

Trump: The Beginning Or The End?

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In the heady times of the late 1960s and early 1970s, many were certain that by 2020, the world would be dramatically different.

In *Changing Images of Man*, the landmark study by Oliver Markley and Willis Harmon (1982), they noticed a marked shift in the image of what it meant to be human. This image, they argued, was leading, with reality soon or eventually to catch up. Wrote Markley and Harmon, “When images ‘lead’ social development they are anticipatory, and provide direction for social change. When images are in this relation to society, they exert what Polak (1973) has termed a ‘magnetic pull’ toward the future (Polak, 1973). By their attractiveness and meaning they reinforce each movement which takes the society toward them, and thus they influence the social decisions which will bring them to realization” (Markley et al., 1982). The emerging image of the future, they argued was focused on: ecology and sustainability; gender equity and partnership; spirituality; a transformed post-material economic system that was focused on persons, nature, purpose as well as prosperity, a quadruple bottom line if you will. As well, as humans went to the space, they saw the Earth without national boundaries, without religious boundaries - environment became primary (Connor, 2009). Imagine, John Lennon suggested, “there’s no countries ... no religion too ... no possession.” (Lennon, n.d). We were to move from materialistic man focused on work and the factory to the self-realized human, living for the greater good.

Demographer Paul Ray shared this perspective, arguing that the data was supporting, the rise of new demographic group, which he called the cultural creatives.

There has been a third force growing in society, unnoticed in the bitter rhetoric about declining values. The appearance of the “cultural creatives” is about healing the old splits: between inner and outer, spiritual and material, individual and society. The possibility of a new culture centers on reintegration of what has been fragmented by modernism: self-integration and authenticity; integration with community and connection with others around the globe, not just at home; connection with nature and learning to integrate ecology and economy; and a synthesis of diverse views and traditions, including the philosophies of East and West (Hurley, 1999, p.6).

For Ray and others, this new demographic group is neither traditional (rural, patriarchy, church based) nor modernist (individual autonomy plus financial gain). This group supports the changing image of what it means to be human identified by Markley and Harmon decades ago. They have moved from 4% of the population to possibly, as Tibbs argues, to over 50% in the mid 2020s (Tibbs, 2011). While the desired values/futures of environment, social inclusion, spirituality, and corporate social responsibility are critical, the most important explanatory variable was gender. In the words of Ray, “the cultural creatives phenomenon... to a very large extent, is about women’s values and concerns coming forth into the public domain for the first time in history (Ray, 2002). The recent global women’s march is certainly an indicator of this demographic shift (Sloban, 2017).

The broader argument made by these thinkers (and many others, such as Hazel Henderson (Waghorn, 2013), Riane Eisler (Eisler, 2007), Roar Bjonnes (Bjonnes & Hargreaves, 2016) and others associated with the

New Age Movement is that leading sectors of society imagine and wish to create a world based on: (1) Ecological sustainability, moving from man over nature to humans with nature; (2) Gender cooperation and partnership, moving away from patriarchy; (3). Glocal governance (global and local simultaneously) moving away from the nation-state as defining; (4). Social inclusion, continuing the long progress of human and nature rights; and (5) Spiritual practice and inclusion i.e. moving away from religion as exclusion.

But alongside this changing image, there has been realist politics. While some commentators such as Boulding (Morrison, 2005) and Milojevic (2005) have imagined a gentler world, cold and hot wars have continued. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan created yet another proxy war with the USA funding Afghani and Pakistani freedom fighters. The “marriage” of Reagan and General Zia led to the birth of the Taliban and the sibling Al-Qaeda. This process allowed extremists to flourish and destroy secular and progressive society in Pakistan. Eventually, through the war in Iraq, another sibling was created - Daesh. And with the weaponization of refugees through the “evil” genius of Putin and Assad - creating conditions to force them out of Syria - the proxy war has now entered Europe. The response from Europe has been tempered, but still the rise of the right - with May in England, Orban in Hungary, and others, such as Marie Le Pen and Geert Wilders in Holland - creates the possibility of the disintegration of the European Union. The future no longer looks so rosy.

And then steps in Trump

How to read him and the oncoming futures? Certainly, if anyone is happy about the current state of affairs, then we should remember Samuel Huntington and Osama Bin Laden. One imagined a clash of civilization and the other laboured to create the clash - their vision is now our reality. Indeed, we are in the middle of - in evolutionary terms (to paraphrase the late Dr. Chaudry Inayatullah) not a clash of civilizations, but a lack of civilization.

Was the Trump victory because the cultural creatives did not vote? Was it his ability to suggest to the unemployed that if they voted for him, they too could become wealthy and famous? Was it his ability to champion of the great wall before the forces of social inclusion - the demographic shift in the USA - could empower (Cohn & Caumont, 2016)? i.e. to hold up the last white male standing? Was it his ability to speak in a world of alternative facts? (Rutenberg, 2017). Was it the framing of Clinton as the crooked, untrustworthy female - the witch - and the FBI as the collective saviour? Causation is certainly complex. We explore the emergence and futures of Trump and populism through the lenses of epistemology and macrohistory.

Epistemology

Reading number one is epistemological.

In the pre-modern, words were ontologically real, i.e. they did not describe reality, they were reality, and thus the religious become deeply upset when their text is attacked because they feel they are attacked - the body of the collective is harmed.

In contrast, in the modern, words describe reality, and thus we seek to find reality based on evidence and counter-evidence. Words and reality have rules. Following those rules leads to greater efficacy. Facts still matter even if they change over long periods of time (or new theories reinterpret the data). Poststructuralists and many others sought to challenge not facts per se but the context of facts, that the facts discovered were based on already decided paradigms (paraphrasing, Heidegger), that they were historical and contextual. And thus the need not to dismiss facts, but as critical theorist Michael Shapiro, using Foucault has argued, the need to focus on the price or the costs of reality claims (Shapiro, 1992). Each reality claim leads to a particular future.

The Causal layered analysis approach has argued that facts are real, but contextualized by systems nested in worldviews and deep narratives (Inayatullah & Milojevic, 2015). Social change works by maximizing the ability to work at many levels. It is facts plus narrative. Trump et al, seeing an opening within the world of the multiple, have decided not to negotiate reality by deeper understandings of the other, but strategically focus on words that gain real power. In themselves, facts are not real, only power over others is. Thus the recent debate over the numbers attending his inauguration. Instead of accepting the low numbers, they claim that the inauguration was the largest in history, in any nation. The Trump team offers alternative facts. They throw out the baby with the bath water, using poor epistemology to leave an ontological future in disarray.

Moving to deep structure, the grand thinker Pitirim Sorokin (Sorokin, 1957) spoke of this. While ideational systems focus on meaning/purpose based on spiritual knowledge claims, sensate systems focus on fidelity to the empirical, and mixed systems used both, there was a fourth alternative. In this alternative, no one agrees on anything since facts are no longer relevant, everyone lives in their own self-referential or worse (tribal reality). However, Sorokin brilliantly concludes, this fourth alternative has only one implication- the end of society, since we cannot agree on anything. Disintegration ensues.

And thus, in that chaos, there is a will to power. Concluding this section, it is Trump's ability to bend reality - as he learned on Reality Television - that makes him the President of the USA. Power becomes primary. Any reason to gain it suffices, since he himself holds the greatest good.

Macrohistory

Reading number two is macrohistorical. Macrohistorians such as Ibn Khaldun, Pitirim Sorokin, P.R. Sarkar and Johan Galtung suggest we do not become easily swayed by current events. There are deeper patterns at play.

The Decline

For Khaldun the deeper pattern is the decline. While he wrote in the 14th century, we can easily use his analysis to to understand the futures of the USA, the decline of Pax Americana, just as the Soviet Union qua communism disappeared so will the USA. This does not mean that the United States will not have economic and military power, but that legitimacy will decline, the image of the future will no longer be of the American male as central in the global imagination of hierarchy and power. Moreover, attempts to make America great again will only worsen the decline since the external world has changed and the narrative is no longer functional. Once the cyclical decline has set in, a certain inevitability results. As Johan Galtung has argued, the contradictions are too many and too strong (for example, between the financial and the real economy; between the USA and the rest of the world (Galtung, 2009). The narrative of American exceptionalism, of "frontier:, of endless growth ensures that the Titanic cannot change its course. And when there are moments of grandeur, Khaldun appropriately responds.

Unity has often disappeared (when the empire has grown senile) and pomp has taken the place it occupied in the souls of men... At the end of an empire, there often also appears some (show of) power that gives the impression that the senility of the dynasty has been made to disappear. It lights up brilliantly just before it is extinguished, like a burning wick the flame of which leaps up brilliantly a moment before it goes out, giving the impression it is just starting to burn, when in fact it is going out." (Ibn Khaldun, 1958, Galtung & Inayatullah, 1997, p.267).

Thus, one macrohistorical explanation of Trump is that he is the predictable indicator of late decline, the Spenglerian decline of the West. For Spengler, the indicator of decline is that “money emerges victorious over ... values “ (Etzioni & Etzioni-Halevy, 1964, 22). At the beginning, democracy is controlled by the intellect, soon however, money buys votes. Money and democracy and destroyed from within. And in Spengler’s words: “Through money, democracy becomes its own destroyer, after money has destroyed intellect.” (Etzioni & Etzioni-Halevy, 1964, 23). An indicator of this is Trump’s cabinet, the richest in USA history, with seven of the picks worth 11 billion US\$ (Goldman, 2016).

The Pendulum Shift

While Khaldun and Spengler, offer the cyclical, Sorokin takes us to the pendulum. His brilliant insight is the systems or coherent social realities move back and forth between the two poles of the pendulum. In contrast, are those who see the future as linear, a continuation of more of the same, but better. Within the framework of the linear, the evidence collected suggests that the rise will continue. However, Sorokin posits that this is not the case since anytime we focus on a particular dimension of reality, other aspects become disowned, until there is a marked pendulum shift, for example, between centralization and decentralization; belief systems focused on truth or many truths; or uniculturalism and multiculturalism. Sorokin posits that the pendulum is the norm. And thus from the current sensate (materialistic, individualistic, growth oriented) we see the return to the Idealistic, as evidenced by the earlier Markley and Harmon study as well as the extensive literature pointing to a global transition to a different type of world - green, gender partnership, glocal governance (Inayatullah, 2017 and Inayatullah, 2012). however, this emerging idealistic future denies the realist: the world of power, of money, of pleasure - of sensate reality. While Sorokin has argued that the most likely long term 100 year future is a grand shift from the sensate to the idealistic, the rise of Trump could be seen as mini-reversal back i.e. Obama went too far towards inclusion within the US narrative of the survival of the fittest, and thus Trump is a logical pendulum swing.

In any case, for Sorokin these moves back and forth are the norm, not linear movements in any particular direction. Rather, we see moves toward more human rights and dignity (progressive and idealistic) and then a pendulum return to racist descriptions of which group is above and which by nature below i.e in the colloquial language of today: the revenge of the white male.

Thus, while in the short run Trump is the reversal to Obama (and multiculturalism), in the longer term, Trump could be seen as the last of the sensate leaders, as he is fully sensate, totally embodying sensate civilization (reality tv, alternative facts, sexist, hierarchy based, external appearance oriented) - the last swing to the extreme before the pendulum shift to an idealistic future or the possible integration of sensate and idealistic.

But why would it swing away from the sensate given how much sensate civilization can offer?

For Sorokin, writing generations ago:

When any socio-cultural system enters the stage of its disintegration, the following four symptoms of the disintegration appear and grow in it: first, the inner self-contradictions of an irreconcilable dualism in such a culture; second, its formlessness - a chaotic syncretism of undigested elements taken from different cultures; third, a quantitative colossalism - mere growing at the cost of qualitative refinement; and fourth, a progressive exhaustion of its creativeness in the field of great and perennial values. In addition to all the other signs of disintegration, these four symptoms of disintegration have already emerged and are rampant in this contemporary sensate culture of ours.

Our culture in its present sensate phase is full of irreconcilable contradictions. It proclaims equality of all human beings; and it practices an enormous number of intellectual, moral, mental, economic, political, and other equalities. It proclaims “the equality of opportunity” in theory; in practice it provides practically none. It proclaims “democracy of the people, for the people, and by the people”; in practice it tends to be more and more an oligarchy or a plutocracy or a dictatorship of this or that faction. It stimulates an expansion of wishes and wants, and it inhibits their satisfaction.

It proclaims social security and a decent minimum of living conditions for everyone, even as it is progressively destroying security for all and showing itself incapable of eliminating unemployment or of giving decent conditions to anyone. It strives to achieve the maximum of happiness for the maximum number of human beings, but it increasingly fails in that purpose. It advertises the elimination of racial, class, religious, and other group hatreds, while in fact it increasingly seethes with group antagonism of every kind: racial, national, state, religious, class and others. The unprecedented explosion of internal disturbances and wars of the twentieth century is an incontrovertible evidence of that failure. It condemns egotists of all kinds and boasts of the socialization and humanization of everything and everybody; in reality, it displays endless, unbridled greed, cruelty, egotism, and avarice of individuals as well as of groups, beginning with innumerable lobbying and pressure groups and ending throughout economic, political, occupational, religious, state, family, and other groups (Sorokin, 1941, p.3).

What he noticed in the 1940s has not disappeared, indeed, it has become increasingly accentuated. But wouldn't it continue if it is meeting the needs of the many. It is here we turn to the Indian macrohistorian P. R. Sarkar. He argues that the system - more and more - is unable to meet the needs of the many.

Sarkar and History Transformed

Sarkar offers an alternative approach, but with the same conclusion. For him, there are four classes of power, four epistemes or ways of knowing the world. The worker, the warrior, the intellectual and the capitalist. Currently, and generally, while there is some variation amongst collectivities throughout the world, we are at the end of the capitalist era. Capitalists generally rule using the skills of the intellectuals - for strategy - and the warriors, to keep discipline, extracting labour from workers. However, as they are unable to discipline themselves, to stop themselves, the capitalist continue to accumulate wealth until all “become their boot lickers.” (Sarkar, 1984). Thus that eight males have the same wealth as 50% of the world population comes as no surprise (Mullany, 2017). It is clearly an indicator, for Sarkar, that mobility of money has slowed down. Money is not moving, but rather accumulating in a few sites (Sarkar, 1987).

Thus, the dramatic concentration and immobility of money is seen as the end of the capitalist era. That a capitalist himself ascends to the presidency, to power, illustrates that there is longer any need to hide the power of capital. Disguise is not needed. Indeed, it becomes the only desired image of the future. A particular worldview totally dominates - ideas, honor, and work disappear, what matters is the accumulation and its display. All wish to become like Trump - he is aspirational. And yet has many have pointed out, all cannot become like Trump - the contradictions are too great, and thus, Trump signifies the end of the end of the Pax Americana, indeed, perhaps, the end of the capitalist era. For Sarkar, whether through Artificial intelligence ending work, peer to peer ending inefficiencies and the middle man, the sharing economy creating vast new wealth through enhanced efficiencies and sharing of power or through workers destroying in violent revolutions, the edifice of capitalism, the current era will end, sooner than later.

Even if this too far or too dramatic a pronouncement - there are always alternative futures, counter-revolutions (the new technological revolutions could create a new Artificial-intelligence led capitalism and concentration of wealth and power), clearly as pointed out Trump signifies the end of an era. In an excellent article on California as the future, the argument made by Tim Rutten is that it is not the vision of Trump that is the future, but his opposite, the state of California. California is the future of the USA and possibly the world in that: (1). No single 'race' dominates; (2) It is bilingual; (3). Its economy works, it now the sixth largest economy in the world; (4) International trade leads to more jobs with the weak not thrown away; (5). And there is significant investment in new technologies such as solar, the sharing economy, i.e., innovation that creates new wealth (Rutten, 2016). And California is preparing to challenge the Trump agenda (Daniels, 2017).

The Linear?

But can't the cyclical or the pendulum be denied through the linear, through progress? Hasn't this been the brilliance of the rise of the West. Certainly, but (1) progress qua linear means more and more rights for more people and Trump denies progress qua social inclusion by excluding females, migrants, and beginning trade wars thus hurting the growing Asian middle class. (2) Isn't progress about merit? Yes, but Trump denies merit instead offers positions to relatives, to family, to those closest to him. He evokes not the linear rise of the West but the feudalism of kinship. (3) Isn't progress about science and technology. Yes, but Trump dismisses science and technology, particularly climate change science and medical science. Thus, the exact tools needed to ensure that the cycle or the pendulum are transcended, are denied, rubbished. The linear jump thus becomes nearly impossible.

Four Futures

What then for the future? What are the possibilities? Based on the above analysis, four futures appear possible.

Scenario 1 - Macrohistory and structure.

The future is clear. Trump is the indicator of the end of American hegemony and perhaps the end of the Capitalist system. This does not mean that the sky is clear; rather, hegemonic transitions are brutal (Wallerstein, 2004). The end of a five hundred economic system only accentuates the dramatic turbulence ahead. Thus, we began with the notion that Markley, and Harmon et al were horribly wrong about the world of 2020. But by using macrohistory, we conclude with the opposite. They were perfectly correct. The end is not near, the end is here. This creates the second scenario.

Scenario 2 - Agency, first.

Structure becomes so because of human agency. For our macrohistorians, patterns become real through evolution, through our behavior, our practice.. Cultural creatives not only challenge Trump et al through demonstrations, they create the new framework toward a different type of world. A far gentler economic system with far greater equity. Advances in artificial intelligence coupled with universal basic income ensure a soft landing, and it is not so much the end of capitalism but certainly the end of the factory. Efforts to mitigate climate change and other international crisis lead to greater global governance. Global skies allow movement with strong regulation to ensure safety, fairness, and prosperity for all.

Scenario 3 - A Mini-shift.

We are not part of a grand shift, but these are mini-pendulum swings and mini-declines. The polarization we are witnessing now is merely superficial. The slow, protracted nature of democratic governance ensures leaders like Trump can talk as much as they wish, but the system of checks and balances ensures that they can only move forward in slow steps. The plane does not take off the ground, there is no real turbulence. Just as Obama led to Trump; Trump leads to Elizabeth Warren or another similar leader to the American presidency. Brexit disappears in importance, and the Western world continues slowly as the threat from terrorism recedes (ageing begins to occur in the Middle East and North Africa, thus reducing the number of young, unemployed, angry men) (Inayatullah 2016). Asia continues to economically rise, indeed, takes-off.

And as with all good scenario work, we do not know the fourth, that is the outlier; hard to imagine from the terms of the present. But lurking, changing how we travel.

What should we do then, given the map ahead. Let us conclude by returning to epistemology and macrohistory.

For Foucauldians, the task is always the same - ensure power has no place to hide. We should not treat any reality as given; rather we see it as constructed. We challenge categories, ensuring that the price of any truth claim is investigated.

From Ibn Khaldun, in the decline, it is crucial to identify the Bedouins (1958). They are outside the system, challenging political and normative power. Understanding them, and aligning with them is wise. In the current system, are these the cultural creatives, the forces of holism that Markely, Ray et al have identified? Or?

From Sorokin, once one can understand the pendulum, one is not, remembering Gramsci, excited by rubbish. Short and long term strategy means not being swayed the politics of the immediate, and to use the swings of the pendulum wisely.

From Sarkar, the task is multifold. First, in times of great change, spiritual practice (as defined as inclusion, meditation, and social service) is a must as this keeps the mind balanced. Second, the goal is not to focus on particular capitalists, but to help create a transition to a new global economic system - for him this is PROUT - a new framework focused on gender cooperation, neo-humanism (humanism plus the rights of nature and technology), a maxi-mini balanced economy, and global governance (Sarkar, 1987; Inayatullah, 2017). The transition while local is ultimately global - new institutions of global governance. Trump is one of many indicators taking us to a different future.

That women are leading the challenge to Trump in the USA fortifies the argument made earlier by Markey, Harmon, Anderson, Tibbs, and Sarkar (Slobon, 2017; Women March, n.d.). The future can be different.

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Endnotes

1. In private conversation.

