

International Women's Day on 8th March 2021 Reflections

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The coronavirus pandemic throws into stark relief how short-sighted it is to neglect care work. Images of nurses wearing trash bags as personal protective equipment during the virus outbreak in New York City highlighted this predicament.¹ Political analyst Naomi Klein thinks that 'the pivot here, the transformative moment here, has to do with grounding whatever is next in a valuing of that labour of care. We can never discard and devalue that labour ever again'.²

Why might ask: Why is that? Why do we neglect care work?

In my work, I focus on *big history*.³ The reason is that only a wide view can make us see what needs to be seen so we can become truly *sapiens*. Only a wide view over long stretches of history makes primary problems visible, which then spawn secondary, tertiary, and quaternary problems.

Throughout the past millennia, most societies were shaped according to the *dominator model of society* as social scientist Riane Eisler has called it.⁴ In that context, care work is mostly relegated to women, while most males are taught to strive for honour through courageous and heroic competition for domination.

To use the image of the human body, in the dominator model, elites — usually men — are allowed to use the right arm, the sword arm, to devise strategies and give orders, to prepare for war if needed. We could say that this represents the sympathetic system of the body that prepares for flight or fight. Their left arm, the one that stands for maintenance and care, akin to the parasympathetic system of the body, is bound behind their backs. Their subordinates — women and men of low rank — suffer the inverse infliction, they are expected to exhaust themselves in service. None can use both arms, none can reach an inner balance, none can unfold their full potential. Worse even, the entire system risks collapse when care has no value⁵ — heart attack is the typical emergency trouble-shooter disease that is the outcome when the maintenance tasks of the body are delayed for too long. Whenever we pass social and ecological tipping points on our planet now — these are our heart attacks.

We live in an era of many heart attacks now, we live in a globally interconnected world of overstretched resources, and it is time for the *partnership model of society* to manifest, where everyone can unfold their full potential in service of global social and ecological health. As relational psychologist Linda Hartling notes, both women and men benefit from being engaged in a full human experience of emotions, empathy, and caring connections'.⁶ It is time to invite all people — women and men alike — to embrace approaches that are conceptually female in that they maintain cohesion through applying strategies that are complex, relational, multilateral, foresighted, integrative, and holistic, rather than uni-directional, short-sighted, and mono-dimensional.

Time has run out for short-lived 'victories' over other people and the planet. Such victories mean collective defeat in the historically unprecedented new situation in which we live. Global unity in protecting our cultural and biological diversity, enacted through equal dignity for all, is the only rational lifesaving plan. For a few years to come, not for long, a small window of opportunity will stand open for humanity to act on these insights.

'It takes a village to raise a child' is an African proverb that applies to the global village now. This village needs to follow the path of nurturing care rather than of coercive force. Danger looms wherever glorious 'manly courage' is contrasted with the alleged cowardice of 'female harmonising', danger looms wherever 'heroic fighting' is set up against the purported dullness of 'nurturing care'. Planet Earth is humanity's lifeboat, where we either all swim together or all sink together, and in that situation, caring for our common interest is in everyone's self-interest.⁷

The coronavirus pandemic is one among many signs that indicate that 'the party is over', the party of who is best in exploiting our eco-sphere and socio-sphere. The carrying capacity of both

spheres is at its limit, to the point of *ecocide* and *sociocide*.⁸ The pandemic is an alarm signal that calls for global care for the common good to be given priority. The profit motive is destructive when it drives exploitation instead of being in service of global care.⁹ Naomi Klein cogently describes the situation, 'Just when we needed to gather, our public sphere was disintegrating; just when we needed to consume less, consumerism took over virtually every aspect of our lives; just when we needed to slow down and notice, we sped up; and just when we needed longer time horizons, we were able to see only the immediate present'.¹⁰

Ecocide and sociocide are facilitated by the same underlying catalyst, namely, *cogitocide*. This term was coined by the former head of the Club of Rome, Prince El Hassan bin Talal in 2020.¹¹ *Cogito* comes from *cogitare* in Latin, 'to think',¹² and *cogitocide* is the killing of our *cogitosphere*, the killing of 'the realm of thinking and reflection',¹³ it is the drowning of humanity in a sightless infosphere.¹⁴ It is the misuse of *cogens*, our ability to think.¹⁵

We live in a world now where the glorification of competition for domination must be transcended. If the world is to become a place of dignity in the future, men and women are called to join hands and combine the best of traditional male and female role descriptions. The *heroism of honour* must evolve towards the *heroism of dignity* as the highest form of 'personal meaning making'.¹⁶ I have coined the term *dignism* (dignity + ism)::

Dignism describes a world, where every newborn finds space and is nurtured to unfold their highest and best, embedded in a social context of loving appreciation and connection. It is a world, where the carrying capacity of the planet guides the ways in which everyone's basic needs are met. It is a world, where we unite in respecting human dignity and celebrating diversity, where we prevent unity from devolving into oppressive uniformity and keep diversity from sliding into hostile division.

Veteran anti-apartheid activist Mamphela Ramphela calls on the world to understand that huge benefits flow from the leadership of 'progressive women' who are demonstrating the power of the conceptually female values framework that 'emphasises interconnectedness, interdependence, reciprocity, and intergenerational responsibilities and complementarities'.¹⁷ All people, however they may define their gender, are invited to embrace this values framework.

'The verdict of history will be harsh', warns Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, pointing at the coronavirus pandemic and how it exposes the neglect of global care, as 'wealthy nations leave millions behind with alarming funding disparities'.¹⁸

We need an 'economy of life' rather than an 'economy of death' — we need a *dignity economy*.¹⁹ A dignity economy calls on all humanity to remember that humans are not only capable of solidarity, humanity will also have a much more fulfilling and meaningful future if we stand together in solidarity.

Now it is time to realise heroic pacifism, heroic willingness to sacrifice for the common good.²⁰ We need a new kind of heroism and bravery for the dignity work that is waiting to be done. Heroic courage is essential if we want to prevent our 'Titanic Earth' from sinking, and mutual care is required among all of its passengers. The world needs both, courageous heroism and nurturing care, it needs the *heroism of care*, the *heroism of dignity*.

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¹ See, among many other related accounts, ‘Coronavirus nurses forced to wear trash bags at hospital where worker died from Covid-19’, by Gino Spocchia, *Independent*, 26th March 2020, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/coronavirus-nurse-death-new-york-hospital-trash-bag-doctor-a9427406.html. I thank Linda Hartling for making me aware of this article.

² See ‘Coronavirus capitalism’: Naomi Klein’s case for transformative change amid coronavirus pandemic, by Naomi Klein, published on 19th March 2020 by Democracy Now! See <https://youtu.be/IFqNAEx1lm4>.

³ See classic publications by McNeill and McNeill, 2003, or Chaisson, 2001. See also Spier, 2010, Harari, 2014, 2015/2016. See, furthermore, the 2016 Stanford University’s 125th Commencement Address by historical documentary filmmaker Ken Burns, 12th June 2016, <http://news.stanford.edu/2016/06/12/prepared-text-2016-stanford-commencement-address-ken-burns/>. I thank Linda Hartling for making me aware of his address.

⁴ See Riane Eisler, 1987. Her most recent books are Eisler, 2007, and Eisler and Fry, 2019.

⁵ *If women counted*, is the title of a book by Marilyn Waring, 1988. Martha Fineman, 2004, unravels the contradiction between the American myth of self-reliance and the reality of an interdependent society.

⁶ Linda Hartling in a personal communication, 6th May 2019. See also Hartling and Lindner, 2016, 2017, 2018a, b, Hartling, et al., 2020.

⁷ See ‘When the vessel is sinking’, by Federico Mayor Zaragoza, *Other News*, 7th February 2019, www.other-news.info/2019/02/when-the-vessel-is-sinking/. See also *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*, a book by Neil Postman, 1985. See, furthermore, ‘Survival of the richest: The wealthy are plotting to leave us behind’, by Douglas Rushkoff, *Medium*, 5th July 2018, <https://medium.com/s/futurehuman/survival-of-the-richest-9ef6cddd0cc1>.

⁸ ‘Sociocide is the intended wounding-killing of a society by eliminating the prerequisites for a live, vibrant, dynamic society’, writes peace researcher Johan Galtung in 2012. See also Cormann, 2015.

⁹ See ‘Hotspot Ischgl: Gier und Versagen in Tirol: Von einer Après-Ski-Bar im “Ballermann der Alpen” gingen vermutlich dutzende Infektionen internationaler Skiurlauber mit dem Virus aus’, by Thomas Mayer, *Der Standard*, 16th March 2020, www.derstandard.de/story/2000115776404/hotspot-ischgl-gier-und-versagen-in-tirol.

¹⁰ ‘The change within: The obstacles we face are not just external’, by Naomi Klein, *The Nation*, 12th May

2014, www.thenation.com/article/179460/change-within-obstacles-we-face-are-not-just-external#.

¹¹ Prince El Hassan bin Talal proposed the term *cogitosphere* in his Opening Address to the 2004 Annual Conference of the Club of Rome 'On limits to ignorance: The challenge of informed humanity', 11th–12th October 2004 in Helsinki, Finland. His address was titled *The challenge of informed humanity: From 'infosphere' to 'cogitosphere'*. In this address, he calls on the Club of Rome to elevate the 'Cogitosphere', or the realm of thinking and reflection, 'above that of the Infosphere in order to avoid sightless vision and to focus our deliberative process on the real challenges facing informed humanity'.

¹² *Cogito, ergo sum* is a well-known philosophical proposition by philosopher René Descartes, meaning 'I think, therefore I am'. *Cogito, ergo sum* originally appeared in French as *je pense, donc je suis* in 1637, in Descartes' oeuvre *Discours de la méthode*. Descartes intended to say *dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum*, or 'I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am'.

¹³ *The challenge of informed humanity: From 'infosphere' to 'cogitosphere'*, Prince El Hassan bin Talal's Opening Address to the 2004 Annual Conference of the Club of Rome 'On limits to ignorance: The challenge of informed humanity', 11th–12th October 2004 in Helsinki, Finland.

¹⁴ Hassan bin Talal refers to cultural theorist Paul Virilio, 1977/2006, originator of the concept of *dromology*, 'the science of speed', where he points at the media-driven acceleration that results in an infosphere that diminishes and engulfs the political subject — the accountable leader as much as the participatory citizen and the deliberative process itself. The outcome is what bin Talal calls *infoterror* and *infowar*, and what Virilio describes as the 'aesthetics of disappearance'.

¹⁵ See the *Alain Elkann Interview: HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal*, 1st November 2020, www.alainelkanninterviews.com/hassan-bin-talal/: 'Cogens — the use of one's ability to think — is the most democratic expression I can think of, of commenting on public and private life'. Latin *cōgēns*, is the present active participle of *cōgō* or 'drive together', 'compel', from *cō* + *agō*, 'drive'. See www.wordsense.eu/cogens/.

¹⁶ Franco, et al., 2016, offers a review of the growing discussion on heroic action in a humanistic perspective, 'as heroism aligns with ethical self-actualisation in its highest form, personal meaning making, and social good, and can also involve profound existential costs', Abstract.

See also *James Doty — The magic shop of the brain*, in 'On Being', with Krista Tippett, WNYC (non-profit, non-commercial, public radio stations located in New York City), 8th November 2018, <https://onbeing.org/programs/james-doty-the-magic-shop-of-the-brain-nov2018/>. See also Doty, 2016:

Being a hero can simply mean recognising a situation where somebody is at risk and making the effort to go and just help them. It could be even seeing an elderly person having difficulty crossing the street or seeing a person perhaps being bullied and intervening. The physiologic effects that individuals get, or what occurs in terms of making them feel good or having the release of these hormones associated with reward is actually quite amazing.

Doty is one of the editors of the *Oxford handbook of compassion science*, Seppälä, et al., 2017.

¹⁷ Mamphela Ramphele in her contribution to the Great Transition Network (GTN) discussion on the topic of 'After the pandemic: Which future?' 8th May 2020. Quoted in Lindner, 2020.

¹⁸ See *Wealthy nations leave millions behind with alarming funding disparities amid pandemic*, The Norwegian Refugee Council, 29th July 2020, www.nrc.no/news/2020/july/wealthy-nations-leave-millions-behind-with-alarming-funding-disparities-amid-pandemic/.

¹⁹ See Lindner, 2012, titled *A dignity economy*. See also Lindner, 2006, Lindner, 2009, Lindner and Desmond Tutu (Foreword), 2010, Lindner, 2017.

²⁰ Courageous and loving willingness to sacrifice for the common good is in line with many indigenous worldviews. See a *worldview chart* titled common *dominant* worldview manifestations versus common *indigenous* worldview manifestations in *Four Arrows* (Wahinkpe Topa aka Donald Trent Jacobs), 2020. p. xxxviii.