



THE FUTURES OF DEVELOPMENT

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THE FUTURES OF CULTURES: PRESENT IMAGES, PAST VISIONS, AND FUTURE HOPES

By: Sohail Inayatullah

PRESENT AND PAST

Culture, like a running stream of water is ever changing, ever moving. This is not to say that it is one continuous motion. Rather, like almost everything else in this universe, it moves in cycles, it pulsates. There are times of rapid cultural change and there are times when the speed and the resultant shock of the future, force various pasts to return. This return for some is a desire for a permanent home, for others it is the hope of including some features of the past in the present, and finally for some it is a short pause in the stream's onward movement.

This tension between the present and the desire to recreate alternative pasts is a major unifying theme among the many development oriented social, political and economic discourses of today. In general, it is groups who have found that their choices have been narrowed by the onrush of modernity, of dominant hegemonic cultural forms, that yearn for the past. These groups are often those in the periphery, the third world; as well as, women, the poor, the elderly and ethnic cultures within the first world.

However, although sympathetic, I find attempts to recreate the past, reactionary, as the ancient polities and economies that individuals yearn for are no longer relevant, and, in fact, are incredibly romanticized. I am sympathetic because their, our, choices for the future have been robbed, because their values have been cannibalized by the dominant civilization and culture such that all that is left is the past. Hawaiians, for example, long for the days of their beloved Queen Liliokalani or their King Kalakaua. The image is of a time when hula was preformed to the Gods of nature, where agriculture satisfied basic needs, and where all in all people were believed to be happy. It is a time before the forces of modernity created a division of labor, before natives lost their dignity and eroticism, and finally before they lost their lands.

But things did not always go so well in ancient cultures. As in the present world, then too there was hierarchy, poverty, disease, violence, and then too there were the rightless and the weak. Of course, the wielders of power were different. Instead of present day national and transnational capitalists (and intellectuals to legitimize their world) in previous eras they were the kings and warriors; that is, those who dominated others through force and the ideology of valor. Some in this world did very well, others not so well.

CONTINUED GROWTH

This discourse between the vision of modernity and the vision of a calmer, quieter and more simple past has been elegantly captured in the alternative futures work of James Dator. For Dator, there are a variety of cultural, political and economic future images that present themselves to us. The dominant global vision is that of "Continued Growth"; the goal

is more goods and services and a better material life for all, especially the wealthy. In the US, the latest form has been trickle down theory, where the poor have been told that it does not matter if they lose their jobs, as corporate America must restructure itself so it can profitably compete in the world economy. That "modernity" has robbed these same unemployed of the cushions of the past, namely, the family, a local community, connection with nature, and a sense of the cosmos—is not relevant to the trickle down theorists. The blame of failure is laid on the individual, thus hiding the dark side of modernity, of capitalist development.

On the Pacific Rim front, the Continued Growth vision is ever present, but as Johan Galtung has written, a twist has occurred. Instead of America doing the growing, it is the Pacific Rim that is rapidly growing and changing. Thus, the global division of labor is now shifting in favor of the Rim region, particularly Japan, and creating the possibility of a new global culture (perhaps an Earth Inc. similar to Japan Inc.) within the context of capitalism a new formula for government/business, labor/capital, individual/collective, and religion/life. Yet the goal in this Pacific Shift, this Pacific Era, remain the same: the production of goods to satisfy the eternal hunger of the mind and heart.

But what will their culture be like once they are on the top of the world, once they see the rest of the world emulating the way they walk, the way they talk; once Chinese and Japanese females become the sexual fantasies of men all over the world (when the blond has become part of an old era, not bad, but not the real thing). Once (can we remember?) the dream was to walk the golden streets of London or New York—streets paved with gold, lined with opportunity and freedom: money and sex. How will the "Pacific Rim" react once Tokyo, Beijing or Singapore evoke dreams of gold? Will movements develop there that long for the good old days before the Japan and other assumed responsibility for the maintenance of the world system, before they believed it was their duty to educate the world as to the East Asia system? What will be the available visions of the future for those groups who no longer accept the vision, the legitimacy of the Pacific Century?

Most likely the emergent antithesis to this future will be structurally similar to the present attempts of Americans searching for their past, although the content may be vastly different. Certainly, we can expect a rerun of militarism, fundamentalism, "back to nature" and a fear of technology. In addition, there will be a longing for a fixed past, one of discipline, hard work, and primary concern for the collective good, that is, to values that were believed to have been central in the economic and cultural rise of the Pacific Rim in the first place.

In the West, this desire for a predictable past has already emerged; it is still nascent in the East. Specifically, this vision evokes a time and space when the family was important, when there was a sense of community, before air travel took away one's friends who one had hoped to know forever (death of course has perennially destroyed that hope!) and before capital from the core nations destroyed local economies.

TRADITIONAL POWER STRUCTURES

Of course, this image forgets the landlords. Pakistanis in their new cities, with their new wealth from the Middle-East, do not want to return to the village. They remember village culture very well. I, having spend most of my life in American, European and Asian cities, see village life differently, romantically. It is my 90 year old grandmother telling me about the love of Allah. It is she blessing me. It is fried bread in the morning, tea with milk in the evening, the sun gently setting, the stars rising, sleeping on the roof, and waking up together

in the early morning, and feeling quietly, gently, unified with all their other villagers, with the environment, with my people. And it is my cousins who still live there telling me: but you have luxury; you have sewage-free streets; you have air-conditioners; you have food in abundance; and you have travel, a life ripe with choices. It is also my father reminding me that when they grew up in the village, they had no doctors nor food. They did have a landlord who routinely would go into the fields and rape any female he wanted. The police, judge and local council were all in the landlord's pockets. This was the village culture that I knew little of; for me, the village was simply a symbol of the womb. For the rest, who have lived there village, life is something to leave behind, albeit hopefully without the loss of Allah and family.

Thus the tension between the present, the Continued Growth vision and the search for the past. Yet there is a possibility of a future that dialectically transcends the image of modernity and of the village past; it would have to be a dialectical development of those two cultural myths: the myth of continued growth, of technological progress, of travel, of choice—oral choice, in who one speaks to, who one kisses, what one eats—of a life with physical needs met. And the myth of a time when things were peaceful, when peripheries still had their own culture, their own categories of thought, before they were robbed in every way by the up and coming capitalists, when families still worked together and when God provided a certainty over the future. To me, both are incomplete stories, they both have their dark sides, neither one has been successful in creating a just world; neither the city nor village has sufficed.

CREATING NEW CULTURES

So far we have looked at the vision of modernity and its various contradictions; exploitation of nature, workers, women, minority cultures, in general, the exploitation of the periphery within and without. We have also looked at its reactions: the search for a predictable past, with its dark side of fundamentalism and its light side of community and interconnectedness.

What then are the possibilities of a new future? It is not clear yet, but there are numerous movements and groups working to create just and authentic futures. These movements are not fixated in the past, nor are they solely concerned with capturing state power at the national level, rather they are primarily concerned with creating new discourses embedded in the values of ecological, spiritual and gender balance.

To become new stories, mythologies, these new movements must be able to deal with the desire for community and the need for personal choice and freedom of movement; with the desire for material goods and with the need to be connected to the infinite, an infinity that like the Zen moon is ever ancient and ever future utopian. The new mythologies must include the need to connect to nature and the need to be around the conveniences of modernity, the quick, the clean, and the efficient—bathrooms and computers! Moreover, these new visions of the future must also recognize the need to contribute to others and the need to be left alone, to not participate.

New visions of the future must empower without power becoming oppressive. And finally new visions must articulate their own dark side, must construct polities that incorporate their own contradictions, that is, they must develop structures to counter what cultural historian William Irwin Thompson calls enantiodromia, the tendency for institutions and structures to become their opposite, to become what they are fighting against. To do this, these movements need to be aware that oppression exists in every age, and that while intellectual

knowledge expands in every generation, wisdom often does not and each generation must learn the painful experiences of previous generations. This is the idea that revolutionary and reform movements have emerged before with mixed results and at times they have become the new oppressors.

The context for these new cultural forms is already in the creation process. We are witnessing a reconnection of science and mysticism such that the objective truth through the senses has been delegitimized as has the objective sense of personal truth as used by the priests of religion (from Christian television ministers in US, hindu Rajneesh from India, and to muslim ayatollahs in Iran). Mysticism must be accountable, it must be freely shared and it must have a criteria for evaluation, such as service to the poor, the hungry, the uneducated, the preturbed and distrubed, it must be a spirituality in society. Concommitantly, science must deal with the sacred, with awe and with the consequences of economic development and with epistemologies that forget, mythically speaking, the heart, and the feminine. Science must deal with its own intolerance for dissent, its own power structure.

Concretely, these movements include various self-reliant bioregional movements such as the Green movement as well as a comprehensive third world based movement called PROUT (the Progressive Utilization Theory). This is a new vision developed by Indian philosopher, Sarkar. He envisions a world federation consisting of diverse cultures, where people are technologically advanced and spiritually developed. For him, the vision of technological development does not mean a loss of past cultures, rather it can free time for intellectual and spiritual development, that is, for the creation of new cultures and the dialectical synthesis of past and present. This technological development must be, however, in the context of a self-reliant cooperative economy (where workers are owners, where there exist income ceilings and floors, where contradictions between local and export production have been solved; an economy where the goal is equity and balance). PROUT evokes the ancient stories of the mystical, yet it does not fear the technological, the move to space or the genetic engineering creation abilities of humanity. However, sarkar sees the key in the development of a spiritual culture; one that has a respect for nature, devotion to the Infinite; intuitional disciplines, a universal outlook and a desire to selflessly serve the poor and the oppressed. True development from this perspective is individual self-realization and the creation of society wherein individuals have their basic needs met so they can develop their potential.

Moreover, this potential must be met along side with the rights of animals and the environment. In his Neo-Humanism: the liberation of Intellect, Sarkar develops a new model of development ethics that argues for a spiritual humanism that includes the environment and other forms of life. For Sarkar, the unnecessary slaughter of animals throughout the world is as irrational as the irrationality of the arms race.

But PROUT is more than simply a preferred future, a possible vision of tomorrow, it is also a viable strategy to transform the capitalist system. Throughout the world, PROUT people's movements based on localism (local ties to the economy, culture, bioregion) have been initiated, as have numerous associations of intellectuals, workers, and peasants. Thus, PROUT is neither capitalist nor communistic, its economic structure is cooperative, its ethics are spiritual humanistic, its development model is global and local, and through its people's movements, its vision is potentially attainable.

PROUT, of course, is only one effort, there are others who are creating new cultural futures. In the West, there exists the new age, feminist, environmental and peace

movements. Even in established, historical civilizations, like Islam, we find the possibility of new cultures emerging. Ziauddin Sardar, a muslim and a futurist, is attempting to create a dialog among muslims so as to reconstruct Islam and make it relevant and compelling for the postindustrial world of the 21st century. Sardar in his *The Future of Muslim Civilization and Information and the Muslim World* is excavating the richness of muslim scholarship. That he is a muslim, and not an infidel, gives him greater legitimacy, such that the mullahs will have to deal with this broadening of the Islamic discourse. Without this type of project, Islam will remain a tool for the holders of State power, the landlords and the military, without this dialog, a cultural renaissance in the muslim world will remain unlikely.

However, a spiritual socialism such as PROUT, a revisioned Islam, or a Green movement, is not what the post-industrial futurists had in mind when they spoke of the coming age of prosperity. The believers and deliverers of modernity had hoped that the new electronics technology would resolve the problems of the present and the universal need for the intimate past; however, instead of the hoped for global electronic village wherein poverty had vanished, we have the alienation of the global city, or the Los Angelization of the planet. Instead of unity through humanity, we have unity through the logos of "Coca-Cola" and finally we have unity through our collective fear, that of nuclear war.

But let us hope for other futures. Let a thousand flowers blossom. I hope for a future where those in the periphery, Asians for instance, are not clamoring for a return to the good old days, rather they and others become the creators of new cultural myths, stories, such as PROUT and other individual and global projects.

However, the task of creating new cultures is difficult and lonely, for the world system remains materialistic and capitalistic. To identify with no culture, nation-state and ever be awaiting the creation of new cultures means one is homeless, ever in dissent. Moreover, these new movements and individuals who are active in them tend to unsettle those of other cultures for they challenge the social order and make bare the empty slogans of nationalism, patriotism, and cultural superiority in the first, second and third worlds. Those in dissent include American and European yogis in Southeast Asia who through their sincerity, humility and wisdom challenge the notion of Asians that they have a monopoly of spiritual wisdom. Or of the Asian who has mastered the game of individuality yet remains a critic of the continued growth vision. Those in the Core, in the imperium, become particularly incensed when those of the periphery partake in the economic fruits of capitalism yet refuse to give it divine status.

BEYOND HUMANS

However, my hope is that these new cultural carriers, these new stories will be more than simply committed to a better world for humans, rather I envision new cultures emerging that see plants, animals and even robots as alive. Plants and animals must gain rights not for our sake as humans, or our future on this Earth, but for their sake, for their value, for they too are life. Robots as well will one day become alive, either through artificial intelligence or through the creation of new categories of perception once they live with us, help us make decisions, and become our friends.

Robotic technology as well as other high-tech technologies such as artificial procreation, collective run baby factories, new forms of genetic engineering will certainly create new cultural forms. The new stories of the future will have to include them in their holograms. At the same time, the spiritual technologies such as telepathy, mind travel will also have to be

included. Their acceptance will, however, not come from the language of science, for spiritual technologies are based on the mind being at peace, open and spontaneous; the new spiritual technologies are not ones that the rational mind can control; it is an outpouring, perhaps from the deeper levels of each individual mind, or from a greater intelligence, or from other beings and entities that we are unaware of yet. And neither outpourings nor extrasensory beings lend themselves easily to scientific proof.

These new cultural forms will certainly be severely challenged by the present dominant vision of Continued Growth as well as by various images of the past. They will not emerge, gain acceptance without a great deal of individual and group anguish—where is one's place if one is not longing for streets of gold, nor books created by priests attempting to recreate eras when they were the guardians of epistemology. Too, the guardians of the Wall Street and other markets do not look kindly on efforts that will challenge the accumulation of capital. Nor do state bureaucracies like movements that do not fit into the logic of the five year development plan. Thus, the new cultures will be labeled escapist by some, simplistic by others, and as destroying Western and Eastern culture by most. But in the new emerging world, the future, for me at least, will be in the infinite and wherever my friends are, human, plants, animals and robots, future and past, on earth and in space. I hope that new cultures will truly be like running streams, ever fresh, ever renewing themselves, and like river water, ever changing yet resilient, and ever aware of their own murkiness.