

Eleonora Masini: it takes a village to raise the future,” in Antonio Alonso Concheiro and Javier Medina Vasquez, eds. , Eleonora Masini and *Futures Studies (Alma de los studios de los futures)* , Mexico, Javier Barros Sierra, 2013, 323-328.

By

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## EXCLUSION OR INCLUSION

While there are many ways to describe a field of knowledge, for example, a discipline with clear boundaries of what constitutes the doxa, with Eleonora Masini, the familial is the best narrative in which to locate her contribution to Futures Studies. While there are considerable dangers in essentializing and there are other narrative sites available – as scholar, as organizational leader - I would like to argue that more than anyone else, Masini is rightfully the Mother of the World Futures Studies Federation<sup>1</sup> - one of the most important organizations championing Futures Studies - if not the mother of the modern field of Futures Studies. And certainly within this narrative, there would not be one mother but as it takes a village to raise a child, a number of mothers. Magda Mchale, Elise Boulding, Hazel Henderson and Dana Meadows certainly stand with her.

While the disciplinary approach seeks to differentiate the object of knowledge from other objects – this is what Futures Studies is not – Masini’s approach intellectually and in the embodiment of her social practice has been not to make categories even narrower; rather, she is inclusive, seeking to bring others into the ambit of her definitions.

It is thus not an accident that in her classic, *Why Futures Studies*<sup>2</sup> transdisciplinarity is the first of her characteristics of the Futures Field. Other characteristics include complexity, globality, normativity, scientificity, dynamicity and participation.<sup>3</sup> Futures Studies is a broad family, including science and norms, experts and citizens, and it moves through disciplines, including them not rejecting them.

It is one thing to write on this, it is another to live like a family. Most fail. My experience of knowing her and working with her over three decades is that she has embodied this inclusive approach to Futures Studies. I saw this especially in the way she led the World Futures Studies Federation over two decades.

## INSPIRING THE YOUNG

My first meeting with her was in the early 1980s when I was an intern at the Hawaii Judiciary conducting research on emerging issues such as the possibility of a Federal Constitutional Convention; the emergence of neuro-drugs and electronic sentencing; Hawaiian Sovereignty; mediation as an alternative to litigation, and more controversially, the legal rights of robots. She was visiting Hawaii in her capacity as president of the World Futures Studies Federation in preparation for the 1986 World conference, Hawaii in Global Futures. Her and my professor, James

Dator, kindly took another intern, Wayne Yasutomi, and I to dinner. There she listened carefully to our exuberance towards Futures Studies, and like a kind mother, embraced our views and in that conceptual embrace, invited us to play a greater part in this association of futurists. For young scholars – in our early 20s – this was a profound moment. We had been accepted, our research had been validated, and there was a future for us beyond Hawaii. And both Wayne Yasutomi and I would leave Honolulu, eventually, Yasutomi to Japan and myself to Australia.

Her inclusion was also apparent in day to day conversations with James Dator. I listened to him regularly converse about the endless political issues involved in running a global organization on a shoe-string budget. Misunderstandings, different competing interests, and cultural suspicions were all countered by the calm voice of Masini. Everyone would be ok, I believe she would tell Dator. It was not just the words but the tone of her voice. Relax. Stay focused on the future.

And it was. Conferences continued without hitches (well, there were hundreds of problems but all were resolved). More and more members were invited. My next meeting with Masini was at the Tenri City conference on the Futures of World Religions sponsored by the Tenri Yamato Culture Congress. Her inclusive approach was further demonstrated at this meeting. While there some tension between secular/scientific and religious/mythological views of the future superimposed on Western and Japanese Buddhist perspectives, Masini made sure to move toward the middle ground, seeking to find the middle ground, to find what was agreed upon. She acknowledged the different perspectives, and made sure to move the debate forward.

After Tenri city, delegates flew to Beijing for the 1988 World Futures Studies Federation conference on the Futures of Development. From a meeting in Tenri with 30 or so scholars, we shifted to the Great Hall of People and listened to debates on Chinese versus Western models of development. The room had space for a thousand or so delegates and it was full. Again, in situations of tension and disagreement, Masini became more “Asian” than the Asians in finding points of agreement.

I was again fortunate in 1990 in Budapest and Barcelona in 1991 to see Masini. I met her again at the Unesco-WFSF meeting in Bangkok, February 1993. This meeting saw intense debates on the futures of culture with Zia Sardar and Susantha Goonatilake taking quite different positions. Sardar saw the new technologies as continuing Western domination while Goonatilake believed that they would transform all users creating a new culture. Ashis Nandy focused on the problem of dissent in cultures arguing for a Gaia of cultures. It is not surprising that in the debate, Masini focused on the co-existence of the heterogeneity of cultures. For her, cultures are deep and strong, exhibiting continuity-in-change. Ever the professor, she argued that the causes of conflict are not evil but ignorance of the basic characteristics of each society: how they construct time, space and the other.<sup>4</sup> With greater understanding, greater peace could result. By focusing on desired futures, and looking at commonalities cultures could learn from each other and grow. And, ever the futurist, she recommended that cultures should avoid using static imagined pasts as a way to gain strength but to understand metamorphosis and use change itself as a way to resist ethnocide. The Asian Futures of Cultures project was broadened and a book in 1994 titled *The Futures of Cultures* was released by Unesco Masini as the editor.<sup>5</sup> In her introduction, she took pains to comment that the project was about “futures” and “cultures”<sup>6</sup> that is, multiplicity. Through the story of Gaia, not only was the mythology of the “Great Mother” evoked but so was the science of complexity and ecology.

My focus on the family-inclusion approach to Masini does not mean the tough issues were ignored, in terms of culture, ethnocide, for example, or core-periphery power relations or the structural and cultural oppression of women. These are researched and analysed. In detail. However as a futurist, the goal is to not end the discussion with analysis but rather to always move toward possibility. What would a more egalitarian world look like? What would a more peaceful world look like? What would gender equity look like? The future is focused on pluralistic possibilities and “desirabilities”.

## PEDAGOGY

Following the UNESCO project, I met Masini a few months later at the May 1993 Andorra Futures Course sponsored by the World Futures Studies Federation and Centre Unesco de Catalunya. There I gained the opportunity to spend more time with her. She was there for most of the two week course, and all the students loved her. In addition to her experience and intellect, the core reason for the affection of students was her practice of inclusion. Her pedagogy was detailed, spelling out the theory and process of scenario development. She took participants step by step through the process of scenario writing illustrating her theory with numerous case studies. Again, watching her, I could see her goal was to ensure that every student was with her, every student got it. She was not rushing so just the brightest could capture her ideas rather she was deliberate ensuring that each and every student understood her. And based on the course evaluations they certainly did.

## LEADING THROUGH INCLUSION

Since then my meeting with the Mother of the World Futures Studies Federation have been less extensive. Having watched the Federation go through very rough times once she stepped out of the leadership circle – in the beginning of this century – I often asked myself what was the difference.

For me the answer is obvious. Masini theorized and practiced inclusion. While she did not sacrifice rigour in her approach, she always sought win-win solutions, always focused on creating desired futures, and always used the future to find peaceful resolutions. Even as she has led in the creation of Futures Studies, she has, as she remarks herself in *Why Futures Studies?*, “brought together the thinking of a great number of scholars from many parts of the world.”<sup>7</sup>

In my mind, she remains the Mother of the World Futures Studies Federation if not the mother of modern futures studies.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.wfsf.org](http://www.wfsf.org) (Accessed 3 August 2011)

<sup>2</sup> Eleonora Masini, *Why Futures Studies?* London, Grey Seal, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Masini, *Why Futures Studies?* 15-26.

<sup>4</sup> Eleonora Masini and Yogesh Atal, eds, *The Futures of Asian Cultures*. Bangkok, Unesco, 1993, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Eleonora Masini, eds., *The Futures of Cultures*. Paris, Unesco, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Masini, *The Futures of Cultures*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Masini, *Why Futures Studies?* , 128.