticated strategy of dialogue.

The gender specialists and media specialists were going to sit down. Not as kindred, not yet, but as professionals faced with a professional issue. And they did, several times since. But first the former had to do their homework. And they did, in massive scale, coming up with the Global Media Monitoring Projects (GMMP).

Perhaps, Gallagher says in retrospect, the GMMP was the key development. An idea that grew from the 1994 WACC-organized Women Empowering Communication conference, the GMMP first took place in January 1995, pulling in 71 countries, and again in February 2000, pulling in just one country short of 71.

Simply put, the GMMP set in motion a way of quantifying proof for a thesis already set. "(An) entire day spent studying the news brought home the sheer scale of the gender differences in news content," she writes. "And the discussion that the coding generated helped people to understand that these differences are not random, but part of a structure that can be analysed."

But as educational and as successful as that was, the GMMP had to be just one of many strategies, Gallagher noted. Women's marginalisation in media simply could not be fought with just one.

Since then, in fact, there has been a deluge. Gallagher makes mention of the strategy of creating techniques of analysis and criticism to match the sophistication of current media messages. (The Canadian activist group Adbusters counters offensive ads with "spoof ads" or "subverts.") In effect, the strategy means nothing short of public education. It means to bring the consumer into the act, to get the citizen to agitate media producers. (Croatia's B.aB.e. and Canada's Media Watch use their websites to analyse media images. Elsewhere, letters and calls inundate TV stations.)

Also, the strategy of lobbying for gender-sensitive policies and guidelines. Of developing tools?buying block-time TV, providing research for popular shows?to increase the presence of women's sensibility in media. Of launching campaigns, protests , networks. Gallagher adds, of tapping "critical media producers."

More impressive than these individual strategies, however, is their sum. Clearly, there is a new intelligence wrapping up the new strategies. No more the knee-jerk reaction or even the easy contempt for media practitioners. Instead, something more productive if also more plodding: a handle on the dynamics of media, of the rules that operate that profession, of its corporate ownership and hierarchy, of the reality in that powerful estate.

Obviously, Gallagher understands it well: "(Within) the overall media scene one thing is constant?and that is the search for novelty, and the need to reach new markets. Now, looked at pessimistically, this often leads to excess and sensationalism. But looked at optimistically, it can open up a space for dialogue. If we can find ways of drawing media professionals into this admittedly small space, discussion and auto-critique may result in real, grounded change."

Gallagher makes for a fine warrior. She knows the enemy. And a first sign is that she refrains from calling it that.