

critical friends. If there is to be a countervailing force strong enough to call the bluff of anodyne, corporate, Western, science-and-technology-led accounts of the future, then futures people of different backgrounds and cultures need to locate common interests and work together.

In my view, the world futures community can only benefit from the active involvement and *leadership* of people from non-Western cultures. As their participation increases, I expect to see a real flowering of different traditions of futures work. As it is, the futures enterprise is anything but monolithic. It already contains critical, visionary, enabling and multicultural perspectives that are not 'owned' by anyone, and certainly not by dominant interests.

So instead of railing against some of those who have tried to work against the dominant tradition and to support the emergence of others, a more constructive and creative strategy should be considered. Criticism is certainly part of it, but it is only part. The more important need is to recognize cultural differences, but then look beyond them to the *shared* interests of humankind in comprehending the past, dealing with the present and actively working toward a more just and viable

future. Such a project is indeed demanding. It cannot be carried out only by Westerners, and will *necessarily* require materials from many cultures. It will be a pity if this is persistently seen as mere 'appropriation'.

In short, I support the thesis in part, but reject the *a priori* notion on which it is based. Some of the more dismissive voices in the text are not helpful and should be seen for what they are—substitutes for a more sophisticated and inclusive outlook.

Notes and references

1. R. Slaughter, 'An international overview of futures education', *Future Scan* (Paris, UNESCO), 7(1), 1992, pages 60–79.
2. R. Slaughter, *Futures Concepts and Powerful Ideas* (Melbourne, Futures Study Centre, 1991).
3. J. Mander's book *In the Absence of the Sacred* (San Francisco, CA, Sierra Club, 1991), is a fine example of an approach embodying both the *critique* of Western assumptions and the *valuing* of non-Western cultures. Such work provides a strong, durable and ethically viable position for futurists and others.
4. R. Slaughter, 'Interviews with Asia/Pacific futurists', *27C*, (Melbourne, Commission for the Future), 9, 1993.

Colluding and colliding with the orientalist

A response to Zia Sardar's 'Colonizing the future'

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Zia Sardar's 'Colonizing the future' asserts that the study of the future is following the much travelled trail of the orientalist path of development. His paper echoes a much earlier piece by Jim Dator entitled, 'Decolonizing the future'¹ in which Dator argued that the future must become increasingly participatory across gender, ethnicity,

nation, region and generation. If we do not create the future, others will. With land, wealth and history already colonized, the last frontier is time. What Zia Sardar has suggested is that this is precisely what has occurred—futures studies has increasingly become Western-dominated with the source of their evolution based on their relation to the Other, in this case, the non-West—the raw materials of Western development. Non-Western sources are only used when they comfortably fit into Western cosmology either in agreement or as loyal opposition.

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What is there to colonize?

The Western bias of futures studies is partly mitigated by the fact that futures studies is not an academic discipline, although Sardar thinks that it is a nascent field. For example, inasmuch as there exists no professional newsletter listing employment vacancies, it is not a field. Neither academe and government, nor the private sector have job categories called 'futurist'. There is also no particular area that futures studies attempts to dominate—the future itself is too grand a concept to be easily controlled by a particular interpretive community, especially since among the key components of the futures perspective is that the future be made open and accessible to all. Finally there are few foundations giving grants to set up futures studies centres—only UNESCO has managed some limited funding for travel and bibliographic research.²

Furthermore, even if futures studies is a field, there is no dominant paradigm that defines it. While this is also the case in other disciplines, however, they do have schools of thought and areas of concern, as for example is the case in political science, which has schools of thought such as behaviouralist, critical, developmentalist and areas of concern such as political theory, comparative politics, and government studies.

Nonetheless, 'colonizing' is still not too strong a word even if there is little at stake (as seen from the strategic instrumentalist perspective) in futures studies. For instance, in both the World Future Society and the World Futures Studies Federation, individuals by and large participate because of personal idealism not because they seek financial, political or psychological gains.

Progress and the future

Still, the Western vision of the future—its categories, its framework—has become hegemonic just as the West has become universal—a particular 'civilization' has defined what it means to be civilized, what is important and what is trivial. Thus from a Chinese individual, we seek to gain insight into Chinese visions of the future, from an Indian individual of Indian visions of the future—but it is only those who live

in the West who can speak universally about global megatrends. However, when an Indian discusses global trends, we call this an alternative view of the future or the Indian view of the world. It should not then be surprising that Western futurists often fail to see their own paradigmatic boundaries even as they predict a coming paradigm change. Since the worldview they speak from is presently universal, the boundaries of their discourse are invisible.³

This is partly because the idea of the future in the West has developed in conjunction with the idea of progress. Following Comte, the West believes itself to have entered the positive scientific era (post-industrial, consumer, and so forth) while the non-West remains in the philosophical (speculative) or theological (religious). Within this linear evolutionary model, how can the backward offer visions of the future? They can only be educated and transformed, not solicited for alternatives. Of course, one can argue that there are few sophisticated versions of futures studies in the non-West, since futures studies are not taught there, but this point forgets that the non-West is filled with compelling alternatives to modernity, with alternative images of time, with different constructions of the ideal, even if they are not couched in the language of modern or developmentalist-oriented futures studies. In the non-West, the future occupies different spaces, often those that emerge from cyclical and transcendental theories of social change. The boundaries of the universal and the particular are constructed along less exclusive lines. But where linear theories are dominant, then the future remains penetrated by the push of progress (or during the middle ages, the pull of God).⁴

Thus we should not be surprised at efforts like Robert Bundy's *Images of the Futures*. Of 20 essays that comprise this edited volume, only four are written by females and there are no essays from a non-Western perspective—a Chinese vision, an Indian vision, an Islamic version, a Pacific islander vision do not exist in this collection. As Bundy writes, 'Western civilization is the obvious focus of all that is said. But the drama we are engaged in is global, therefore an important underlying assumption in all the essays is that what happens to the West will significantly

shape what the world will be like in the second millennia'.⁵

I hope Bundy will be disappointed and that the new visions of the future will emerge less from the spiritually tired and materially 'exhausting' West and more from other sources of insight. Obviously, he and others who offer us the future have not read the futures visions and theories of Indian Sarkar or Muslim philosopher Al Shariati or the struggles of the various social movements—Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka for example—or recent efforts by Hawaiian activists to use ancient Hawaiian cosmology to articulate a new sovereign Hawaii. Fortunately, there is a wealth of other sources available—the UNESCO futures orientation programme has hundreds of citations of futures studies in South Asia, East Asia and South-east Asia.

World Future Society proceedings tend to be particularly culturally myopic. In the 1989 proceedings, there is only one article that examines the Third World, and again as a source of potential colonization. Examine the title of an essay by Frank Meissner: 'Effective food marketing as a tool of socio-economic development in the Third World'.⁶ I can guarantee Meissner that marketing is not the problem. But marketing the future is the problem. Hypergloss books like *Future Shock* and particularly *Megatrends* or, for example, the other books that tell us the trends shaping the world (Faith Popcorn, *The Popcorn Report*; Cetron and Davies, *Trends Shaping the World*; OECD, *Long Term Prospects for the World Economy*; and Frank Feather, *G-Forces: Reinventing the World*) all ignore that the source of new paradigms of the future could come from the Third World.

However, they forget that there grand trends are based on the continued universalization of local Western experiences.⁷ Even attempts to rethink the epistemology of futures studies shows its dramatic Western bias, as in the case of Jay Ogilvy's 'futures studies and the human sciences'⁸ in which all relevant philosophical understanding of the social sciences are to have developed in Europe.

Fortunately, in the West, there are numerous efforts to acknowledge that something exists outside Western culture, and that individuals and societies can learn from how different cultures con-

struct the future. Certainly, non-Western nations can learn from the idea of alternative futures instead of constantly parroting the one future, one leader, one text vision of the God and the nation-state. Western perspectives can be enriched by different approaches of what it means to be developed and the place of humanity in the cosmos.

Still there are culturally synthetic efforts, primarily through the efforts of the World Futures Studies Federation. Conferences are structured so as to maximize diversity. One has come to expect the voices of Islamic futures, Japanese utopias, African models, Indian visions and women's images, to mention a few divergent perspectives.⁹

But the problem for most writers on the future is that marketing is the key. To present the Orient as other than the land of exoticism and eroticism (as in the case of the recent *Aladdin*, a movie that steals dreams from the non-West by cannibalizing Islamic mythology, turning Aladdin, the servant of god to just plain old Al) does not sell. We should, then, not be surprised that the non-West exists as the space that must be denigrated, developed and disciplined. It is the space of turmoil and uncertainty that could cause a wrench in the emerging new world order—but how the West has historically created the conditions for this disorder are rarely covered in futurists' briefings of potential disasters ahead. But history would complicate the discourse and befuddle the executive being briefed; thus we are left with snapshots of the 'hot spots' of the future that must be avoided if capital is to continue its successful onward march.

Collusion

But while colonialism and the Cold War have created the tragedy of the Third World, what needs to be developed further is how elites in the non-West collide with elites in the West in marginalizing non-Western images of the future.

To begin with, conferences in the Third World—far more than in the West where an independent academe has developed somewhat—are hierarchically structured, and the presence of key government functionaries and foreigners is central to the perceived success or failure

of the meeting. Far more important than what is said is (1) who said it, and (2) that a high functionary of the government heard it said. The future, then, does not exist unless power hears it. The reasons for this intellectual style are often based on the legacy of colonialism—again, foreign penetration with local collusion. There is always a class which adopts the mind, the psychological categories of the colonialist—the intimate enemy in Ashis Nandy's words—and then continues to reproduce this view long after the colonialist has left. Local organizers need the foreign element to justify that the conference was on the correct track or to show the outside world that academic modernity has been achieved. Meetings are thus orchestrated for the purpose of public relations, engineered to give an image of success—often in terms of economic development or national integration.

Orientalized by negative images of the non-West, foreigners are often not surprised when the content quality of a conference is low; in fact, they are thrilled that holding a conference is in fact possible in such primitive Third World conditions. But there is an added complexity to the foreign—local collusion, for there are individuals who have succeeded in the model of the colonialist and have either rejected it entirely in search of an alternative culture or in the recovery of traditional culture. They can afford to be far more critical of the collusion of the local with the foreign. Neither foreign nor local, they can create alliances with both groups, thus allowing the future to seep through. But even if little formal space is given to *ad hoc* meetings, information communications and conference disturbances, creativity and critical thought can occur in a colonized environment, once that history is owned and transcended.

Conference titles and books in themselves provide collusion with the dominant model of futures studies, namely, nation-state-oriented studies. What is important in studies such as Malaysia 2000 or India 2000 is the way time is represented. While this might appear trivial, the importance of the year 2000 is a Western category. Indians have many categories of time; for example, cosmic, spiritual and cyclical. Muslims begin their calendar from Muhammad's migration or hijra (AH)

from Makkah to Madinah. The new century, the 15th, has already begun in this model of time. Yet the Western concept of time is globalized.

The Western notion of sovereign space is also globalized. Here the non-West colludes directly with the West. Nationalist movements are more than happy to have a 21st century defined by statist categories. The idea that these national categories in themselves are recent and when placed outside the context of regional, cultural and religious histories remains contentious since sovereignty (economic and cultural) has not been realized for Third World nations. Nonetheless, the future of South Asia in the changing world economy or in the emerging Central Asian economy might make more sense than Pakistan 2000, sovereign though it may be. One way, then, to include Third World participation in the creation of the future is to give alternative readings of time outside the domination of AD and BC. *One could list a range of times or have a global dialogue to find a new way to 'calendar' ourselves.*

The other dimension of futures studies as developed in the Third World is the predominance of international relations and development theory. The only viable future is one that is nation-centric in its focus. Scenarios are important insofar as they can lead to a strategic edge over competing nations. Outside strategic futures studies, the future is fugitive, with the problems of poverty making the only relevant futures study that of population growth. This is the type of futures studies Zia Sardar has alerted us to; studies by the World Bank, the IMF and other international development agencies, where the problem is the non-West—a problem that must be tamed, controlled and monitored. Michel Foucault has also developed this argument from a broader perspective, asking how it is that we have become populations in the first place—we were once communities, or individuals or people—but in the quest for state-istics we have become that which is countable, that which can be monitored and controlled.

But recent futures studies in the West are unique in that they are not dominated by the international relations and development paradigm. No longer silenced are the categories of environment, class, gender,

epistemology, culture and spirit—indeed, the most creative futures studies are those developed from movements representing these categories.¹⁰ Development has also become less of a hegemonic influence in the paradigm of the social sciences. Futures studies, by being spacious, can accommodate ideologies, worldviews and marginal voices—unfortunately, one modern direction of futures studies is further to colonize the future, not release it to the Other.

Collusion with Western models of futures studies is thus based on historical variables (colonialism) and structural variables (the dominance of international relations and the paradigm of development theory). The self, then, is colonized and viewed through the eyes of the West. Legitimacy of non-Western efforts is only gained when a Westerner approves of it, or reshapes it in his model of the mind and spirit. But individuals who do move outside conventional models—either recovering the ancient or creating authentic new visions of the future, are not treated well by any establishment. Those that succeed in gaining government funds are those that are forced to stoop to the levels of the dominant Third World institutions, the bureaucracy (military and civil), which does understand the need for strategic scenarios but not the need for rethinking power and unleashing local imagination. The battle is often rhetorical, with writers claiming 'yes we love democracy', but we have our own version (which could be innovative and interesting) but then often this means that we have the right to suppress our people in the name of national sovereignty and development. Thus Westernization in the sense of nationalism and development is the specific hegemonic vision that negates the diverse history and the future of the non-West. Other concepts of the future, of growth/distribution, resources and ownership, gender and ecology, progress and tradition, multiple construction of time, as provided by the non-West, are ignored or cannibalized through Westernization.

Finally, the non-West in itself is a varied category. Islamic perspectives are as different from Confucian as they are from Tantric (and as Tantric is from Vedic)—these great divides are often far more important than the West/non-West divide

that we have used here. Indeed, the non-West in itself is an orientalist category that we are forced into, again showing the hegemony of the Western discourse.

Beyond West and non-West

Are there any positive signs for alternative views of the future? Yes and no. At a recent conference, a participant asked why there wasn't more talk of the transcendental. I proceeded to offer ways in which the metaphor of the spiritual could be shown or experienced within a conference setting. But this was too much. She did not want conference structure to represent conference themes; just a panel on religious views of the future would have satisfied her. Unfortunately neither Islamic, Taoist, Tantric or even New Age are overly excited by that particular division between who one is and what one says.

For futures studies to participate in the creation of the next century—to regenerate humanity—the non-West will have to break out of the model set up by the West, that is strategic international theory and development theory. At the same time it will have to break out of its own recent despotic imitative past and the hundreds of years of brutal colonialism. That type of futures study will be uncomfortable for all concerned—Westerners, Muslims, Hindus, orientalists, post-modernists, reformers and revolutionaries—as it searches for a new paradigm. But it is there within the historical spiritual traditions and within the voice of global suffering that is the Third World. As the site of intervention for drug companies, peace corps, developmentalists, and US generals, the role of intervention and the ramifications of consciously creating the future are well understood by all in the Third World.

Let us hope that the misery of the past will lead to new social designs, instead of what has been the traditional recourse to realism and developmentalism—more bad poetry, that is, resignation and fatalism. Inasmuch as the academy is not well developed in the Third World, the importance of Sardar's argument is crucial. Futures studies in the West are emerging in an overcrowded region (too many PhDs or fields per square university) whereas in the Third World

there is more space for growth, creativity (and rubbish but this can be recycled), and critical thought. Futures studies can play a crucial role as the Third World moves out of the double straitjacket of nationalism and developmentalism.

In other words, we have to find our own categories of thought, value and action—as well as the interrelationships between these three—our own visions of the future, and recognize how we collude with the historical West in limiting our own freedom. Part of this will involve a collision. Part of this involves moving out of both West and non-West perspectives in creating a new 'other'—a new 'we'. Entering into the other society will need a different sort of collusion between creative forces in the West and non-West. Certainly a different sort of futures studies.

In any alternative, however, I hope that the future will always remain outside the realm of futures studies.

Notes and references

1. James Dator, 'De-colonizing the future', Ontario Educational Communications Authority, April 1975, mimeo.
2. In the USA, the State Justice Institute has been highly supportive of court forecasting, especially encouraging models of courts that assume multicultural assumptions of law and court structure. National governments, however, do give funds for conferences, for example, as in the recent Pakistan Ministry of Education supported regional meeting of the World Futures Studies Federation in Islamabad.
3. This is similar to the argument that Americans have no culture. I would argue the opposite—their culture is universal and thus harder to see.
4. In my model, the ideal futures studies would be synthetic, developing on linear, cyclical and transcendental constructions of time, space and evolution, and they would be local, operating at non-universal levels, seeking to articulate specific politics of the possible.
5. Robert Bundy (editor), *Images of the Future* (Buffalo, NY, Prometheus Books, 1976), page 5.
6. Howard Didsbury (editor) *World Future Society Conference Proceedings* (Bethesda, MD, World Future Society, 1989), page 75.
7. My sense is that these authors' idea of travel means watching *National Geographic* (although even that might have helped).
8. *Futures Research Quarterly*, 8(2), 1992. While it is to his credit finally to have discovered European post-modernism, recent Third World articulations of the post-modern are strangely missing from his analysis, making his essay far from current.
9. The list of thinkers who do futures studies is noteworthy—Yamaguchi and his idea of a Zen utopia (Muratopia) from Japan; Kim Tae-Chang's development of a local Korean studies; the dozens of articles by Sarkar and his students as well as their future-oriented journals, for example, *Cosmic Society* published from Calcutta, *Prout Weekly* from Delhi, *Prout Journal* from Los Altos, California, *New Renaissance* from Germany, *Prout Africa* from Togo, as well as Ravi Batra's *The Downfall of Capitalism and Communism* and other efforts, all focus on an alternative non-Western vision of the future (as well as dramatically transforming Indian thought); Ashis Nandy of India and, of course, the journal *Alternatives* from Delhi as well as the numerous Gandhian thinkers. Or the *IFDA Dossier* which provided a wealth of alternative images of the future. And, of course, the hundreds of articles and numerous books and the many projects exploring the future of Islam by Zia Sardar and others.
10. Chris Jones, *The Futures of Gaia*, Doctoral Dissertation, Honolulu, HI, University of Hawaii, 1989, remains among the best alternative futures studies.