



Building Cultures of Peace

Riane Eisler

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Women for Peace

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It is a great honor to be with you at this wonderful event, to share the stage with Judith Mayotte, a truly remarkable and courageous woman, and to follow in the footsteps of such distinguished leaders as the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu in receiving this Distinguished Peace Leadership Award.

It's been a real pleasure talking with so many special people tonight working for a saner, safer, nuclear free world. And to start with, I would like to introduce someone who is also very special, the distinguished social scientist and award-winning author, my wonderful husband Dr. David Loye.

Now I have been asked in the short time we have together tonight to tell you a little about myself and my work. And I want to first thank David Krieger and all the others of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation not only for this wonderful award, which I will cherish, but also for calling this evening "Women for Peace." Because this designation recognizes something very important: the key role of the female half of humanity in building what in my work and that of a growing number of others we call "cultures of peace."

I would like to suggest to you that both this concept of cultures of peace and the growing recognition of the importance of women's role in working for a less violent world are building blocks for a new integrated phase in the global peace movement based on the recognition that to move forward we need a systemic approach. I think most of us here recognize that we stand at a critical point in human history, in human cultural evolution, when going back to the old normal where peace is just an interval between wars is not an option; that what we need is a fundamental cultural transformation.

As those of you familiar with my work know, this cultural transformation has been the focus of my multi-disciplinary, cross-cultural, historical research examining two contrasting social configurations – what I have identifying as the configurations of two underlying social categories: a domination system and a partnership system.

Because as Einstein said, we cannot solve problem with the same thinking that created them. If we think only in terms of the conventional cultural and economic categories – right vs. left, religious vs. secular, Eastern vs. Western, capitalist vs. socialist, and so on – we cannot move forward. What we need is to look at social systems from a new perspective that can help us build not only a nuclear free world but that better world we so urgently want and need.

My Passion and My Work

As you can tell I have a great deal of passion for this work of building foundations for a better future, not only as a scholar and writer and social activist, but also as a mother and grandmother deeply concerned, as so many of us are, about what kind of future our children will inherit.

And this passion is deeply rooted in my own childhood experiences. Because in terms of this

new conceptual framework that I am going to very briefly describe tonight, I was born in Europe, in Vienna, at a time of massive regression to the domination side of the partnership/domination continuum: the rise of the Nazis, first in Germany and then in my native Austria. So from one day to the next, my whole world was rent asunder. My parents and I became hunted, with license to kill. I watched with horror on Crystal Night – so called because of all the glass that was shattered in Jewish homes, businesses, synagogues – as a gang of Gestapo men broke into our home and dragged my father away. So as a little girl I witnessed brutality and violence.

But I also witnessed something else that night that made an equally profound impression on me: what I today call spiritual courage. We've been taught to think of courage as the courage to go out and kill the enemy. But spiritual courage is a much more deeply human courage. It's the courage to stand up against injustice out of love. My mother displayed this courage. She could have been killed for demanding that my father be given back to her, many people were killed that night. But by a miracle she wasn't, by a miracle she did obtain my father's release, yes, some money eventually passed hands, but it would not have happened had she not stood up to the Nazis. So we were able to escape. We escaped to Cuba, and I grew up in the industrial slums of Havana, because the Nazis confiscated everything my parents owned. And it was there that I learned that most of my family, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents were murdered by the Nazis – as would have happened to us had we not been able to escape.

These traumatic experiences led me to questions most of us have asked at some time in our lives: Does it have to be this way? Does there have to be so much injustice, cruelty, violence, destructiveness, when we humans also have such a great capacity, as I saw in my mother, for sensitivity, for caring, for love? Is it, as we're often told, inevitable, just human nature? Or are there alternatives – and if so, what are they?

It was these questions that eventually led to my research. And I found very early I simply could not find answers to them in terms of the old social categories – right vs. left, religious vs. secular, Eastern vs. Western, Northern vs. Southern, capitalist vs. socialist. First of all, none of these categories, if you really think about it, describe the configuration of a social system. They just look at this or that aspect of a social system. Most critically, none of them answer the most critical question for our future: the question of what kinds of beliefs, values, and institutions (from the family, education, and religion to politics and economics) support or inhibit either our enormous human capacities for caring, for consciousness, for creativity, for sensitivity – the capacities that are most developed in our species, that make us uniquely human – or those other capacities we also have, for cruelty, insensitivity, and violence.

In other words, I started from the premise today being verified by neuroscience, that we humans have genetic possibilities for many different kinds of behaviors, but that which of these genetic possibilities are expressed or inhibited is profoundly affected by our experiences. And of course, these experiences are in turn profoundly affected by the kinds of cultures or subcultures – mediated by families, education, economics, and so forth – we live in.

Connecting the Dots

So in my research I looked for patterns, drawing from a very large data base both cross-culturally and historically. And it was then possible to see social configurations that had not been visible looking at only a part of social systems, configurations that kept repeating themselves cross-culturally and historically. There were no names for them, so I called one the Domination System and the other the Partnership System.

Most of my books, *The Chalice and The Blade*, *Sacred Pleasure*, *The Power of Partnership*, *Tomorrow's Children*, and most recently, *The Real Wealth of Nations*, draw from this research. And all of them describe connections we need to understand to build a nuclear free world: connections between what in a society is considered normal in national and international relations, on the one hand, and what is considered normal in family and other intimate relations. Why? Because it is in our primary human relations – the relations that are still not taken into account in most analyses of society – that people first learn (on the most basic neural level, as we today know from neuroscience) what is considered normal or abnormal, moral or immoral, possible or impossible.

I just want to give you a few examples of these connections. Consider for a moment that if children grow up in cultures or subcultures where violence in families is accepted as normal, even moral, what do they learn? The lesson is simple, isn't it? It's that it's ok, even moral, to use violence to impose one's will on others. Now fortunately many of us reject this, many of us have experienced these kinds of childhoods and we say no, we don't want to repeat these patterns. But unfortunately a substantial majority, as we see all over the world, not only accept these traditions of violence and domination in intimate relations; they consider violence appropriate in other relations – including international ones.

We see this cross-culturally and historically. I want to illustrate this with two cultures. one is Western, the other is Eastern; one is secular, the other religious; one is technologically developed, the other isn't): the Nazis in Germany and Taliban in Afghanistan. From a conventional perspective they are totally different. But if you look at these two cultures from the perspective of the partnership/domination continuum, you see a configuration. Both are extremely warlike and authoritarian. And for both a top priority was returning to a "traditional family" – their code word for a rigidly male-dominated, authoritarian, highly punitive family.

Now this is not coincidental. Nor is it coincidental that these kinds of societies idealize warfare, even consider it holy. Neither is it coincidental that in these kinds of cultures masculinity, male identity, is equated with domination and violence, at the same time that women and anything stereotypically considered "soft" or feminine, such as caring and nonviolence, is devalued.

I want to emphasize that this has nothing to do with anything inherent in women or men, as we can see today when more and more men are doing fathering in the nurturing way mothering is supposed to be done and women are entering what were once considered strictly male preserves. But these are dominator gender stereotypes that many of us – both men and women – are trying

to leave behind.

All this takes us directly to women for peace. Because if we are to build cultures of peace we have to start talking about something that still makes many people uncomfortable: gender. We might as well put that on the table; people don't want to talk about gender, do they? But let's also remember what the great sociologist Louis Wirth said: that the most important things about a society are those that people are uncomfortable talking about. We saw that with race, and only as we started to talk about it did we begin to move forward. And we're beginning to talk more about gender, and starting to move forward, but much too slowly.

This is important for many reasons, including the fact that it is through dominator norms for gender that children learn another important lesson: to equate difference – beginning with the most fundamental difference in our species between female and male – with superiority or inferiority, with dominating or being dominated, with being served or serving. And they acquire this mental and emotional map before their brains are fully developed (we know today that our brains don't fully develop until our twenties), so they then can automatically apply it to any other difference, be it a different race, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

The Economics of Domination and Partnership

This is why we urgently need a systemic approach if we are to move to a better world, a nuclear free world. Because only then will we have the foundations on which to build this more peaceful world.

I am going to suggest to you that this question of women for peace goes very deep. It goes to something that once articulated may seem self-evident: that how the roles and relations of the two halves of humanity are structured can no longer be considered “just a women's issue” (of course, we're half of humanity, actually the majority, but that phrase again shows how we've been conditioned to devalue women and anything associated with women). In reality, how gender roles and relations are constructed affects everything about a society – from its institutions (for example, whether families are more democratic or authoritarian) to its guiding system of values.

Let me give you an example from economics, which, as I said, my last book *The Real Wealth of Nations* is about. Most of us would never think economics has anything to do with gender. At most we think this refers to the workplace gender discrimination we're finally beginning to talk about. But actually it goes much, much deeper. It has huge systemic effects.

Have you ever wondered, for instance, why it is that so many politicians always find money for weapons, for wars, for prisons – but when it comes to funding health care, child care, and other “soft” or caring activities, they have no money. Nor do they have money for keeping a clean and healthy natural environment, like that “women's work” of keeping clean and healthy home environment.

Underlying these seemingly irrational priorities is a gendered system of valuations we've inherited from earlier more domination-oriented times. To meet the challenges we face, we must make this visible.

We need to move beyond the tired old argument about capitalism vs socialism and vice versa. Because if you really think about it, the latest phase of capitalism, neoliberalism was actually a regression to dominator economics: to a top-down economic system where "trickle down economics" is really a continuation of dominator traditions where those on the bottom are socialized to content themselves with the scraps dropping from the opulent tables of those on top, and where freedom when used by those in economic control means freedom for them to do what they want – including the destruction of our natural environment, as we see around us.

This is an ancient economics of domination, whether it's tribal, feudal, or mercantilist, whether it's Eastern or Western, whether it's ancient or modern. Indeed, the two large scale applications of socialism, the USSR and China, also turned into domination systems, highly authoritarian and violent, with horrendous environmental problems, because the underlying social system did not shift from domination to partnership.

That's not to say we should discard everything from capitalism and socialism. We need to retain and strengthen the partnership elements in both the market and government economies and leave the domination elements behind. But we need to go further to what I have called a "caring economics."

Now isn't it interesting that when we put caring and economics in the same sentence, people tend to do a double take? And isn't that a terrible comment on the values we have learned to accept, the uncaring values we've learned to accept as driving economic systems?

Of course, we've been told that caring policies and practices may sound good, but they're just not economically effective. In reality, study after study shows that investing in caring for people and nature is extremely effective – not in human and environmental terms, but in purely financial terms.

Not only do businesses that have caring policies do extremely well, so also do nations. We dramatically see this if we look at nations that at the beginning of the 20th century were so poor that they had famines: Nordic nations such as Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and Finland. Today, these nations are invariably in the highest ranks not only of United Nations Human Development Reports but of the World Economic Forum's annual Global Competitiveness reports. And this is largely due to the fact that their norm became a more caring economics, a more caring society.

These nations have government-supported childcare, universal healthcare, stipends to help families care for children, elder care with dignity, generous paid parental leave. In short, they economically support caring work in *both* the market and the household. As a result, they have very high life spans, very low poverty rates, very low crime rates, and a generally high standard

of living for all. They are also in the forefront of moving toward sustainable energy and invest a larger proportion of their GDP in helping people in the developing world than other nations.

But none of this happened in a vacuum. These nations are the contemporary nations that have moved most closely to the partnership side of the partnership-domination continuum. They are not ideal nations, but this is their configuration. First, they have more democracy and equality in *both* the family and the state. Second, they have been in the forefront of trying to leave behind traditions of violence inherent in domination systems. For example, they pioneered the first peace studies and the first laws prohibiting physical discipline of children in families. And the third part of their partnership configuration is that, in contrast to domination systems where the female half of humanity is rigidly subordinated to the male half, they have a much more equal partnership between women and men. For example, approximately 40 percent of their national legislators are female.

And what happens as the status of women rises is that men no longer find it such a threat to their status, to their “masculinity” to also embrace more caring practices and policies. They also have a strong men’s movement to disentangle “masculinity” from its dominator equation with conquest and violence, including a strong movement for men to take responsibility for violence against women and children.

Now I want to say to you that the statistics on intimate violence, which is primarily violence against women and children, are horrendous. You can get some of these statistics on the website of our Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence, www.saiv.net. But to sum it up, between child-battering, wife-beating, sexual abuse of children, rapes, bride burnings, sexual mutilation of girl children and women, so-called honor killings, and other horrors, the number of lives taken and blighted by intimate violence worldwide are much greater than those taken by armed conflict. And yet this violence is still largely invisible.

So our job is to make it visible, and to move toward a new integrated stage in the global peace movement. Because if we really want a nuclear free world, we can’t just tack that on to a system that idealizes violence as “masculine,” that devalues the soft or “feminine,” such as nonviolence as caring – whether it’s in a woman or a man, as in insults such as wimp, sissy, and effeminate.

Building Cultures of Equity and Peace

So let’s join together and move into that second phase of the peace movement: that integrated phase that takes into account the *whole* of human relations, from intimate to international. Let us muster the spiritual courage to challenge traditions of domination and violence in our primary human relations – the formative relations between women and men and parents and children. This is the only way we will have the foundations for that more peaceful and equitable culture we so urgently need at this critical time in human history.

Let us work for systemic change, for the new norms needed for a future where all children, both girls and boys, can realize their enormous human potentials for consciousness, creativity, and caring. Let's do it together – for ourselves, for our children, and for generations still to come. I thank you.

RIANE EISLER is a social scientist, attorney, and social activist best known as author of the international bestseller *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future*. Her newest book, *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics* has been hailed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu as “a template for the better world we have been so urgently seeking,” by Peter Senge as “desperately needed,” and by Jane Goodall as “a call for action.” Dr. Eisler is president of the Center for Partnership Studies (www.partnershipway.org), keynotes conferences worldwide, and is a consultant to business and government on applications of the partnership model introduced in her work. She has been a powerful advocate for the human rights of women and children, has received many honors, and is included in the award-winning book *Great Peacemakers*, as one of 20 leaders for world peace, along with Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King.

Dr. Eisler can be contacted at center@partnershipway.org
Her website is www.rianeeisler.com