Vicki Robin
Hi, I'm Vicki Robin. In partnership with the Post Carbon Institute, I'm hosting short to the point conversations with diverse cultural scouts, asking each one the same question: What could possibly go right? The invitation is to see through these wise eyes what is opening up in the present moment, as normal as up-ended and next is not at all clear. These conversations were recorded a few months into the pandemic, and in the weeks following the murder of George Floyd. Let's see what today's guest says.

Vicki Robin
Hi. This is Vicki and it's "What could possibly go right?" and today I'm with a friend, a teacher, amazing woman Victoria Santos for our 15 to 20 minute conversation. Here's a little bio and then off we go. So Victoria Santos uses she/her and she's Co-Executive Director of Young Women Empowered. She's a leader who works for social justice and racial equity with institutions, schools, community organizations, and in the US and internationally. Victoria is Spanish fluent, Afro Latina, immigrant born in the Dominican Republic. Her commitment to social justice and service has expressed itself in many forms over the past 30 years, including designing programs, community advocacy, facilitating groups and community development in the US and international. Victoria emphasizes intersectional awareness, individual and collective healing, and commitment to compassionate action. I can confirm that all that is true. So hi, Victoria. And we're going to just dive into the question of the day, which is the question of the month, or the question of the hour. It's this question of what, in all that is coming apart, do you see sprouting? What could possibly go right, from your perspective, from the seat you have in envisioning the future or seeing the future arising in the moment? So what could possibly go right?

Victoria Santos
Thank you, Vicki. Thank you so much for inviting me to partake in this interview with you and for just giving me some space to reflect on some of the things that I'm seeing and in some of the thoughts that have been percolating in my mind. You know, before we started with talking a little bit about the protests and that we have COVID and now we have the protest. In both of them I'm seeing as an opportunity to reveal a lot about who we are to each other and who we can be to each other. So, with COVID, I was beginning to see how, I must say first of all, this is an undue burden on people of color, black, females, indigenous people, the disproportionate burden, primarily because we have had systems in place that have been disenfranchising all of these groups that have not had adequate health care, education, housing, food, access to nutrition, access to medicine, all these things, right. So of course, you get a pandemic and this is the group that's going to be most impacted. Then we have the hunting down of an unarmed young man just jogging in the street. Then we have police breaking into this young woman's home and killing her in her bed while she sleeps. Then we have this police officer putting his knee on this man's neck while he screamed and begged for breath. And finally, while he's screaming and begged for his mother... And then we have people uprising, saying "Enough is enough". Regardless of whether there's a pandemic or not, taking onto the streets, to protest the unjust and the injustice that we have been suffering in this country that tells people are gonna die, we're gonna die. It's time to take onto the street and change the system. So what could go right? Is that the moment it was set, the moment was set for people to rebel, for people to say enough is enough. We can't continue to live in this system that has been impacting all of us disproportionately. Also, those of us, those of people who have been just working really, really hard and living at home and living without, maybe not being impacted, but have been also disconnected from their families, from their children, from community. The way that this capitalist, white supremacist system has been developed has been just wreaking havoc on the entire planet. The entire planet. It's not just here in the US. I mean, we see before COVID hit,
we were seeing the immigration crisis. We were seeing that people were being forced out of their homes; because we in the West, and we here in the United States and other developed countries have been using disproportionate resources at their expense. We have children all over the world that are living in garbage dumps, that are drinking water that is contaminated by toxic chemicals and by all of these agro products that are contaminating the earth, contaminating the air, making people sick, and they're making their homes inhabitable. So they have to leave and flee in order to be able to find places to live. And in addition to that, we have been arming people all over the world, making it even more uninhabitable due to the wars that have been perpetrated on civilians.

Victoria Santos
So, this crisis is a crisis that has been going on for generations and generations and generations, right? It's just been accumulating, accumulating. We're blowing up the top of mountains. We're contaminating rivers. We are destroying forest to grow cattle so we can have cheap beef. It is just total chaos. It is total chaos. I tell you, this pandemic... This pandemic has been very difficult on a lot of us, myself included; a lot of us but I tell you, it has kind of been a wake up call, because nature, Mother Earth will take care of Mother Earth. We share this planet with so many other beings, so many other beings, that our behaviors have discounted them and have destroyed their habitats, have destroyed and killed their children, have we made them extinct. Who are we to think that we have that privilege to just ransack this planet with no consequences. It's heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking.

Victoria Santos
So, you asked the question, what could go right? What could go right? I'm not sure if it will. Because even as I see the signs of people kind of, of things opening up again, I am afraid that we might go back to sleep. So what could go right is that we wake up; we wake up and we begin to figure out how to live in harmony with the planet, with the other species that are here, and with each other. It is not okay. It is not okay for us to accumulate so much at other people's expenses. It is not okay for children to die of starvation, of malnutrition, of not having access to medicine. It's not okay. It's not okay for the whales to starve and be on the shores of the beaches, because we want to get pleasure.

Victoria Santos
We have to learn, we have to learn to share. And so COVID was a really quick and hard lesson for a lot of people because all of a sudden... I know that it's been hard. I have friends who are parents, for instance, you know? And all of a sudden, they were sequestered with their family and their children and they're like, "Oh my gosh, Victoria. I don't know how to be in this house all the time with my kids and my husband". Or, "Oh my gosh, I am a single parent and I'm having to take care of my children" and they're trying to do school online and watch all these videos and they're like five or 10 and they can't manage. I can't deal with this. I'm driving myself nuts. It's real like that and I also know that not everyone has a safe home. So when people had to stay at home, those people who were privileged enough to have a home, it wasn't necessarily a safe place for them to be. And then we have people who don't have a home, like most of the world. With it, most of the world don't have clean water to wash their hands and the materials to clean themselves, so people are just dying. There's a lot, there's just a lot going on and then we have people that have observed different rituals for death, and they're having family members and people die and they cannot perform those rituals. Just the pain, the pain, I mean, I feel it in my heart... and at the same time, there's some things that people won't say, and part of that is why must other species become extinct and not us.
Vicki Robin
Can I ask in this context of... I mean, I really appreciate how you brought the suffering, all the suffering into this moment, and you've brought it through your heart and then your words. It's like, what a gift. And so in this question of what could possibly go right, I have two things that maybe you could riff on. One is we know at an individual level, that there's a redemptive power of pain, that the pain gets so bad, that you have to wake up. And so, can you see places, not in theory, but can you see places where people are actually getting the suffering at a level that they haven't gotten it before; sort of a metanoia, sort of an anonymous group, where we just go like, no, this whole thing can't continue. So if you see anything like that bubbling up. Then the other question you could go with, and we have maybe five minutes to go there, would be that there's this word intersectionality, which is an opaque word until you really work with it. But what you're talking about and from is the intersectionality of pain that it's all from the same source. That's part of what intersectionality is, "Oh, I see. The pain that I'm feeling is actually the pain you're feeling and there's a source that's coming in both of us that we want to see." The alignment isn't just at a virtue; the alignment is at a shared experience. So anyway, just either one of those to focus in right now on what you see emerging that people watching or listening to this could actually put their focus on, energize, support, because our attention can make things expand. So there you go, pitching you another one.

Victoria Santos
Thank you. The pain, that the pain became so bad, that they have to change. This is what I'm concerned about, because right now, the pain seems to be primarily being felt by people who have been in pain already. Most of the people that I know are in pain, but when you hear and see and I read of other people who are very affluent, who have assets, they're not in that much pain. A lot of people are inconvenienced. They're feeling like, Oh, I need to go get a haircut, and I'm not getting it, or something like that. Or my maid can't come to clean my house, or things like that. But they're not in that much pain. So I'm concerned that unless they feel the pain of this unjust system, that they're going to go right back to creating the same junk that's been created that we've been spoon-fed and that things are not going to get changed. Now, at the same time, I hold that the people that are in pain, they are going to rise up as they did, and that they're gonna form coalition and that we're going to create and demand change. So I hold those two.

Vicki Robin
Right, exactly. I think this moment, in my experience, in this moment many issues that I have understood with my head have dropped into my heart. So the heartbreak of the moment actually is, for me at least and maybe I'm not representative, but I'm upholding that, that the pain is seeping in. People are understanding the pain of it, not just the mental analysis of injustice, so may that be so Victoria, may the pain...

Victoria Santos
We do live in an energetic field and because there is so much pain, that there is a possibility that that could happen and I will hold to that, but I also know that we have to work for things to change. It's not just about feeling the pain and then doing something and feeling good. It's about really getting to work to dismantle these systems of oppression that are keeping black and indigenous and other people of color oppressed and at the servitude of white dominant culture. It is not okay to continue to propagate and to create images where people of color, black people in particular, are demonized and vilified so that people get conditioned from birth to hate black people and to hate blackness; that it feels okay to have their knees on their neck to kill them. The reason why the George Floyd incident has become so widespread is because we could see ourselves in him.
Vicki Robin
Right.

Victoria Santos
It is not okay.

Vicki Robin
Exactly. So I think we can... This is not about hope. This is about what we are noticing. One thing I would say is that the revolution is getting filmed. And we are seeing, we are seeing the pain. We’re not hearing about it. We’re not reading about it. We’re seeing it. And hopefully - I know it's not about hope - but seeing the effects...

Victoria Santos
We're seeing that. We’re seeing some of that, but we’re still not even seeing enough of it.

Vicki Robin
Exactly.

Victoria Santos
Because the media company in this country is still controlled by five corporations. They're still very much censoring what people are able to see and they are distorting the messages.

Vicki Robin
Perhaps from this conversation, just merely from the conversation from hearing you, people can feel called to do their work, to turn the pain into anti-racist work, anti-war, anti-racist, poor people's campaign. This is sort of like it's revealed and now we see the work ahead. Will we do it? That's the question. Will the people who've been most privileged do the work? So maybe that's a wrap where we can ask: Will we do the work to dismantle the system that is causing pain to so many communities in this world? So a challenge is also in what could possibly go right, is basically people have a challenge that they can rise to. So thank you.

Victoria Santos
Thank you Vicki for your time. Please continue to do the work and help your brothers and sisters awaken.

Vicki Robin
I got it. I’m doing it with all my heart.