

**Riane Eisler**

**The Dance between the Dominator and Partnership Models**

This text is adapted from the epilogue written for the new third Italian edition of *The Chalice and the Blade* (1987): *Il calice e la spada. La civiltà della Grande Dea dal Neolitico ad oggi*. Udine: Forum (2011).

Since the first publication of *The Chalice and the Blade* in 1987, many things have happened, both in the world at large and in my personal life. In this short period of less than a quarter century, our world has experienced seismic shifts – both literally through powerful earthquakes and tsunamis, and geopolitically, as when the Soviet Empire broke into pieces. Post-colonial Africa also fragmented into a plethora of new states, with bloody conflicts erupting between ethnic groups, as in Rwanda, the Congo, and Sudan. In Europe, the Balkans too exploded, with armed struggles between Serbs, Bosnians, and Croatians. And on September 11 2001, for the first time since the Civil War, thousands of Americans were killed on U.S. soil, together with many other citizens of the world, when Islamic terrorists blew up the Twin Towers of the New York World Trade Center, eventually leading to war in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, behind the headlines lies a deeper story – one that shows how the *Cultural Transformation Theory* presented in *The Chalice and the Blade* is a very useful tool for analyzing and understanding our world situation. What we can see is that while globally the movement against domination in all its forms has been growing, resistance to this fundamental change due to the persistence of long-established patterns of domination and violence has also escalated, sometimes taking extremely regressive and brutal forms.

### **The Tension between Partnership and Domination**

In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, presaging the collapse of the Soviet Union and an end to the Cold War. Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* had permitted, and even encouraged, overt rebellion against rigid top-down hierarchies and centralized rule. His personal partnership with his wife, Raisa, his perception that a fundamental shift in values is needed, his unilateral reduction in Soviet military systems, and his obviously sincere desire for a more just, *equalitarian* (Eisler1987: 216, note 10), and peaceful world held out enormous hope.

Those acquainted with the realities in the Soviet Union were less sanguine. There were reports of behind-the-scenes economic sabotage, of the deliberate creation of shortages, of members of the Soviet elite, or *apparatchiks*, particularly in the provinces, doing their utmost to maintain control through massive obstruction and destabilization. When added to the inefficiency and corruption already built into the system and the inevitable dislocations of trying to shift from a state-controlled to a so-called free market economy, this posed a threat of economic collapse. So, as the fear of brutal reprisals lessened, what was once a Soviet empire began to break into ever more pieces, and in the end, Gorbachev himself fell from power.

During the period when Gorbachev and Yeltsin were still fighting for leadership, I was invited to participate in a meeting with a handful of Soviet intellectuals and politicians. One of the politicians who came was a highly placed colleague of Yeltsin. There was also an economist, a television producer, and several members of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. It was a fascinating meeting – one that opened my eyes to the remarkable illusion held by most of the Soviet participants that if they could only replace communism with capitalism all would be well. Subsequent events of course showed the fallacy of this view. As it turned out, the “victory” of capitalism led to an even greater polarization of wealth and income, both between nations and within nations.

Instead of combining the better elements of socialism and capitalism with intensive exploration of a completely new economic course, Russia's economic planners chose the same capitalist prescription for economic restructuring that had already caused so much hardship in many parts of the developing world, particularly for women, children, and the elderly. While there is now a larger middle class and more freedom of expression in Russia, there is also a drop in living standards and health for much of the population. A new governmental and industrial elite is in control; rather than moving toward any real democratization in the family, abuse and violence against women is still a major problem; and prostitution, pornography, and violent crime (some of it allegedly backed by the government) are now part of everyday life.

What happened in the former Soviet Union illustrates the main thesis of this article: that the real struggle for our future is not between capitalism and communism, left and right, religious or secular, or any of the other struggles constantly in the news. Rather, it is between a social and ideological organization orienting primarily to a partnership or dominator model of society.

If we look at what happened in the Soviet Union from this perspective, we see that Russia's failure to move toward real democracy is rooted, not in communism, but in traditions of domination embedded in Russian history long before the Soviet "dictatorship of the proletariat". Under earlier feudal and tsarist regimes, Russians had only known authoritarian structures in both the family and the state. Despite the mass entry of women into the labor market and into lower and middle government levels, as I observed firsthand when I visited the Soviet Union in 1984, Russia is still extremely male dominant and male centered, with a strong belief (backed up by traditions of wife-beating) that in the family women must defer to and serve men.

Unfortunately, this male-supremacist ideology did not change even during the Gorbachev years – when the Soviet outlawing of feminism as counter-revolutionary began to be somewhat relaxed – as dramatically illustrated by Soviet television's removal of the portion of Gorbachev's famous American interview in which he spoke of his partnership with Raisa.

As long as this male-superior/female inferior model of our species remains in place, so also does a mental and emotional map that children internalize early on, equating difference – beginning with the fundamental difference between male and female – with dominating or being dominated, being served or serving. This is why male dominance is so foundational to dominator systems. It provides the mental and emotional template for all the ugly *isms* – from racism to anti-Semitism. It makes injustice and subordination seem normal in both families and the family of nation, in both economics and politics. Not only that, this superior-inferior, in-group versus out-group species model of “mankind” and (as in the legend of Eve) a “dangerous” and “inferior” female “other” is a key component in the construction of the enemy mentality so central to the maintenance of dominator systems.

### **The Rise of Dominator Fundamentalism**

We dramatically see the centrality of how the roles and relations of the female and male halves of humanity are constructed in the rise of so-called fundamentalism – whether it is Eastern or Western, Muslim or Christian. While this phenomenon is generally described as *religious fundamentalism*, it is actually *dominator fundamentalism*. It is the reinstatement, or the attempt to reinstate, authoritarian rule in both the family and the state or tribe, rigid male dominance, and the idealization of violence as a means of control – as in all the fundamentalist “holy wars” against other religions and ethnic groups.

Indeed, the “return” of women to their “traditional” subordinate place is the hallmark of fundamentalism. We see this in stark relief in the notion that a man’s “honor” depends on his control over the bodies of the women in his family. This is brutally exemplified by the Taliban’s barbarity toward women in Afghanistan, the stoning of women in Pakistan and Iran, and the fact that to this day murder in the name of honor is still not prosecuted in much of the Islamic world. So while the press likes to call fundamentalism puritanical, that is not what it is about. Men are not penalized for sexual activities unless they infringe on a husband’s ownership of his wife’s body nor are they forbidden multiple sexual relations. What this fundamentalism is really about is maintaining or reinstating rigid male dominance.

Of course, the maintenance and/or reinstatement of rigid male dominance is *not* a matter of being Muslim. The so-called Christian Right in the United States shares the same obsession with male dominance. Moreover, traditions of wife-beating, rape, and other forms of violence against women continue worldwide. In cultures and subcultures on every continent “masculinity” is still defined primarily in terms of domination and conquest, as is evident from the contemporary barrage of mass media – including brutal video games – glamorizing male violence. For violence is how the dominator system ultimately maintains the ranking of man over woman, man over man, religion over religion, and nation over nation.

Accordingly, fundamentalism idealizes violence. Again, we see this most clearly in Islamic terrorism, first against Israelis and now also against Westerners, Indians, Kenyans, and others – where male suicide bombers are told they will be rewarded in heaven with 42 virgins by Allah for murdering women, men, and children. We also see this linking of the divine with violence in the views of some Western Christian fundamentalists. For example, according to Palestinian Prime Minister Nabil Shaath, “born-again” Christian U.S. President George Bush stated that God told him to launch his invasion of Iraq in 2003 – an invasion that turned out to be

totally unsupported by evidence that Saddam Hussein actually had those “weapons of mass destruction” Bush kept talking about.

Invasions and wars are part of our dominator heritage. And let's not forget that male violence has traditionally been idealized in both the East and West. All we have to do is to read some of the most beloved epics – from Homer's *Iliad* and the Hindu *Mahabharata* to the famous tales of King Arthur and his knights and Firdausi's *Shahnameh*, written in ancient Persian around 1000 CE<sup>1</sup>. So the violence of fundamentalism is really not a new development. It is simply part of a regression to a more rigid and brutal form of the domination system.

### **The Continuing Movement Toward Partnership**

Fortunately this is not the whole story. There is also a growing revulsion of world public opinion against violence – be it through the peace movement or the movement to end traditions of violence against women and children. This development is an important part of the partnership movement, as is the trend in international law – from UN Conventions and Declarations to the Rome Statute's section on Crimes against Humanity – condemning brutality and violence.

We also see the growth of nonviolent challenges to authoritarian regimes that maintain their rule through force and fear. This was dramatically illustrated by the peaceful 1989 Chinese student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square (significantly utilizing the symbol of the Goddess of Democracy), which were so tragically repressed, and the democracy movement in Burma (now Myanmar) inspired and led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who in 1991 received the Nobel Peace Prize. More recently we have seen it in the so-called Arab Spring (2011), where first in Tunisia and then in Egypt, authoritarian regimes were brought down by nonviolent mass demonstrations.

Here again, though, as in the former Soviet Union, there is the problem of an underlying culture with strong traditions of domination. In fact, with the growing power of Islamic fundamentalism, the result in Egypt, Tunisia, and other Muslim nations could, under the guise of democracy, be a regression to an even more virulent and brutal authoritarianism. Elections do not have to result in real democracy – as we saw in Gaza when the fundamentalist Hamas took control. For real democracy there has to be a significant shift to the partnership side of the continuum – and a prerequisite for this is leaving behind traditions of male dominance. However, unfortunately even the women who were so visible and active in the anti-government demonstrations in both Tunisia and Egypt are already being pushed back into their “traditional” subservient place.

This is why the international women’s movement, which has brought increased attention worldwide to the long-ignored prevalence of violence against women – be it through wife-beating, rape, genital mutilation, female infanticide, or the selective starving of female children – is so important. For this movement to empower women worldwide points to a new systems approach to real democracy, justice, and nonviolence. Similarly, as illustrated by the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the designation of 1994 as the Year of the Family, there is growing condemnation of socially sanctioned violence against children. And with this, we are seeing greater consciousness that abuse and violence against both women and children play a major part in perpetuating repressive and unjust social institutions across the board. In sum, there is an emerging consciousness that the so-called public and private spheres are inextricably interconnected. Simply put, people all over the world are becoming aware that there can be no sustainable social and economic progress without changes in the foundational relations between men and women and parents and children.

The last several decades have also brought a vast body of empirical evidence demonstrating that the most cost-effective investment for economic development is investment in the education of women, particularly in those nations of the developing world where the literacy ratio of men to women is sometimes as high as two to one. This attention to the female half of humanity – which in many places means attention to the welfare of children, since women are often primarily responsible for their care – is gradually beginning to be reflected in nongovernmental, or private development, aid to grassroots women's endeavors all over the world.

All this reflects still another important partnership trend: the growing entry of women into both governmental and nongovernmental decision-making positions. The political representation of women is highest in the Scandinavian nations – which, not coincidentally, also have policies that support stereotypically “feminine” social priorities such as health, welfare, and education, rather than focusing on stereotypically “masculine” priorities such as weapons and wars.

Even in corporations, patterned on the traditional dominator or military model of rigid top-down chains of command, there are signs of movement toward partnership. Although this is not happening everywhere, there is a growing perception that rigid top-down structures – be they centrally planned socialist bureaucracies or capitalist corporate bureaucracies – are inefficient in an era of rapid technological and economic change. And, though still largely as an afterthought, the fact that such structures are destructive of human potentials is also being discussed.

Another highly significant change in consciousness has been the growing support for the environmental movement, with its emphasis on partnership with, rather than conquest of, nature. With the mounting threats of global warming, more and more people have realized that business as usual cannot go on. Some of this



consciousness is beginning to affect government and business policies. There is also a growing movement of socially and environmentally conscious investors and businesses, as well as a plethora of conferences about climate change and other themes concerning our ecosystem.

### **The Point-Counterpoint**

However, it remains to be seen whether all this will lead to real structural changes. That even some of the transnational corporations that already control a major portion of the world's wealth are talking of environmentally sustainable policies and changes is a significant development. But much of this is just more rhetoric extolling the virtues of ecologically sound practices, greater teamwork, and more nurturing or stereotypically "feminine" management styles.

Wherever we turn we see the point counterpoint of the forward partnership thrust and the strong dominator resistance. Of particular importance in this connection is the struggle regarding the global population explosion. For a while there was strong forward movement, as in the shift in discourse from the first international population meeting in Bucharest in 1974 to later meetings, focused on the recognition that any hope for population stabilization lies in attention to so-called women's issues: not only free access to family planning for women, but access for women to equal educational and occupational opportunities so that their security and status no longer depend so heavily on breeding sons. However, the Vatican and a number of nations mounted a strong counter-push, which was then bolstered by the notion that reducing population growth is a Western imperialist conspiracy of genocide against poor and more populous nations. So today the issue of population is almost taboo even in most environmental circles – despite the fact that scientific data from the Worldwatch Institute and other respected sources clearly show that we are rapidly exceeding our planet's carrying capacity,

and that unless we halt exponential population growth we will have drastic shortages of – and conflicts over – water and other essential resources.

Another area where we dramatically see how the struggle to move toward partnership gets co-opted by often unconscious dominator resistance is in the discourse about cultural relativism that has become so fashionable under the guise of postcolonial and/or postmodern thinking. Although this too is a view largely held by people who consider themselves liberal and progressive, in fact it is an extremely regressive notion. It acts as a smokescreen for justifying human rights violations, especially violations of the human rights of women and children, as “cultural traditions”.

Yet at the same time, there is the incipient recognition of the absurdity of splitting off from “human rights” the rights of the majority as just “women’s rights” and “children’s rights”. This has been the theme of several of my journal articles, from “Human Rights: Toward an Integrated Theory for Action,” published in *The Human Rights Quarterly* in 1987 to, most recently, “Protecting the Majority of Humanity: Toward an Integrated Approach to Crimes against Present and Future Generations,” to be published this year in the Cambridge University Press book *Securing the Rights of Future Generations: Sustainable Development and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*.

I should here say that by and large the continuing movement toward partnership in all these different spheres has been due not to the leadership of heads of government, but to the continuing pressure on governmental and international organizations by a myriad of grassroots nongovernmental groups – groups that are today growing all over the world. It is this grassroots partnership movement that I think is the most important long-range development in our world today. For it is here that politics, as conventionally understood, is beginning to be redefined to focus on power imbalances not merely on the top of the dominator pyramid (the

economic and political relations traditionally confined to relations between males), but in our most foundational relations: the parent-child and woman-man relations where, in dominator societies, people first learn that violations of other people's human rights are "just the way things are".

### **My Life and Work after *The Chalice and The Blade***

The book I wrote after the publication *The Chalice and the Blade* is called *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body* (1995) and it focuses on interpersonal and intimate relationships – particularly on the interrelationship between sexuality, spirituality, politics, and economics. Even beyond this, it demonstrates how the social construction of pain and pleasure is very different in societies orienting primarily to partnership rather than domination. Indeed, societies orienting towards domination exalt and idealize pain, suffering and sacrifice, while in partnership societies fundamental are wellbeing and pleasure, both in the physical and spiritual planes, which are not seen as separate but as part of a continuum and a unity of being.

As with *The Chalice and the Blade*, the research and writing for *Sacred Pleasure* greatly enriched my life, expanding not only my intellectual horizons, but my personal sense of purpose. And it has done this in a deep emotional and spiritual sense I did not foresee.

It is on this more personal note that I want to bring this article to a close. I have been amazingly fortunate during the past several decades to have had the opportunity to do work that so passionately engages me. Thousands of women and men have written me to say that *The Chalice and the Blade* has changed their lives. It was in response to some of their requests, as well as to the adoption of *The Chalice and the Blade* by university professors and high school teachers in their classes, that – together with my husband and partner, the social psychologist

David Loye – I also wrote *The Partnership Way: New Tools for Living and Learning* (Loye and Eisler, 1990) as a practical workbook companion for *The Chalice and the Blade*. *The Chalice and the Blade* has now been translated into Italian, French, Spanish, Urdu, Arabic, Hebrew, Swedish, German, Portuguese, Greek, Danish, Czech, Korean, Finnish, Japanese, Russian, Norwegian, Dutch, and Chinese, with a British edition with distribution to Australia and India.

In October of 1992, I saw a dream come true: the first International Partnership Conference, attended by five hundred people from over forty countries, was held in Crete under the auspices of former Greek First Lady Margarita Papandreou. In October of the next year, I co-chaired a conference drawing attention to the critical importance of focusing on the human rights of the female half of humanity. This conference, attended by almost one thousand people from many parts of the United States, was organized by a committee of volunteers that, in accordance with partnership principles, was composed of many men.

In 1993 a Chinese Partnership Research Group was formed in Beijing following the publication of *The Chalice and the Blade* by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. And to date over a hundred books have made use of the partnership model ranging from *The Chalice and the Blade in Chinese History* by a group of Chinese scholars brought together by Professor Min Jiayin to *The Art of Partnership* by Professor Antonella Riem and colleagues at the University of Udine.

*The Chalice and the Blade* also inspired the formation of the Center for Partnership Studies. Founded in 1987, this nonprofit public interest corporation is devoted to research, education, and advocacy to help accelerate the shift from domination to partnership worldwide. One of our research projects led to the publication in 1995 of the monograph *Women, Men, and the Global Quality of Life*, documenting the key role of women's status in a nation's general quality of life. As part of our educational work was the formation of what at one time was a network

of over twenty U.S. Centers for Partnership Education, self-organizing and self-financing groups that actively promoted the application of partnership principles in their communities.

Moreover, in 1998 the *Partnership Studies Group* was started at the University of Udine (Italy), which is the only international research center on partnership studies active in Europe. Conceived and directed by Professor Antonella Riem (University of Udine), whom I also want to thank for the Italian third re-edition (2011) of *The Chalice and the Blade*, which she strongly wanted and supported. The *Partnership Studies Group* is composed of scholars from different universities that carry on significant research and study on *partnership* in world literatures (in English, French, Spanish) and in the education of young people both at school and at university levels.

I have spent a great deal of my time supporting these kinds of endeavors, also advising people who are writing doctoral theses drawing from Cultural Transformation Theory and, most recently, teaching in an online graduate program with a concentration in partnership studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies. I have also traveled a good deal, lecturing about the partnership alternative at universities, corporations, and conferences.

In 1993, when the paperbound edition of *The Chalice and the Blade* came out in Germany with a foreword by Daniel Goeudevert, former chairman of the board of Volkswagen, I traveled twice to Germany to speak. The second time – when I was invited to Bonn for an event introduced by Professor Rita Suessmuth, then president of the German Bundestag – was particularly meaningful to me. To have such a high official in the German government display strong interest in my work and receive me and my husband so warmly was a very healing experience, considering that I was almost killed as a child when that government was in Nazi hands. I could not help thinking how different my life and the entire course of world

history would have been if in the 1930s and 1940s there had been more women and men such as Professor Suessmuth with the courage to take a strong stand against injustice.

In 1994, I had the opportunity to express my gratitude to a country that *did* take such a strong stand. That year marked the publication of *The Chalice and the Blade* in Denmark – the only European country in which the people joined together to nonviolently resist Hitler's orders – where, beginning with King Christian, Danes refused to collaborate in the Nazi extermination of those who, like me, happened to be born to Jewish parents. That publication – for which I wrote a special epilogue that honored the courage of the Danes – was a reminder that if enough of us join together, we *can* halt the drift back to domination, that if we hold fast in our resolve, we *can* put our vision of creating a partnership world into action.

This theme of putting vision into action underlies my three most recent books.

In the award-winning *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2000), I applied my research to education, focusing primarily on needed changes in educational methods, curricula, and structures for grades kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup>. This multi/inter/cultural book strongly emphasized gender balance, and has influenced many teachers and schools worldwide.

*The Power of Partnership: Seven Relationships that Will Change Your Life* was my excursion into the realm of self-help books, and won the Nautilus award as the best self-help book of 2002 – even though it is very different from other works of this genre. It applied the templates of the partnership model and the domination model to the whole range of our relations – from how we relate to ourselves and our intimate relations to our national, international, and spiritual relations as well as

to how we relate to our Mother Earth. It was probably the most personal of my published books, interspersing my own experiences throughout.

My next and most recent book is *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*. Published in 2007, it proposes a new approach to economics that gives visibility and value to the most essential human work: the work of caring for people and for our natural environment. It was hailed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu as “a template for the better world we have been so urgently seeking,” and led to a new focus for the Center for Partnership Studies: our CPS Caring Economics Campaign (CEC).

As President of CPS, I am deeply involved in this campaign, which offers online resources at [www.partnershipway.org](http://www.partnershipway.org) and a highly successful interactive online partnership leadership training program, as well as a pioneering public policy initiative focusing on the development and implementation of a new set of Social Wealth indicators to supplement conventional economic measures such as GDP. A key part of the Caring Economics Campaign is the Alliance for a Caring Economy (ACE), a coalition of grassroots, research, educational, environmental, faith-based, and other organizations supporting the movement toward a caring economics.

In addition to these activities, I have written over 300 articles in publications ranging from *Brain and Mind*, *Behavioral Science*, *Political Psychology*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *UNESCO Courier* to the *Human Rights Quarterly*, the *International Journal of Women's Studies*, *Futures*, and the *World Encyclopedia of Peace*. I have also spoken at hundreds of venues nationally and internationally – including the United Nations General Assembly as well as conferences and universities worldwide. And I have had the honor of receiving many awards, including the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation's 2009 Distinguished Peace Leadership Award, as well as honorary Ph.D. degrees.

All this has brought me in contact with thousands of extraordinary people working for social transformation. So I am blessed to be constantly reminded that the partnership movement is alive worldwide, and that every one of us can – and must – play our part in it. Together, we can build the more equitable, sustainable, and caring partnership future we so need and want.

## NOTES

1. BCE: in order to promote partnership value, 'BCE', 'Before Common Era', is used instead of the patronizing 'BC' in respect of all the world's spiritual and religious beliefs. The same is true for 'CE', 'Common Era', instead of 'AD'." See Glossary of partnership by Stefano Mercanti at: <http://www.partnershipway.org/about-cps/foundational-concepts/the-challenge-of-language/understanding-the-language-of-partnership-a-glossary>.

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