

THE GIFT OF PARTNERSHIP

Stefano Mercanti, PhD, and Antonella Riem, PhD

Abstract

Riane Eisler's partnership model and David Loye's theory of Darwinian *moral sensitivity* are effective interdisciplinary frameworks for highlighting the dynamic interplay between dominator and equalitarian constructs that shape the history of our time. In this period of limited individual freedom and impending predatory globalism, branded as philanthropic altruism and environmental sustainability, this article uses both theories to offer life-enhancing and caring scenarios to move beyond top-down elitism and to promote a culture of peace.

Keywords: Partnership; Domination; Caring; Charles Darwin; Moral Sensitivity; Globalism; Cultural Transformation Theory; Ethnophilology; Multicommunitarianism; Ecocriticism.

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We are very honoured to contribute to this commemorative issue of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* dedicated to David Loye, Riane Eisler's beloved partner, cofounder of the Center for Partnership Systems, and highly esteemed scholar, whose work on Darwin's "lost" theory of love identifies the higher drives of moral sensitivity and caring for one another that undermine the cultural stereotypes of domination, exploitation, and predation stemming from the popularized distortion of the basic Darwinian theory of natural selection. We had the great pleasure of discovering both Eisler's and Loye's work in the 1990s and since then we have enjoyed a long-standing and fruitful collaboration. This collaboration culminated in the founding in 1998 of the Partnership Studies Group (PSG), an international research centre based at the University of Udine (Italy), directed by Antonella Riem and animated by the participation of many international scholars, writers, doctoral students, artists, and poets, inspired by the seminal

anthropological and socio-cultural work of Eisler and Loye. In 2020, at the University of Udine, the PSG launched the first international Master in Partnership Studies and Native Traditions program (2020), which is receiving enthusiastic appraisal.

THE PARTNERSHIP STUDIES GROUP

Initially, the PSG's research focused on the literatures of Australia, India, and Canada, applied linguistics, and education; in recent years it has expanded to include a more interdisciplinary range of intercultural studies, social, anthropological, ethno-philological, and educational fields. It has been especially active with nationally and internationally funded research projects, the international online journals *Le Simplegadi* and the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies (IJPS)*, the ALL (Association of Graduates in Foreign Languages and Literatures) series Forum University Press, international publications, and a number of conferences and seminar series.

At the PSG, renowned international scholars focus on postcolonial, ecocritical, intercultural, mythical, and archetypal studies of literature, education and its partnership mediation, intercultural strategies in English literatures, applied linguistics, and plurilingual education, also intersecting with contemporary systemic science and ecofeminism. As a model for thinking about language, culture, and the environment, Eisler's partnership theory works beyond gender-binary systems and traditional Western Manichean oppositions between coloniser/colonised, master/slave, ego/other, white European/indigenous, and male/female, and presents interesting interdisciplinary perspectives on nature/animal/cultural/human relationships:

Systems of oppression that require everyone to be rigidly raised either male or female and masculine or feminine according to stereotypes socially constructed for a domination society, thus eliminating the possibility for other gender expressions. Conversely, the partnership model aims at the creation of a society beyond the male- superior female-inferior, in-group versus out-

group species systems, in which diversity - be it based on gender, religion, or ethnic origin - can be valued. (Mercanti, 2015, p. 17).

Eisler's perspective is consonant with Raimon Panikkar's idea of ecosophy, which emphasises the wisdom-spirituality of Mother Earth (Panikkar, 1994).

A NEW METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LITERARY CRITICISM

Thanks to Eisler's partnership model and Loye's theory of Darwinian *moral sensitivity* (Loye, 2010a; 2010b), which radically transcend the authoritarian structure of ranking and hierarchies of domination in world culture, economics, and society, the PSG has developed important multi- and inter-disciplinary research, investigating the presence and meaning of partnership/dominator configurations within world literatures in English, Language, Education, and Arts. The aim of investigating the relationship between dominator and partnership models within textual phenomena of different natures is based on the awareness that it is primarily in the texts that all ideologies are institutionalized and reproduced in more or less explicit ways. The text is thus studied not as a faithful reflection of reality but as a privileged 'con-text' through which changes of the status quo can be envisaged. Texts belonging to different genres (fiction, drama, poetry, journalism, advertising, politics, etc.) are selected and analyzed in order to examine the different gender relations (traditional hierarchies of male/female), discriminations (institutionalized social violence), and social structures (hierarchical and authoritarian social organizations), and those semiotic codes that reinforce and strengthen them. What is central is the study of myths, archetypes, symbols, and languages as instruments for creating and reinforcing a cultural partnership paradigm and language, because "once new categories in our language are created, used, and internalized, they become lenses through which we perceive 'reality'" (Eisler, 2013, p. 42).

Accordingly, the PSG approaches research within a broader intercultural and interdisciplinary frame, aiming at transcending the limiting, rigid, and dated scientific specialisations which, by focussing on a single and univocal perspective, lose sight of the importance of the whole, the interrelated web of life on our planet.

The epistemological foundations of this research group thus rest on Eisler's biocultural partnership model (Eisler & Fry, 2019, p. 1-2) which promotes a viable poetics of relation (Glissant, 1996) and strategically seeks to move beyond the scientific and technocratic attitudes stemming from domination (Eisler, 1997) and globalised bio-imperialism (Shiva, 2015). Equally, within the tension between partnership and domination morality, Loye's theory of Darwinian moral sensitivity firmly establishes the thrust of a partnership-oriented moral evolution based on love and caring at the heart of human life: "Working through evolution to reach its greatest power within us is our ability to override even the worst of early experiential reality to shape the future to the highest rather than the lowest ends" (Loye, 2014, p. 15).

The capacity to listen, relate, and connect to human beings and the environment is at the core of this biocultural partnership approach which offers truly peaceful alternatives to the violent, globalising, destructive dominator exploitation of the Mother Earth and all Her children, including us humans. Both Eisler's and Loye's theories operate within a broader cultural and macro-historic frame, identifying what supports our human capacities for love, care, creativity, and awareness, or, on the other hand, for insensitivity, brutality, and violence. In particular, Eisler's research and critical method underlines the importance of systemic, macroscopic, socio-cultural, and macro-historical views which uses a new method of analysis, the study of Relational Dynamics: "Dynamics are, first, what kind of relations - from intimate to international - a particular culture encourages or discourages; and second, how key elements of a culture interactively relate to shape and maintain its basic character" (Eisler, 2019, p. 9).

ELITIST GLOBALISM AND BIO-IMPERIALISM

The PSG considers 'relations', starting with the interconnections between the formative gender and parent-child relations and relations in the larger society (Eisler, 2002), and the consequences they have on the forces which have seen the world's ecosystems come under sustained and increasing attack (Nixon, 2011), often marginalizing peoples and causing the 'share' of global economic, political, and

personal suffering to fall with great unevenness (Riem & Mercanti, 2014, 2017, 2021; Riem & Thieme, 2020; Riem & Hughes-d'Aeth, 2022). The world's financial elites stringently impose their goals, openly represented by *The Great Reset* (Schwab & Malleret, 2020) announced by the World Economic Forum at Davos. Under the convenient all-purpose 'opportunity' of the pandemics, the current neoliberal capitalistic challenge of climate change (Chakrabarty, 2012, p. 1), and rampant bio-imperialism (Shiva, 2022), both reinforcing and renewing the uneven economic, social, and racial conditions experienced during the long history of colonization, the ostentatious 'newspeak' announcements of *The Great Reset* with its 'new social contract that honors the dignity of every human being' is gaining momentum. This exclusive group of financial elites, bankers, stakeholders, academics, and national political leaders, orchestrated by Klaus Schwab, pushes on the long-cherished project of a global governance, which certainly does not have in mind the dignity, freedom, and wellbeing of the world's peoples, and not even the 'care' for the planet. It's where the world's billionaire class reaps profit through the global inequalities of a *Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Schwab, 2016) which clearly aims at enforcing, for instance, automation, which will reduce - if not replace altogether - the role of human labor in production. A global technocratic governance is judiciously couched in "positive, common and hope-filled narratives, enabling individuals and groups from all parts of the world to participate in, and benefit from, the ongoing transformations" (Schwab, 2016, p. 9).

Conversely, both Loye's and Eisler's theories and environmental morality bring together findings from the natural and social sciences, often overlooked or not put into relationship, powerfully debunking the idea of humans being totally replaced by monocultural technocracy (Shiva, 1993) and intrinsically driven by selfishness, violence, domination, and greed. "On one hand is a morality that recognizes the interconnection of life on our planet; on the other is the domination of nature as our divinely ordained right" (Loye, 2014, p. 11). Their approach abandons the traditional dichotomies of Western thought - right/left, religious/secular, and other similar categories, with the fundamental intent of including our social and familial relationships, such as parent-child and partner-to-partner. On one end of the continuum, the domination system, often through menace and violence, ranks man

over man, man over woman, ‘race’ over ‘race,’ and man over nature. On the other end of the continuum, we have a more peace-oriented, gender-balanced, equalitarian and sustainable system of inclusive familiar, social, cultural, and economic partnership relations that embraces and supports our planet.

ECOLITERARY AND ECOSUSTAINABLE NARRATIVES

A partnership approach to literature, language, and culture looks and feels quite different from the previous conventional historicist and materialist attempts to locate cultural tension in underlying social and global financial over-structures, forces, and trends. But it is here where Eisler’s pluridisciplinary work shows its profound, nuanced complexity as it transcends “age-old assumptions about human nature and its supposed impossibility for improving the human condition showing how we can bring about fundamental change” (Eisler & Frye, 2019, p. 2). Eisler’s interest in gender equality as a fundamental force of partnership, against the divisive patriarchal/matriarchal dominator approach, makes her also an interesting feminist scholar studied worldwide. With the publication of her first book *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1987), she clearly expounds how a dominator society, characterized by rigid male dominance and ingrained violence, is certainly much different from a gender-balanced and *equalitarian* partnership society. Eisler re-examines fundamental human topics, such as sexual relationships, parenting, human rights, social justice, politics, economics, science, and technology (also in its technocratic degenerations) from an integrative and dialogic perspective, shedding new light on critical current issues, from climate change, scapegoating, authoritarianism, racism, and other forms of in-group versus out-group thinking, to contemporary disputes about biological and cultural evolution, economics, national and international politics, religious fundamentalism, and the uses and potential abuses of technological breakthroughs (Eisler & Fry, 2019, p. 2).

Literary studies become laboratories for the interplay of domination and partnership, workshops for the operational ethics that the world needs in order to curb the Neo-Malthusian drive to forcefully and eugenically reduce human

population in order to ‘save’ the planet. This approach exemplifies how the so-called new geological epoch - the Anthropocene (Malhi, 2017) - is actually due to the greedy, exploitative, anti-sustainable and anti-ecological actions of the financial elites and multinationals, even if in their constructions and narratives, humanity as a whole becomes the culprit. Just to mention a few of the most powerful cartels: The Seven Sisters (oil cartel), Monsanto/Bayer (genetically modified seeds and highly polluting pesticides), Big Tech (Facebook, Windows, Amazon), Big Pharma (the pharmaceutical cartel), Wall Street, Black Rock (multinational investment management corporations), Media Corporations (Netflix, Walt Disney, Comcast Corp, AT&T, Charter Communications, Sony, Thomson Reuters, ViacomCBS), and the World Economic Forum.

The complementary views of postcolonialism and ecocriticism illustrate the constitutive relations between literary, linguistic, cultural, social, and environmental concerns. Our innovative interaction of partnership, postcolonial studies, ecocriticism, and discourse studies aims at contextualizing the transnational cultural and literary imagination and rethinking plurilingual education in terms of equal relationships among civilizations. It can promote the development of new researchers and professionals in transcultural mediation, and build cultural, linguistic, social, and institutional expertise to operate at national and international levels.

In our most recent work on ecoliteracy and ecolinguistics (Riem & Thieme, 2020; Riem & Hughes-d’Aeth, 2022), we explore how different narrative choices inform and condition the worldview presented to us by mainstream media. We also enter the classrooms of children learning second languages and into the virtualized pages of contemporary news services reporting the climate emergency alongside sports and the lives of celebrities. Our research always aims at being distinctively pluralistic, through an interdisciplinary lens crossing literary, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Such border zones often reveal the distinctions offered by Eisler - domination and partnership - quite starkly. What happens at a border, when two aspects meet that are at odds with one another? A border organizes difference as an interface, a contamination, a crossing. This can manifest through a militarized

margin of mutual suspicion (domination) or as a place of instrumental exchange, of partnership dialogue. It is at these crossroads that one can decide to relinquish the drive to domination, and partnership can be most fully expressed and manifested.

As a consequence of monocultural imperialism, industrialization, and globalization, humanity has been progressively detached and alienated from nature. Precious in this crucial battle to heal the Earth are the teachings of those peoples who still preserve their ancestral ties with the land and value their earth-centered mythologies, such as the narratives of Indigenous people of North America who teach us how to restore a renewed respect for Mother Earth and its creatures. In native traditions the interdependency between women and the Earth is fundamental, and points to how the shift away from the dominator model hinges on a re-evaluation of feminine principles, relinquishing violent behaviors against women and the Earth. Given that the will to domination has been such a strong feature of imperialist hegemonies, it is understandable that sources of wisdom might be found in forms of human society that lived by ecological and partnership principles.

Ecofeminists have warned of the devastating consequences of dominator systems over Nature that are now more tangible than ever. It has become obvious that greedy capitalist interests need to be replaced by a more eco-sustainable economy based on caring, solidarity, respect, altruism, and partnership, if humanity wants to save the planet and itself (Eisler, 2007). Since 2020, the world has been facing a declared pandemic, which politicians world-wide, particularly in ‘developed’ countries, have been using to limit civil and democratic liberties, thus affecting our lives far beyond the virus, also thanks to the despicable conditioning and misinformation of mainstream media. Local and small economies are crumbling, to the detriment of common people, families, and small businesses, and to the benefit of globalized multinationals, as described in *Reviving and Restructuring the Corporate Sector Post-Covid. Designing Public Policy Interventions* (Group of 30, 2020). This document was signed by Mario Draghi, vice-chair and managing director of Goldman Sachs, who was ‘appointed’ Italian Prime Minister in 2021 in order to carry on a “creative destruction” of useless “Zombie firms” or “walking dead” (Group of 30, p. 22). For example, “Adapt new business realities, rather than trying to preserve the status

quo. [...] This may require a certain amount of “creative destruction” as some firms shrink or close and new ones open, as some workers need to move between companies and sectors [...]” (Group of 30. p. 3).

This quotation perfectly shows how the cold insensitivity of multinationals, financial elites, and international powers heavily affect and condition the ecology of our everyday lives, which includes our work and our family, social, cultural, and political relations. It is ever more urgent to rethink radically the ideological and cultural tenets on which our societies and economies are based. This means moving beyond the Cartesian dualism separating humans from nature, both in the sense of our human/animal nature and of the natural world, while fostering more dialogical interactions and inspiring people toward a deeper environmental awareness. By applying both Eisler’s and Loye’s theories to the study of world literature, poetry, applied linguistics, and education, across ages and genres, the PSG research creatively highlights the fundamental interconnections between human beings and their environments, and reminds us how to live in authentic, sustainable harmony for the benefit of our planet. We also intend to provide new and vital transdisciplinary perspectives on the ongoing debate in the field of Humanities.

ETHNOPHILOLOGY AND MULTICOMMUNITARIAN SENSITIVITY

Very interesting in this respect is the critical approach of Francesco Benozzo, which emerges from the ashes of traditional philology as an art that has become a discipline, with its fixed methods and its surgical ‘nonchalance in front of mystery.’ Also a distinguished poet and a traditional Celtic harpist, Benozzo proposes *ethnophilology*, a new approach and an “indiscipline,” which still maintains the “emotion of meeting with texts and words” (Benozzo, 2010, p. 1). *Ethnophilology* can be defined as the “philology of the people with their multiple forms of cultural expressions” (Benozzo, 2012, p. 206). Like Eisler’s partnership model and Loye’s Darwinian *moral sensitivity*, ethnophilology “aims at extending the opportunities for free thought for generations to come, hoping they can welcome and disseminate them, refusing any resurgence of authoritarian thrusts” (Benozzo, 2021, p.108). In this context, philology can find again its passion for liberty, freeing itself from

critical rules, ‘discipline,’ and dogmatism; it can lead the way toward a new “continuous becoming of tradition, that is of the ‘traditioning’ of tradition” (Benozzo, 2021, p.108). Ethnophilology thus is an invitation to manifest the capacity not to ‘fix’ or imprison living traditions within a ‘canon,’ established by an ‘authority,’ within defined margins and crystallised static interpretative schemes. It is a poetic call to be open to challenges, to explore the different lyrical dimensions of words and texts and the emotional vibrations they create in us. It is a solicitation to embrace alternative, mobile critical stances, to be on the move, as it were, ready to revise and contradict our previous assertions if needed, while we read, speak, think, feel, explore words and texts, meet with peoples, and flow with life:

The idea of a (philological) revolution can be defined in terms of dissemination and social metamorphosis, in opposition to the appropriation and substitution method (of authority). Philological practice, understood in terms of an original drive towards liberty, can give us a glimpse of a series of consequences [...] ‘we can (and must) engage in tackling problems which have a human significance’ (N. Chomsky, quoted in Benozzo, 2021, p. 107).

This approach will make “evident and available the beneficial effect of opening to the unknown, becoming a mouthpiece, among other sciences, of the concrete experiences (cartographic, *en plein air*, anti-hierarchical) of uprootedness” (Benozzo, 2021, p. 109). In the relational and participative desire to transform our lives for the better of all, partnership studies, in their palpable affinity with ethnophilology, talk to our emotions as human beings, readers, writers, and scholars; they speak to our minds, hearts, and souls as temporary visitors walking on this beautiful planet Earth.

To conclude, a partnership-oriented approach is never neutral, but vigorously participative and actively engaged in dissolving the myth of the neutrality of the scholar who vivisects topics of study with absolute detachment (Benozzo, 2021, p. 109). The strength of partnership lies in this dynamic and passionate participation, in its *multicommunitarianism* (Benozzo, 2012, p.195-196). This term was coined by Touraine (1997) to show the difference between the idea of multiculturalism, which

underlines the need for respecting other cultures and traditions within a single community, and multicomunitarianism, which allows cultural difference and multiple communities to exist in the same geographical space without a common community binding them. Benozzo's multicomunitarianism focuses on the concrete everyday relationships within a shared 'community' (Momin, 2004), in a continuous engaging encounter with texts and words of different genres, geographical areas, and cultures. It is found in the 'inter-indisciplinary' and pluralistic diversity of the themes explored, the diverse range of ecological concerns and the fundamental and creative relations with ecosophy, ethnophilology, ecofeminism, system theory, and ecolinguistics. Here lies both Eisler's and Loye's passionate call for a fuller recognition of our common humanity that holistically values the essential needs and aspirations of all human beings within the interconnected web of life.

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Stefano Mercanti, PhD, is Senior Research Fellow, co-founding member of the [Partnership Studies Group](#) (PSG), and co-editor of the online journal on modern literatures [Le Simplegadi](#) at the University of Udine, Italy. He has published widely on South Asian writers, Postcolonial and Partnership Studies. He authored the partnership glossaries for Riane Eisler's Italian editions of *The Chalice and the Blade* (Forum, 2011) and *Sacred Pleasure* (Forum, 2012) and is currently working on a new *Partnership Glossary for Post-Democracies*. His email is stefano.mercanti@uniud.it.

Antonella Riem, PhD, Honorary Member of the Order of Australia (AM) is Full Professor of English Literature and Language, Director of the Department of Languages and Literatures (DILL), President of the Italian Conference of Foreign Languages, founder of the Partnership Studies Group (PSG) and editor in chief of the series ALL Forum University Press and the online A-ranked journal on world literatures *Le Simplegadi*. She was Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice Chancellor International of the University of Udine, Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, President of the Italian Deans of the Faculties of Foreign Languages and Literatures. She has more than one hundred international publications and nine monographic volumes on the Literatures in English. Her email is antonella.riem@uniud.it.