

CONTRACTING OR EXPANDING CONSCIOUSNESS: FOUNDATIONS FOR PARTNERSHIP AND PEACE

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Abstract

The Congreso Futuro (Futures Congress), sponsored by the President of Chile, was established in 2011 “as a bridge that connects ideas, people and views that change the world with our society.” The 2018 Futures Congress included 40 panels featuring 130 presenters. Riane Eisler gave two **plenary** speeches, both featuring a Consciousness focus. In the Master’s Closing of Congress Speech delivered on January 20, 2018 at the Salón Honor - Congreso Nacional (Honor Hall of the former National Congress) in Santiago, she summarized the partnership/domination paradigm as a model for understanding our history and our current societies. She concluded by describing four societal cornerstones (family relations, gender relations, economics, and language and narrative) that support domination or partnership systems.

Keywords: Futures Congress; Consciousness; Partnership; Domination; Caring Economics; Gender Relations

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Good afternoon, it is an honor and pleasure to be with you today, and although I will speak in English, I want to open with a few words in Spanish: *Buenas tardes, quiero decirles que es un honor y placer estar aqui con ustedes, y aunque mi vocabulario Espanol es limitado, queria al menos saludarlos en este bello idioma...*

As you know, I will be talking about Contracting or Expanding Consciousness, and I want to start with some fundamentals. First, we humans have a biological capacity for awareness of ourselves and of the world around us, and we have this in three dimensions: our past, our present, and our possible future.

However, and this is the second basic point, while there are some individual biological differences, whether this awareness is contracted or expanded largely depends on cultural factors. That is, consciousness is largely shaped by the social environments we grow up in and live in - by what we experience, observe, and are taught in families, education, religion, politics, and economics. So consciousness is also shaped by language, by the words a culture provides - because, as linguistic psychologists point out, our thinking is largely channeled by the categories a language offers.

To quickly illustrate, terms like human rights, women's rights, and children's rights, or words like racism and sexism, did not exist in our language in earlier times; they had to be invented to express changes in consciousness about cultural patterns that were formerly considered as normal rather than as human rights violations. Then, as these new terms entered our language, they became instruments for changing consciousness, in an interactive process in which awareness of new ideas and possibilities, as well as actions to implement these, spur each other on.

Now, we have to ask, why is it only in relatively recent times that this new consciousness has arisen - and why is it still not shared by millions of people worldwide? Or, why do so many people, including the present President of the United States, deny climate change - despite dramatic increases in severe storms and extreme temperature shifts, even despite scientific consensus and warnings that we are running out of time to address it?

All of which takes us to what I will be talking about: my multidisciplinary, cross-cultural research studying human cultures, all the way from prehistory to today; as well as the new social categories, in other words, the new language, that this research led to; and some interventions needed to meet the unprecedented environmental, economic, and social challenges we face.

So there is a great deal of information I will share with you, but I want to begin on a personal note, because this research - which is described in many of my books, including *The Chalice and the Blade* (now in its 57th US printing and 26 foreign editions, including in Spanish, *El Caliz y la Espada*) - this decades-long research, and the passion I have for it, is rooted in my early life experiences, when by a miracle my parents and I escaped death in Nazi Europe, and by another miracle were able to flee to Cuba - where I learned Spanish as a child - and from there to the United States, where I now live.

These childhood experiences had a great impact on my consciousness. Growing up in three different cultures - the European one of my native Vienna, which my parents carried with them into exile; the Caribbean culture of Cuba; and the culture of the United States - these experiences led to my early awareness that what people consider “just the way things are” is not the same everywhere. In other words, I became conscious of the enormous impact culture has on what people believe is normal, moral, even possible.

It was the dislocations and traumas of my early childhood - seeing cruelty and violence, having to leave everything I had known, being thrust into poverty in an unfamiliar place - it was these radical changes that eventually led to the key question that my research addresses: the crucial question of what kinds of cultures support our human capacities for empathy, caring, and creativity - capacities that neuroscience shows are actually wired into our brains - or alternately, because obviously we also have those, our capacities for lack of empathy, cruelty, and destructiveness?

When I embarked on this research, I was already becoming aware that looking at cultures through the lenses of our familiar social categories - religious or secular, rightist or leftist, Eastern or Western, capitalist or socialist, industrial or pre- or post-industrial - that this was not useful to answer this question. Because repressive and violent societies can be found in *all* these categories: they can be secular Western societies, like rightist Nazi Germany, or leftist ones, like Stalin's Soviet Union; they can be Eastern secular rightist capitalist regimes like Sukarno's in Indonesia and Pinochet's here in Chile, or leftist socialist ones like Kim Jong Un's North Korea; they can be religious, such as the Taliban and ISIS in the East, or the rightist-fundamentalist alliance in the United States, which also believes in holy wars and wants to impose theocratic dictatorship in the West.

As I left behind conventional ways of looking at societies, I became aware of something else, something crucial that greatly expanded my consciousness: This is that despite their differences, all these repressive and violent societies have the same core configuration. First, they're authoritarian in *both* the state *and* the family. Second, they rank male over female, and with this, devalue traits and activities such as empathy, caring, and nonviolence that are considered inferior, feminine, and inappropriate for "real men". And third, they have a high degree of abuse and violence, from child and wife beating to violence against minorities and aggressive warfare.

I also became aware that more equitable and peaceful societies, that in other respects are very different, also share a social configuration of mutually interactive and supporting core elements. For example, foraging societies like the Teduray studied by University of California anthropologist Stuart Schlegel; agrarian societies such as the Minangkabau studied by University of Pennsylvania anthropologist Peggy Sanday, and the technologically advanced Western societies of Sweden, Finland, and Norway, all share the following configuration.

First, a more democratic and egalitarian structure in, again, *both* the family *and* the state or tribe. Second, more gender equity, and valuing of so called “soft” traits and activities such as empathy, caring, and nonviolence - in both women and men, *and* in social and economic policy. Third, less abuse and violence, because these are not needed to impose rigid hierarchies of domination - be it man over man, man over woman, race over race, religion over religion, nation over nation.

There were no terms, no language, to describe these two social configurations. So we chose for one the *domination system* and for the other the *partnership system* (translated in Spanish as *sistema de parnerismo*, or *sistema de complementariedad solidaria*).

The research that identified the partnership system and the domination system as two basic social configurations drew from many sources - and again, many of these only became available in recent decades. One important source was recent studies that contradict the popular belief that our evolutionary heritage dooms us to warfare, rape, and other forms of violence.

For instance, studies by anthropologist Donald Fry and other scholars published in the Oxford University Press book, *War, Peace, and Human Nature: The Convergence of Evolutionary and Cultural Views*, which came out *in 2013*, detail extensive evidence that peaceful and egalitarian societies, that is, societies orienting to the partnership side of the social scale, were the norm for 99 percent of our past, for the many thousands of years when humans lived as foragers - and that this is still the norm for the vast majority of foraging societies today. Archeological finds, many also relatively recent, also indicate that in many world regions the majority of cultures oriented more to the partnership side, until approximately 5,000 years ago and in some places 3,000 years ago. For example, Çatalhöyük in Turkey (the largest Neolithic town excavated)

has no signs of destruction through warfare for over 1,000 years; houses and burials reflect a generally egalitarian social structure; and, as the archeologist Ian Hodder wrote in *Scientific American* 15 years ago, there are no signs of gender inequality. And this partnership orientation continued in the technologically advanced “high civilization” of Bronze Age Minoan Crete.

However, you would never know this, would you, from the texts still generally used on ancient civilizations, or for that matter, from most of what in our universities is taught as important knowledge and truth. Indeed, if you really think about it, in most of these narratives - in history, philosophy, sociology, political science, and so on - there is a curious omission: there is hardly any mention of women, or for that matter, of children - even though together they are the majority of humanity.

That too is the case with the social categories we inherited to describe social systems; none of them - right or left, capitalist or socialist, and so forth - pay much if any attention to women and children.

This stunning omission of the majority of humanity is our heritage from a massive cultural shift in prehistory during a time of great environmental and social disequilibrium, when findings from archeology provide evidence of the appearance of brutal domination systems. We now see destruction through warfare, caches of weapons, radical changes in artistic themes (such as the idealization of warriors), and virtual disappearance of the earlier numerous female depictions.

Again, even today, hardly any of this is taught in universities, which actually have only in recent decades even started to offer women’s studies, men’s studies, and gender studies, and still only offer courses on families and child development in just a few departments.

So not surprisingly, it has been difficult for us to see vital interconnections between how a society constructs family and other intimate relations, on the one hand, and its educational, political, religious, and economic institutions, on the other - which is what the new categories of the partnership and dominations systems make visible.

Similarly, we could not see patterns in history that only become visible through this new lens. For example, only then can we see that, rather than being random and disconnected, over the last several centuries, one progressive social movement after another has challenged traditions of domination. The 18th century “rights of man” movement challenged the supposedly divinely ordained right of kings to rule. The feminist movement challenged the also supposedly divinely ordained right of men to rule over the women and children in the “castles” (a military metaphor) of their homes. The 19th and 20th century abolitionist, civil rights, and anti-colonial movements challenged the also supposedly divinely ordained right of a “superior” race to dominate “inferior” ones. The 19th, 20th, and 21st century peace movement and the much more recent movement to end traditions of violence in family and other intimate relations, challenge the use of fear and force to impose domination in these relations. The environmental movement also challenges a tradition of domination: the once idealized conquest of nature that at our level of technological development could take us to an evolutionary dead end.

Every one of these challenges to traditions of domination has been fiercely resisted, and, while there *has been* movement toward partnership, it has been periodically set back by regressions to domination. I was born into a brutal regression, the rise to power of the Nazis. And today we see regressions in many world regions, including the United States.

However there is also good news: we *have* left behind many traditions of domination, at least in some world regions. Consider that the European Middle Ages, with its

Inquisition, Crusades or Holy Wars, and witch burnings, looked a lot like the Taliban or ISIS, closely orienting to the domination system. And rigid top-down rankings were still considered divinely ordained - so much so that St. Augustine famously declared that for anyone to think of changing their station in life was like a finger wanting to be an eye.

So the movements I just mentioned both reflected and brought about expansions of consciousness about what is, and is not, possible for human societies. However - and this is a very important point - if you look at these movements as a whole, you see that most of them focused on dismantling the top of the domination pyramid (politics and economics as conventionally defined), with far, far less attention to leaving behind traditions of domination and violence in our primary human relations, our parent-child and gender relations - even though, we know from neuroscience that what children experience and observe in their early years affects our brains, and with this everything in our lives.

In sharp contrast, for those pushing us back, these issues are of central importance. For the Nazis, a top priority was getting women back into their 'traditional' place in a 'traditional' family - code words for a top-down, male-dominated, authoritarian family. This was also a priority for Stalin, for Pinochet, for Khomeini, for the Taliban, for ISIS, and is a top priority for all contemporary so-called religious fundamentalists - both Eastern and Western.

So in studying these psychosocial dynamics, I found that those pushing us back in the United States have invested enormous resources and energy in maintaining or reinstating four cornerstones on which domination systems rebuild themselves: family and childhood relations (they appropriated and distorted family, values, and morality); gender relations (they demonized gender partnership), economics (they promote top-down trickle-down economics), and narratives and language (for example, they claim that the only good family is one in which the father is "master of the house" which, as

you have started to glimpse, is one of the foundations for strongman rule in the state). And, as shown by election of the current president, they have been all too successful.

So in closing, I want to briefly turn to what we can, and must, do to stop these regressions, focusing on the same four cornerstones that regressives have used to push us back.

CORNERSTONES OF PARTNERSHIP OR DOMINATION

Family and Childhood Relations

The first cornerstone is Family and Childhood Relations. Neuroscience shows that the neural pathways of our brains are not set at birth: they are largely formed in interaction with our early experiences and observations. So, while people can, and do, change throughout life, early experiences and relations are crucial. We've got to pay attention to this, and disseminate the growing number of resources for partnership parenting and child care, including the [“Caring and Connected Parenting Guide”](#) available free in both Spanish and English at www.centerforpartnership.org/

We need laws and enforcement of laws that hold perpetrators of violence against children, and against women, responsible, because these are models children internalize early on for using violence in *all* relations. www.centerforpartnership.org/ has many practical resources, as well as resources to engage spiritual and religious leaders to do something most of them have not done and that we have to get them to do: take a strong stand against the pandemic of violence against women and children, much of it in homes.

Gender Relations

This takes us to the second cornerstone: Gender Relations. As you have glimpsed, how a society constructs the roles and relations of the two basic forms of humans - male

and female - affects every social institution: families (whether they are more democratic or authoritarian), education, religion, politics, and economics, as well as all relations, from intimate to international. What people learn in domination-oriented families is to equate difference - beginning with the fundamental difference between male and female - with superiority or inferiority, dominating or being dominated, being served or serving, a template for in-group vs. out-group relations that can automatically be applied to other differences, be they racial, religious, ethnic, and so forth.

And there is much more that has very negative effects on us all - women, children, and men. Because along with the subordination of the female half of humanity, we have inherited a gendered system of values that we must become conscious of: a system in which traits and activities stereotypically (because this is not something inherent in women and men) associated with femininity, such as caring, caregiving, and non-violence, are devalued.

Economics

We clearly see this if we look at the third cornerstone: Economics. There is empirical evidence that raising the status of women is good for everyone's quality of life. We first showed this decades ago in a Center for Partnership Studies report, [*Women, Men, and the Global Quality of Life*](#) (which you can also get at www.centerforpartnership.org). Since then, other studies, such as the World Economic Forums' annual *Gender Gap Reports*, have confirmed this interconnection between the status of women and a nation's economic success and quality of life.

So obviously we urgently need a new way of economic thinking. To begin with, both capitalism and socialism came out of early industrial times (the 1700s and 1800s), and we're now well into the 21st century's post-industrial age. So these systems are antiquated. But the problem is even deeper, because both capitalism and socialism have perpetuated traditions of top-down economics.

Think about capitalist neoliberalism, trickle-down economics. Here, as in feudal times, those on the bottom are supposed to content themselves with the scraps dropping from the opulent tables of those on top. In other words, what we are dealing with is one more version of an economics of domination, whether it's tribal, feudal, or mercantilist, Eastern or Western, ancient or modern.

And the two large-scale applications of socialism, in the former USSR and China - they too created a top-down economics. I saw this in 1983 in Russia, where the officials on top ate caviar while the mass of people had to stand in line for hours for the most basic necessities.

That there was so little caring for people, or for nature - consider the huge environmental problems in both the USSR and China - should not surprise us, since both capitalism and socialism came out of more rigid domination times.

Times, for one thing, in which women and anything associated with them was so devalued that for both Adam Smith and Karl Marx, the "women's work" of caring for people, starting in early childhood, and keeping a clean and healthy home environment, did not count. For them, it's just reproductive, *not* productive, work. In the same way, there is no mention in their theories of caring for nature; for them, nature was there to be exploited.

And this contracted consciousness is today perpetuated in universities, and even by how we measure economic health. Current measures such as GDP not only include in "productivity" activities that harm and take life (for example, selling cigarettes, and the resulting health and funeral costs), they're great for GDP. Yet these measures fail to count the hard work of people who care for children, the sick, the elderly, and others

at home, even though recent studies show that if it were included this work would constitute from 30 to 50 percent of GDP.

Studies also show that if that work were valued, and therefore supported by policies such as paid parental leave, stipends to families to help care for children and the elderly, universal health care, and affordable high-quality early childhood education - which nations such as Sweden, Norway, and Finland that have moved more to the partnership side provide - we would have much more equitable societies. Indeed, we would radically, as they have, lower poverty worldwide. Because globally women are the mass of the poor and the poorest of the poor - not only due to job discrimination but because most of these women are or were either full- or part-time caregivers.

And again, there is even more. We are in an era when automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence are replacing millions of jobs, when our life support systems are threatened, when economists tell us that the most important capital is what they call “high-quality human capital” - which we know from neuroscience is largely determined by the quality of early care and education children receive - in short, ours is a time when the devaluation of caring for people and nature built into capitalism and socialism is not sustainable.

For starters, we need new ways of measuring economic health, which is why the Center for Partnership Studies’ *Caring Economy* campaign developed *Social Wealth Economic Indicators*. You can learn about these at www.caringeconomy.org.

Language and Narratives

More fundamentally, what we need is a new economic paradigm, and with this, words to describe it, which takes us to the fourth cornerstone: Language and Narratives.

We need terms like *partnerism* and *caring economics* (which can be translated as *economía del cuidado solidario*), to describe an economic system that recognizes the

enormous economic value of caring for people and for nature, the subject of my book *The Real Wealth of Nations*, also available in Spanish as *La Verdadera Riqueza de Naciones*.

We also urgently need new narratives to expand our consciousness, to see that we *can* move forward to a society in which our enormous human capacities for sensitivity, caring, and creativity are supported. Because we can only create this better society with a new consciousness. And it's up to us right now to create and disseminate new normative narratives that recognize the importance of the majority (women and children); that no longer devalue traits and activities that have been considered "feminine"; that recognize, as Einstein observed, that we cannot solve problems with the same consciousness that created them; and yes, by using the language of partnership systems and domination systems to make visible crucial systems interconnections that were made invisible by conventional narratives and language.

Because, my friends, it's only as we expand our consciousness, and together apply this consciousness through joint action, that we can build the missing foundations for the more peaceful, equitable, sustainable, and caring future we so want and need.

I thank you.

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