

REORIENTING FUTURES STUDIES

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Zia Sardar, ed., *Rescuing All Our Futures: The Future of Futures Studies* (Twickenham, Adamantine and Westport, Ct., Praeger Studies of the 21st Century, 1999), 49-60.

*Plant Taro, if you want to plan for the next six months,
Grow Teak, if you want to plan for a decade,
Teach your children, if you want to plan for the next hundred years.*

Ancient Hawaiian saying

*The present is the dreaming of the ancestors.
The dreaming of our present becomes the waking state of our ancestors - dreaming is the reality of ancestors.
The future is the balance between conscious and unconscious, history folding in on itself to become the sacred moment.*

Aboriginal view of the future

*The shudra (unskilled worker) thinks of only the fleeting present.
The ksattriya (warrior) imagines myths and stories of the past.
The vipra (intellectual/priest) thinks of the future as the transcendental.
The vaeshyan (merchant) commodifies time and controls the shudra, warrior and vipra.*

But the wise person lives the divine and thinks neither of past, present or future.

Tantric typology of social time

The Cost of Perfection

In contrast to these views of the futures, the hegemonic - what is considered truth, non-contestable, natural - Western view of the future sees time largely as linear, exponentially so. The future began with the taming of nature, with the move from our animal irrational past to our glorious present of science, technology and liberal democracy. The future is linear and it is, will be, perfect. Perfection will be attained once the invisible hand of the market allows buyers and sellers to meet on a level playing field. This will allow untold wealth to accumulate.

Remembering Comte and Spencer, religion and philosophy will slowly disappear as the technocratic managers solve the world's problems, either through new technologies or better organisational skills.

There are deviations of this model such as communism and now evolutionary systems theory but in general the trend is secular, linear, progress-based with the ultimate goal that of heaven on earth. The darkside of this overarching paradigm is that the cost of perfection is the exploitation of nature, the Third World and the Other - the periphery. But the deeper cost is the creation of a civilisation that cannot listen to the Other. The only other the West can meet are simulcras of itself. Multiculturalism, for example, merely means equal opportunity, a collection of idiosyncratic individuals from other places, a woman here or there, some mention of the spiritual, or a trip to the Pacific islands. But the deeper ways of knowing of other civilisations, Islamic, Indic, Confucian and Pacific (and the diversities within these civilisations) are lost. Perfection on Earth can only be realised through the eradication of difference.

In linear Western time, those ahead construct those behind as culturally inferior, their faces as ugly - certainly not worthy to walk the catwalks of fashion shows. In exponential Western time, cybertime, not only are they not worthy, but they no longer exist. They are at best virtual. Indeed, the futures of the non-West are in virtual museums.

The cost of the rise of the West, of the splendour of clean streets, beautiful concert halls, of seamless travel on the internet is the loss of the ability to understand the Other on its terms and thereby the loss of the West's own humanity.

The West has prospered precisely because it has been able to be diverse enough to appropriate the symbols of others without changing its essential worldview. Through its alter ego - small scale and community - its own Other, existing on its own periphery, it has managed to rise and rise while other civilisations have declined. For example, Johan Galtung argues that

the West is expansion and contraction based (with Islam being in an inverse relationship to the West) (Galtung, Heiestad, Rudeng, 1979). If the West had been rigid, only linear and without a composite cosmology - ego and alter ego - it would have collapsed. Its success on becoming a world civilisation, indeed, in appropriating civilisation (and thus defining civilisation as solely itself) has been its ability to selectively allow the Other in without fundamental internal transformation. This coupled with military and technological might - and a willingness to use it when the natives become restless - have destined the West to rise.

However, this rise has not been seen as imperialistic, rather it has been naturalised with the Other theorised as too disorganised (the Pacific), too religious (India), too transcendental (its own middle ages, which the West seeks to disown seeing the Middle Ages as a historical aberration instead of natural to it), too rigid (Confucian systems), and too close to nature (women and Africa).

Central in the rise of the West, in the rise of the world capitalist system, has been the transformation of perfection as a spiritual ideal (as wisdom), to perfection as an economic ideal (as technocratic engineering) - from perfection as a moral process, to perfection as an ideal wealthy society. The time of future thus has been transformed from astronomical/cosmic metaphors (as unknown and vast), agricultural metaphors (the circularity of the seasons), from religious metaphors (the future has heaven as opposed to the future as hell, the long fall from Grace), from transcendental metaphors (the future as eupsychia, the perfect self) to a site that can be colonised, that like death, can be tamed. With space already being colonised in the name of globalism by Northern and East Asian transnationals, all that is left now is time - the past is either romanticised or considered inferior, the present victorious but with collapse (the fear of Fall) always in sight, what is left is future time to colonise not to mention the studies of the future.

The West thus has maintained its hegemony by securing: (1) definitional power, defining what is important, what is truth, good and beauty; (2) temporal power, naturalising measurable time; (3) spatial power, transforming sacred spaces into secular spaces, centralising power and exchange in megacities, and; (4) creating a centre-periphery based world economy where wealth trickles upward from the poor to the rich and social control downward from the powerful to those aspiring for power. East Asian nations have been able to challenge the economic power of the West (and centralised themselves, only keeping the spiritual in ceremonial forms) but have made little inroads into temporal and definitional or epistemic power.

Given the asymmetry of world relations, we ask is it possible for the West to listen to Non-Western perspectives of the future? More specifically, we ask can futures studies open up to Non-Western futures epistemologies and methodologies?

Futures Studies

In the last fifty years or so, the future has increasingly become futurologised, defined, extrapolated, and owned. From thinkers such as Herman Kahn developing scenarios to consider nuclear war options to a vast array of national and global futures societies committed to investigating the 21st century, we can easily say that the future has arrived. With cyberspace becoming universal, the future as the victory of the West has arrived. As cultural historian William Irwin Thompson writes:

Futurism is little more than a not very imaginative managerial description of the implications of the present. Futurology, like archaeology, is an academic way of closing down the past and the future so that they are no longer open to the imaginative expansion of the present. The space of the present is under the political control of the technocratic management; so it is very important that the thought police patrol the exits. ... we are closed in and protected from any narrative of future or past that is not

propaganda for our present technological mentality (Thompson, 1985, 65-66).

What is left then is merely the task of working out the global details. Should EC or the USA handle Eastern Europe? Who to dispatch to Kashmir? Book now to holiday in Cuba or wait another decade? Forget Central Africa or let the South Africans handle it?

The dimension missing from the above quote by Thompson is that there can be dissenting futures. Not dissent in the leftist sense, which merely reinscribes materialistic civilisation but merely puts workers on top of others (with intellectuals interpreting the world for them and providing leadership), but in the deeper sense - dissent as unofficial knowledge, as truth outside the margins, as truth that cannot be easily comprehended within the gaze of modernity. As Ashis Nandy writes:

Explorations in the future, I passionately believe, have to be specifically statements of dissent from the existing ideas of normality, sanity and objectivity. As in the case of the visions of the great 'seers' of the past, such explorations have to flout or at least stretch the canons of conventionality to be worthwhile (Nandy, 1996, 637).

It is thus not only critiques of materialism and technocraticism that are necessary but the models of rationality that underpin these discourses. What is asked for is a new ordering of knowledge that disturbs, perhaps even makes strange current worldviews, nations, leaders and conventional understandings. But this reordering must go beyond postmodern chique. At heart is not metaphorical playfulness but issues of civilisational life and death, of trauma and transcendence. Cafe Latte' postmodernism, while enthralling, manages to avoid the reality of deep human and nature suffering.

But where can these come from? We certainly should not expect studies of the future that have the ability to transform the present to emerge from those invested in current models of the future - neither fashionable universities, government policy institutes, nor even the world futures societies.

Real futures, and here not necessarily sustainable futures -that is to say echoing the need to be fashionably green - are perhaps those that cause cognitive dissonance, that do not make sense to the immediate - not because they are nonsensical but because we do not have the epistemological frames, the language, to comprehend them.

Futures might thus emerge not from the victor's modernity but from those who accept it as part of the many. One cannot be multicultural if one is in a dominant situation, if one has levels of power over others. It is he or she who exists on margins, who must learn different ways of knowing to survive, that can know differently (through trauma and transcendence) and can thus offer alternatives beyond postmodernity and the information highway.

Futures are more likely to come from the Non-West, from the indigenous traditions: Tantra, the Aboriginal, the Hawaiian, the African and even the Muslim (not the Muslims that live in an oppositional relationship to the West, but Muslims who dissent from mullahist Islam and secular nation-statism). Others marginalised by the victory of world capitalism, women, the disabled and of course men individually critical of the system they structurally perpetuate too can offer alternatives. Futures studies has much to offer precisely because it is not an official bounded discipline - it neither offers riches to practitioners nor stability to believers. Universities are unable to departmentalise it and thus for the time being it can maintain its authenticity.

21C and the Time of the Non-West

These alternative traditions must not only give new visions but must have solidarity with all those that have been the victims of history, that have lost their diversity. For these alternative traditions, among other disruptions - such as contesting the neutral nature of the Olympics, which now, for example, allows ballroom dancing but does not consider legitimate numerous

local Nigerian or Pakistani sports (Obijiofor, 1996) - is the issue of the demarcation of the future, particularly the myth-like significance of the approaching millennium.

In the name of the 21st century, the future has arrived. In the name of the 21st century, debate has ended except for grand issues as in Australia as to whether there should be a republic or monarchy. The alternative of creating a council of Aboriginal elders to become the guiding wisdom behind the parliamentary system is, for example, not discussable. In the name of the 21st century, information has been victorious over knowledge and wisdom, over the visceral reality of the spiritual. In the name of the 21st century, the futures has become the future.

But as the world prepares for millennium parties not everyone will be celebrating. For many parts of the world, the beginning of the third millennium is a non-event. Instead of 21c, Confucianists as well as island nations talk of future generations, a concept located more in the idea of family, in children's children and ancestors. Chinese history, following the stars, has no definable beginning nor end, just a succession of virtuous and evil leaders and of the rise and fall of the tao (Watson, 1958). After all, 1998 for many Chinese will be remembered as the Year of the Tiger and not necessarily as 2000 minus two.

For Muslims, instead of 21c, the key event was not the death of the Christian-Muslim prophet Jesus but the flight from Mecca to Medina (the *hegira*) of Muhammed. For Indians, the demarcations are also less important - time is cosmic, the blink of Brahma is millions of years. Time for Indians of many traditions is also cyclical, with humanity now leaving the worst of the iron age, and moving to *satya yuga* or *ananda yuga*, the golden era or the era of bliss.

21C is thus not merely an unproblematic objective timing of the real. It is an arbitrary cut-off point but one which reinscribes the body of the West on the souls of the Non-West. Describing the world in these terms immediately cuts of the diversity of way others time the world. No number of policy reports, millennium studies or 21st century studies are likely to

produce or create anything novel if they begin with that framework. The texture needed to touch the heart and passions of most of the world's communities will not come from such superficial metaphors. While certainly the allure of Disneyland is always there - of the perfectly socially controlled society with no illness, no fear - of a rich society, there might be more to life than that, as the existence of non-Western cosmology testifies.

For much of the non-West, it is the spiritual that is the base of the triangle of needs, not the top. Seeing the world in terms of deep unchanging truth is where one begins the journey. The good society is one which allows individuals to pursue the *satya* (truth for the benevolence of all). Creating a rich society with open markets and then expecting spiritual values to emerge from that, while possible, is unlikely. While individuals might drop out, choosing unconventional futures, the civilisation has a whole will fulfil its social grammar until it becomes so exhausted that only a Spenglerian decline is possible.

Of course, we must not simplify the Non-West as well. Certainly post-colonial Asia and Africa have done little to convince the planet that they can be great societies essentially spiritual but equally strong on gender cooperation, ecology, dynamic economic growth and social distribution.

Still while the non-West has partly entered scientific and business time, it has not lost its historical ecological diversity of time and culture. Even under the veneer of accepting Western notions of death, that is, death must be battled through technology, the non-West retains varied cultures of death. It sees death as the meaning of life, to be mystically transcended (the *Upanishads* for example), as resignation (karma, Allah's will), and as joining one's ancestors. But for the West, fear of death is the defining impulse. 21C perhaps is a boast, a call out to the universe, we have made it! 2000 years and still going strong - Nazism defeated, Fascism defeated, Communism defeated, and now only Islam, uppity East Asians and nature left (Africa

will take care of itself and South America has already joined). Still there are a 1000 years for that project. Most likely we will only need 100, after all, all roads lead to the melting pot.

The question remains: How then can the West listen to the non-West when its temporal frame does not allow other timings? How can it listen when death, the future of the future, is defined as an external battle (and not as an inner dance or as link to the ancestors and nature). How can the West listen when it defines itself as the site of not only the true and the good, but the beautiful as well. How can the West listen when it pledges global democracy but only when it suits its strategic interest (Algeria where opposition victories were not supported and Serbia where they were) and only in the context of the nation-state, not true world one-person, one-vote democracy?

Sarkar as Epistemic Transformer

But sitting from Calcutta, as macrohistorian P.R. Sarkar did, or in a taro patch in old Hawaii, one knows that the strong shall fall and the others shall rise - history is cyclical. Hubris and karma cannot be evaded - once excellence is one's fatal flaw. The inability to listen to non-Western futures is the flaw which will bring the behemoth down.

Sarkar's work is important to us for many reasons. Not only did he redefine rationality, seeing it in spiritual and social justice terms, but he placed the subtleness of inner love at the centre of his cosmology. But while love was the base, he did not neglect the harsh realities of the world system. While certainly his work can be seen as part of the larger global project of creating a strong civil society to counter the waves of corporatist globalism, his movements are unique in that while most social movements are Western, highly participatory, goal oriented, short term, and single issue based, Sarkar's offer a genuine non-Western future (Sarkar, 1988; Inayatullah, 1988). His movements are:

- (1) **Third World oriented**, hoping to be the carriers of oppressed yet also seeing the oppressors in humanist terms;
- (2) **Tantric**, focused on reinvigorating mystical culture and not necessarily on immediate efficiency;
- (3) **Comprehensive**, working on many issues (and not just on the issue of the day) from women's rights and workers' rights to the prevention of cruelty to animals and plants;
- (4) **Very very long term oriented**, hundreds of years, that is, structures and processes that cannot fulfil their goals for generations ahead;
- (5) **Committed to leadership creation** and not just organisational development, thus avoiding the bureaucratic tendency;
- (6) **Trans-state oriented**, not solely concerned with nation-states and ego-power but acknowledging that there are four conventional types of power - worker, warrior, intellectual, economic - and the challenge is to develop processes that create a fifth that can balance these forces.

Underneath these projects has been Sarkar's effort of creating and using a new language (*samaj, prama, microvita, samadhi, sadhana*) and new metaphors (Shiva dancing between life and death) to help be the vehicles of the good society he envisioned (Inayatullah and Fitzgerald, 1997). But it was not perfection Sarkar was after. Influenced by Indian thought, he understood that there are deep evolutionary structures that cannot be changed, but certainly the periods of exploitation can be minimised. Perfection for Sarkar was only possible for individuals in the spiritual inner sphere, timeless time.

Sarkar's, as well as the many other Non-Western perspectives, hope to create not just a global civil society as with normal Western social movements but a gaia of cultures. Civil society is a response to particular dynamics of European history with its division between

religion and church, state and society. For Muslims the dream is a global *ummah* (a world community or *ohana* or family). For the Maori, the appropriate word is the creation of a *whanau*. It means a vast universal family that connects the stars and the moon, the earth, and the sky all life forms that reside therein, the world of animation and inanimation, the worlds of the living and the dead. It is not *universum nullium* but knowing and intelligent, linked by genealogy for the indigenous or for Sarkar by consciousness.

While Sarkar is perhaps among the most important of non-Western visionary thinkers and activists, he is certainly not alone in his articulation of a different universal family.

Future Generations Thinking

Perhaps the most important recent critique of futures studies and its domination by Western epistemology has come from writers and activists working in the futures generations paradigms. This perspective is far more concerned with the family, in all its variations - and instead of forecasting decades ahead or centuries ahead - prefers to see time as future generations time - the future of children and their children and their children. Future generations thinking has almost a natural affinity with the non-West where children (even as children are often abused, made rightless, exploited), nature (even as the rural pack into the city creating catastrophic and polluted megalopolises), family (even as this means often authoritarian relations between elder and younger, where senility amongst the old is confused for cryptic wisdom) still retain mythic if not actual significance. It is certainly easier for non-Western cosmologies to think of the future in these terms.

Taken together future generations thinking can be characterised by the following:

- (1) Commitment and expansion of the **family** (going far beyond the nuclear family to the extended family to the planetary) as a basic, non-negotiable unit of analysis;

(2) An **intergenerational** approach, an expanded temporal definition of the family that goes seven generations ahead and before, ancestors and *futurecestors* (in futures studies, Elise Boulding's idea of an extended present); and a

(3) A **spiritual and collective** view of individual choice and rationality in that choice is contoured by both the *aina* (land, as in the Hawaiian tradition) and the heavens. Rationality is not individual nor instrumental based but collectively linked to *samaj* (Sarkar's Tantric Indian idea of a society/family moving together towards a spiritually balanced society) and it is given by God. Rationality is not merely logic but inclusive of other ways of knowing such as intuition, the voices of the spirits/ancestors, and the altered fields of awareness generated by interaction with the wildness of nature. Rationality is thus tied both metaphorically speaking to the heart, to others and to nature - ultimately rationality is about understanding that which is eternal.

But dissenting non-West perspectives including future generations thinking is not transparent, it is problematic. It is far too easy to critique the West for the ills of the planet and then quickly articulate a historical non-Western view as the obvious solution to the world's ills. For one, this forgets that all non-Western views have been Westernised. Moreover, non-Western views eliminated by the onslaught of modernity existed in historical contexts - they cannot be simply idealised and raised as the solution to the future. The non-West should be seen in its entire humanity, as good and evil, as sensate and ideational, and not as romantic reified archetypes that are the sole carriers of wisdom, of humanity's salvation. As Zia Sardar argues, the non-West as the spiritual Other of the West is as much as a projection as the non-West as the historically inferior (Sardar, 1993). As Edward Said has shown, what Europe denied to itself, it projected outwards onto the non-West making it the site of the exotic and the erotic (Said, 1979). Thus, just because a culture is suppressed, it does not follow that everything from that culture that is recovered is good for all. For example, many practices of indigenous

cultures are not post-rational practices that are inclusive of many ways of knowing, rather they are simplistic pre-rational practices that confuse cause-effect, that confuse levels of reality. The logical mistake of misplaced concretism is often made, leading some to argue that angels can be tapped so that humans can travel to Mars. Metaphors are appropriate at particular levels but not at every level. Story telling is not the best way to do everything, it is one way.

Finally the larger question often not asked in future generations and other dissenting thinking is whose future generations are to be honoured and protected? (In the West it is *prima facie* assumed this means the West). In the plea to save the world for future generations, issues of the rights of the Other are often forgotten. Each civilisation wants to ensure that its members survive and thrive, expanding to all corners of the world, that the graves of their ancestors are forever enshrined. But often it is at the expense of other civilisations that these claims are made.

Finally, while rich in temporal epistemology, non-Western thought, particularly future generations thinking, is weak at dysjunctive thought, at the dramatic changes to history that genetic, virtual, nano, and psychic technologies promise. While the future might be the past, it also might be the "unknown country", a transformative world which cannot be imagined with any of our current or past categories.

However, this new, which cannot be imagined thus also cannot exist. There are no gateways for its comprehension and thus while it be of fascination to an individual, it has no social transformative qualities. Thus the appeal of critical traditionalism, wherein the past is recovered and used to create alternative futures. The future is not a space that can be merely invented, it must exist within an episteme, within a civilizational history. Modernity appears to destroy history but as we know it merely reinscribes the West on the face of world civilization. The new assumes that the future can be created without trauma and transcendence, without

struggle, it assumes that the new will be adopted due to market measures, forgetting that all nominations of reality are but impositions that exclude other discourses. Future generations thinking in this sense takes the past and uses it to create alternative futures, but so far it has done so out of a critical context. The efforts of critical traditionalists such as Sarkar (in Tantra), Iqbal, Sardar, Nasr and many others in Islam, Gandhi (in Vedic Indian thought) is to create new futures from civilizational contexts, to provides paths to the past and to the future.

Defining Futures and Futures Studies

Future generations thinking and dissenting non-Western approaches are certainly not a dominant perspective in futures studies. Thus, the future and futures studies have in many cases come to mean not only the definition of the future from the West but the definition of what is futures studies of the same West. Two important referencing sources show evidence of this. The recently released *Encyclopedia of the Future* specifically goes out of the way to exclude non-Western references since these books will be difficult for Americans to find (Kurian and Molitor, 1996). Referencing, however, is not merely a sign of a bookstore but symbolic of what is important. The knowledge categories of the classification scheme in addition only make sense to the Western worldview. That is to say, the choices of what is covered, Italy and India but not Pakistan or Malaysia. Cross-impact analysis and Delphi but not the i-ching. Hinduism but not Tantra. Of the top 100 futurists listed there are barely a handful that come from the non-West (actually just one, Yoneji Masuda). There is Teilhard de Chardin but not Allama Iqbal. Does this mean that there are no non-Western futurists? Hardly. Of the classical thinkers included there is no mention of Ibn Khaldun, Al-Baruni, Ssu-Ma Chien, and Confucius. Crucial terms such as karma, *dharma* (one's inner nature and duty), *prana* (the breath of life that regulates health), *prama* (dynamic balance, the central principle to a society that is in equipoise between

the spiritual and the material, the inner and the outer, struggle and acceptance), *mana* (the life force), *aina* (land but not real estate), *ilm* (knowledge) that are central to understand the epistemologies and methods of other cultures are missing. While the *Encyclopedia* is a good initial effort, its definitional power is disastrous for those wishing for a future different from the present.

Of course, one cannot cover everything but the omission is predictable, since as Robert Bundy has declared, in reference to his own book on the future, "Western civilisation is the obvious focus of all that is said. But the drama engaged in is global, there is an important underlying assumption in all the essays that what happens to the West will significantly shape what the world will be like the second millennia" (Bundy, 1976, 5)

The recent contribution by Edward Tenner to the *Brittanica 1998 Yearbook of Science and the Future* - while a solid review of futures studies - makes the same mistake equating thinking of the future with seminal works from the European enlightenment. This linear history of the future again limits the richness of the future. It assumes the future is merely about what technologies will be present. This is certainly one layer of the thinking about the future, but as important are the social and political factors and the paradigms and worldviews that provide the base for the technological. Nor does Tenner present examples of utopian thinking in other cultures. However Tenner does rightfully understand that futures studies will rise and fall not because of its predictions but because it offers a richer debate on questions concerning the good society and self. He writes: "At its best it [futures studies] offers not a crystal ball, but a kaleidoscope" (Tenner, 1997).

But this of course is not a critique of the authors but a pointing out that these images are unavailable to them: fish certainly did not "discover" water and the West will not find the future even as it predicts it. For example, the one scenario that American WWII planners did not plan

for was attacks by Japanese kamikaze pilots (Tenner, 1997). However, anyone remotely sensitive to East Asian culture would understand the different meanings given to the giving of life for a higher cause - self-immolation and other activities occupy less controversial space in large parts of the Non-West.

This does not mean to say that futures studies in the recent years have not benefited from the rigour developed in the United States, that is through military forecasting, scenario development and a host of new methods, it does mean to say that the methods are based on flat methodologies. They are not layered. They are unable to negotiate with the grand differences that is the world today.

To conclude: while there are certainly structural features that are similar to West and non-West, that is: all have phases in history dominated by merchants and intellectuals; all have periods where the sensate has dominated and where the ideational has dominated; all have exploited others, especially women and nature; all have levels of structural violence; all have historically operated from instrumental rationality even as they claim to be the carriers of moral civilisation; still there are deep differences. Can these differences be negotiated? Can we collectively create a multi-civilisational world, where Western categories of food, beauty and language and not hegemonic? On the positive side, there are certainly macrohistorical forces that are transforming modernity (and postmodernity) and creating the possibility for a more integrated civilisation (Galtung and Inayatullah, 1997). And at subtle deeper levels, the *mana* is active in creating a bifurcation to new futures. At the same time, many still believe that by simply having more information, social transformation is possible. This is not the case. Transformation comes from trauma and transcendence. Dissension is not merely a game but a call to suffering and *ananda*.

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