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Book review

Islam, Postmodernism and other futures: a ziauddin sardar reader

Edited by Sohail Inayatullah and Gail Boxwell. Pluto Press: London, 2003, pp 374, £14.99

Sohail Inayatullah and Gail Boxwell have performed an important service for all of us by collecting some of Zia Sardar's writings into a single volume. Moreover, the title, *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures*, very accurately expresses the content, which could hardly be more timely. However, it is daunting for any writer, or reviewer, to foresee the context within which anything written about Islam might be read, given the frighteningly swift dynamics of the subject.

The earliest essays about Islam in this volume were written at a time when most westerner's knowledge of and concern about Islam was near zero. Thus, it is often not clear exactly for whom some of Sardar's early Islamic articles are intended. The "general reader" perhaps, but perhaps also the informed, or concerned, Muslim who might only lightly hold to the tenants and practices of the faith while living as a citizen of some western nation? I do not know.

But for the latter reader, Sardar is a contemporary embodiment of the most powerful of the historical religious prophets, condemning all existing pretensions of creating an "Islamic state" on the western nation-state model. As Sardar makes clear in essay after essay, neither a literal attempt to recreate the ideal "Medina state" of Islamic history, nor the modern claims of Pakistan, Iran or other Islamic nation-states are true to the word and intentions of Islam (though Sardar expressed hope that the six Islamic republics that gained freedom from the Soviet Union might bring forth

"the emergence of Muslim nationalism in Central Asia [that] will hasten the end of mindless fundamentalism" (87).

Sardar, in short, is as severe a critic of those who would erect repressive governments in the name of the Prophet as he is of those who would launch "crusades" against them.

But these essays can not be read by "the general reader" now the way they might have been read when they were written. The world changed in important ways on September 11, 2001, and so does the way we read these essays.

Indeed, the volume opens with a piece that Sardar published in January 2002,

written in the aftermath of 9/11, titled “Rethinking Islam.” It is very different in tone from his earlier writings which follow in the book. But even this essay means something different to readers now, after the American invasion of Iraq in March/April 2003. And who knows what developments will transpire by the time you encounter these words, or those in the *Sardar Reader*?

An impressive bibliography compiled by Gail Boxwell at the end of the book reveals that Sardar has been an extraordinarily prolific writer on many topics for a very long time. There are references to some of his writings from the late 1960s and early 1970s, with detailed annual listings from 1976 through 2002. The earliest essay in the *Reader* was written in 1979 and the latest (three of them) in 2002. Most come from the 1990s.

Moreover, editors Inayatullah and Boxwell have written an exceptionally lucid and helpful introduction to the *Reader*. Not only does it present Sardar in a most open and charming way, but it deepens our understanding of Sardar’s perspective beyond his bare essays themselves. For example, they quote an email from Sardar describing the impact that *The Satanic Verses* had on him:

“As I read *The Satanic Verses*, I remember, I began to quiver; then, as I turned page after page, I began to shake; by the time I finished the novel, I had been frozen rigid. For the first time in my life, I realised what it must feel like to be raped. I felt as though Salman Rushdie had plundered everything that I hold dear and despoiled the inner sanctum of my identity” (10).

But his revulsion was then almost as great when the Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa against Rushdie:

“The fatwa compounded my agony. It not only brought a death sentence for Rushdie but it also made me redundant as an intellectual for implicit in the fatwa was the declaration that Muslim thinkers are too feeble to defend their own beliefs” (11).

“For Sardar,” Inayatullah and Boxwell note, “both Rushdie and the Ayatollah are products of post-modernism where the distinction between image and reality, the authentic and the aberration, life and death have evaporated—all is desperate, panic is the norm, and everything can be justified by reference to secular and religious absolutes” (11).

Nonetheless, anyone who wants to learn more about what a contemporary Islamic culture and polity could and should be must read the essays in the first section of the book, titled simply “Islam”. I especially recommend chapters four and five, titled “The Shari’ah as Problem-Solving Methodology” and “Islam and Nationalism”.

Chapter Four opens,

“The Shari’ah is the core of the worldview of Islam. It is that body of knowledge which provides the Muslim civilisation with its unchanging bearings as well as

its major means of adjusting to change. Theoretically, the Shari'ah covers all aspects of human life: personal, social, political and intellectual. Practically, it gives meaning and content to the behaviour of Muslims in their earthly endeavors" (64).

Yet, later on the same page, Sardar comments,

"In the entire history of Islam, the Shari'ah has not been more abused, misunderstood and misrepresented than in our own epoch. It has been used to justify oppression and despotism, injustice and criminal abuse of power. It has been projected as an ossified body of law that bears little or no relationship to modern times."

Sardar shows, as the title of this chapter suggests, how, in contrast,

"many contemporary problems can be studied using the Shari'ah and policy alternatives developed that could become an integrated part of Islamic law if they obtain the ijma [consensus] of Muslim scholars and intellectuals" (74).

A short while later Sardar states,

"Apart from focusing on the general principals of the Shari'ah, Muslim intellectuals must also rediscover its norms. The fragmented and abnormal imposition of the Shari'ah in various Muslim countries has led many to believe that the Shari'ah, almost always, takes the extreme position on every issue. This image is projected by hudud [outer limit] punishments--so beloved of dictators and others seeking expedient 'Islamic' legitimacy for their rules." But to the contrary, says Sardar, "The Shari'ah is like a spiral, confined by its limits but moving with time, with its norm requiring a fresh effort by Muslims of every epoch to understand its contemporary relevance" (75).

Chapter 5, "Islam and Nationalism" starts are out equally bluntly and clearly:

"Islam and nationalism are contradictory terms. While Islam is intrinsically a universal creed and worldview which recognizes no geographical boundaries, nationalism is based on territory and is parochial in its outlook. While Islam insists on the total equality of humanity, recognises no linguistic, cultural or racial barriers, nationalism glorifies assumed cultural, linguistic and racial superiority. Nationalism demands the total loyalty of a people to the nation ('my country, right or wrong'), Islam demands loyalty and submission only to God" (81).

For many years, I have been teaching graduate and undergraduate political design

courses at the University of Hawaii. Among the things I try to get my students to do is to rise above the cosmological and technological limitations of the American Founding Fathers who, between 1787 and 1789, created the Constitution of the United States—the first “constitution” of a new nation, and a model that has been followed (in its cosmological and technology principles, though certainly not in its structural details) by all constitution-writers since. There has been no fundamental rethinking of governance cosmology and technology since, even though communist and indeed Muslim, as well as many other religious and secular governments have come and gone since 1789.

One of the things I try to do is to get my students to consider adopting a “quantum” instead of a “newtonian” perspective, since the newtonian concepts upon which the Founding Fathers based their governance system have been recognized for almost a century as being a limited, though still useful, but certainly not sufficient, understanding of the forces and processes of the physical world of which human societies and their governance must be a part.

Alternatively, I urge students who come from nonwestern cultures to try to use cosmologies from their own cultures upon which to base their political design. This might mean crafting modern governance systems on Confucian, or Buddhist, or Hindu, or Hawaiian indigenous cosmologies.

Or on those of Islam.

I ask my students to imagine what contemporary Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, Indigenous, Islamic, and similar systems of governance might look like if those systems had been able to continue to grow and evolve free either from the taint of western imperialism and colonization, on the one hand, or from internal constraints which froze them at a particular period of history, on the other. For example, what might Hawaiian systems of governance look like in 2003 if Hawaii had not been wholly dominated by western culture and forms (including being forced to become an American colony, and then an American state), but instead had been allowed to continue to grow and evolve as an independent polity interacting freely with the forces and technologies of the rest of the world?

In order to encourage students to think about what contemporary Islamic governance might be in this context, for almost two decades I have used Chapter Six from a book Sardar wrote titled, *Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come* (London: Mansell, 1985). The chapter is titled, “Islamic State in the Post-industrial Age” and is to me a remarkable, and remarkably clear, statement of the topic. Sardar reviews the theological basis of Islamic political thought, and then the various attempts to develop actual Muslim polities beginning of course with the Medina state. He then discusses in brief but sufficient detail “the modern understanding of the Islamic State” focusing especially on the rationale behind and real experiences of Pakistan and Iran. He then comments, as we have seen him say above,

“there are considerable difficulties with the whole notion of an ‘Islamic State.’ Indeed the term itself is self-contradictory: Islam is uncompromisingly universal; state is unquestionably parochial. An Islamic state with its fixed boundaries and allegiance to a particular nation, undermines both the universality of Islam and

the notion that Muslims are one ummah, a single global community which shares common political, intellectual and spiritual goals” (145).

Sardar then traces the rise of the western idea of the nation-state, and its captivity by ideologies that are also fundamentally at odds with Muslim principles, so that “if the pursuit of an Islamic state becomes an ideology itself, then reason and justice are readily sacrificed to the alt[a]r of emotions. And there are always those who take upon themselves the role of the guardians of the ideology, who regard themselves more equal than others and are ever ready to prove it.”

“Dictatorship thus emerges. This is exactly what happened in the early stages of the revolution in Iran. Ideology is the antithesis of Islam. It is an enterprise of suppression and not a force of liberation. Islam is an invitation to thought and analysis, not to imitation, and emotional and political freebooting” (147).

Finally, Sardar discusses in a very convincing and inspiring way the possible rise of the ummah state from the failures of the Islamic state, ending with a series of steps that need to be taken for that transformation. Of particular interest is what Sardar says about

“the role of communication; How can computers, satellites, and modern communication techniques be best used for promoting integration and cooperation in the Muslim world and used to usher in a common polity that eventually leads to the creation of an ummah state? How can a proper balance be struck between the centralising and pluralising effects of modern communication technology? How can Muslim communities use this technology to maximize human choices without infringing on diversity, creativity and free flow of information between and among Muslim countries?” (154).

I have quoted at length from this essay for three reasons. One is that this chapter is not included in the Sardar Reader under review, whereas the chapter on the Shari’ah is from the same 1985 volume. I find the omission odd, and am left wondering why.

Secondly, I quoted the section on the role of communication because it highlights another interesting aspect of Sardar and Islam. Sardar often focuses on the same kinds of transforming technologies that fascinate so many futurist (most certainly myself) and yet he finds a way to use them on behalf of a properly-functioning contemporary Islamic polity. Indeed, I must admit that the thing that most attracted me to Sardar when I first encountered him in the 1980s was not just his outspoken, firebrand, indeed prophet-like willingness to tell it like it is in the bluntest of terms, but the fact that he was as fascinated as I was by the transforming toys of the postmodern world. I had seen how certain rightwing Christian fundamentalists had

eagerly incorporated the most advanced communication technologies to reinforce their version of Old Time Religion. But I had never seen anyone suggest how these same technologies might eventually undermine the message of the fundamentalists and restore faith to its original purity and power. And this is what Sardar was doing, and still is, I believe.

And thirdly, I quote what Sardar says about telecommunications here because to me the most fascinating chapter in the entire reader is number six, disarmingly titled, "Paper, Printing, and Compact Discs: the Making and Unmaking of Islamic Culture." What this chapter shows, from my point of view, is the power and force within an Islamic context of two of Marshall McLuhan's aphorisms that I quote ad nauseum:

"We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us" and, "The medium is the message."

The third most frequent term in the Qur'an, according to Sardar, is *ilm* (knowledge). Knowledge--seeking it, obtaining it, analyzing it, expanding it, sharing it, preserving it, and seeking newer understandings of it--is central to Islam. Originally *ilm* was very broadly conceived, interpreted, and shared, but over the years it has come to mean only certain, often secret, religious knowledge that only a small number of initiates can possess. How did this narrowing and freezing of such a fundamental concept happen? And how might the original liberating meaning be re-ignited?

Sardar shows how very important written texts are to Muslims.

"The first Muslim community, living in Medina, recorded the Qur'an on almost anything they could find: on papyrus, palm fibres, bone tablets, hides, white stones and parchment. The Prophet Muhammad himself had his important decisions documented. Nearly 300 of his documents have come down to us, including political treatises, military enlistments, assignments of officials and state correspondence written on tanned leather. Because he could not read and write himself the Prophet was constantly served by a group of 45 scribes who wrote down his sayings, instructions and activities" (91).

After his death, an elaborate system was devised for obtaining and authenticating other teachings that had not been initially written down:

"Each saying of the Prophet was traced through a chain of authoritative transmitters right to the lips of the Prophet Muhammad himself" (92).

"The methodology of hadith collection and criticism, with all its precision and accuracy, combined with the Qur'anic emphasis on *ilm*, became the basis for a host of new scholarly and literary genres" (93)

leading to the flowering and spread of Islamic culture from the 9th through the 13th Centuries.

This proliferation of Islamic culture was also

“made possible by one of the most revolutionary events in Islamic history...the manufacture of paper” (94).

The know-how for papermaking was acquired by Muslims from Chinese captured in Samarkand, but Muslims added numerous features that led to the improvement and mass production of paper, eventually exporting it to Europe in the late 13th Century.

“The manufacturing of paper also led to the new profession of the warraq” (95)

(plural, warraqeen) who made and sold paper, published and sold books, and served as scribes, often becoming scholars in their own right. Centers of learning and eventually universities grew up around scholars and their libraries. Reading, writing, widespread research, scholarship, and creativity on every topic imaginable--ilm--flourished throughout the breadth of the Muslim world.

However, at the same time, some religious scholars (ulema) began to be concerned because wide readership was fostering widespread and differing interpretations of the meaning of what was being read.

“The initial response of the ulema...was to undermine the concept of ilm itself.”
“Ilm was now transformed from meaning ‘all knowledge’ to mean only ‘religious knowledge’”(99).

Eventually very strict rules for determining who could become an ulema (by the memorization of the entire Qur’an and of numerous other writings) were put in place.

“All this had a devastating effect on Muslim culture. From a general and distributive concept, ilm became an exclusive and accumulative notion.” “Muslim thought ossified and became totally obscurantist. Consequently, Muslim culture lost its dynamism and degenerated, while the Muslim community was transformed from an open to a closed society” (100).

And then, into this already suspicious environment came the printing press.

“Not surprisingly, the arrival of printing produced a hostile response from the ulema, who managed to resist the introduction of printing presses in Muslim countries for nearly three centuries. The mechanical reproduction of the word of God or material connected with it, they argued, was irreverent. Furthermore, they insisted that the only way to understand a text and retain its uncertain authority was to hear or read it aloud, phrase by phrase, by or in the presence of someone

who has already mastered it, and to repeat and discuss it with such a master. The mass printing of books would lead not to understanding and appreciation of sacred and classical texts but to misrepresentation and misunderstanding” (101).

Indeed, it is interesting to conjecture that the free-availability of the printing press might have done to Islam what it did to Catholicism--lead to a splintering of the unity of interpretation and to the creation of numerous new sects each based upon their own interpretation of the words (perhaps with the words being published in the local vernacular instead of the Arabic which the Prophet spoke, as is even now the case). It also might have led, in analogy with the case of Christianity, to an Islamic Enlightenment, and thence to “individualism”.

And yet, something better than that may be happening now, suggests Sardar, with the invention and proliferation of electronic communication technologies, such as compact discs. All of the sacred and classical texts, and all of the interpretations of those words that have been uttered and written from the time of the Prophet to the present, now can be had on CD for anyone to read and interpret.

“In short,” hopes Sardar, “Islamic culture could be remade, refreshed and re-established by the imaginative use of a new communication technology” (104).

Or, it could lead to the development that Sardar deplors when Islamic fundamentalist and western Orientalist alike pick some statement in the Qur’an out of context and use it to show that the Prophet exhorted his followers to rape and kill to the greater glory of God. Sardar gives this example in his opening essay:

“After the September 11 event, for example, a number of Taliban supporters...justified their actions by quoting the following verse: ‘We will put terror into the hearts of the unbelievers. They serve other gods for whom no sanction has been revealed. Hell shall be their home’ (3:149). Yet the apparent meaning attributed to this verse could not be further from the true spirit of the Qur’an. In this particular verse, the Qur’an is addressing the Prophet Muhammad himself. It was revealed during the battle of Uhud, when the small and ill-equipped army of the Prophet faced a much larger and better-equipped enemy. He was concerned about the outcome of the battle. The Qur’an reassures him and promises that the enemy will be terrified by the Prophet’s unprofessional army. Seen in this context, it is not a general instruction to all Muslims; it is a commentary on what was happening at that time” (32).

But if the medium is the message, and if the silent, cheap, widely-available, and privatizing, products of the printing press helped destroy western medieval cosmological unity, then the CD (and, I would add, even more powerfully, the Internet) most likely will do the same to Islamic and indeed all other local unities. Whether

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346 this will lead to the kind of ilm Sardar and I would admire remains to be seen, for
347 when people can think for themselves, they will (I can assure you after forty years
348 as a university professor).

349 Which brings us to the second section of the Sardar Reader which is devoted to
350 essays about postmodernity. The title (of the book and of the section) says “postmod-
351 ernism”, which led me to hope that the essays would be Sardar’s critiques of the
352 intellectual school, derived primarily from Foucault, that has swept European and
353 American universities over the last twenty years, producing torrents of words and
354 controversy but not necessarily much “ilm”, in my judgement. But, in fact, Sardar’s
355 essays are not primarily about the intellectual movement but rather about the post-
356 modern world itself, especially the consequences of mass-produced images of the
357 good life dispensed globally by Hollywood, Walt Disney and the like.

358 Sardar is concerned about the postmodern world itself which “does not represent
359 a discontinuity with history, a sharp break from modernity, but an extension of the
360 grand western narrative of secularism and its associated ideology of capitalism and
361 bourgeois liberalism. Whereas Nietzsche, providing the philosophical basis for mod-
362 ernity, declared that ‘God is dead’, ‘there are no facts, only interpretations...,’ post-
363 modernism “extends Nietzsche’s assertions by declaring that even a moral interpret-
364 ation of phenomena is not possible.” Postmodernism “has appropriated aesthetics
365 and made it its own to ensure that aesthetics triumphs over ethics as a prime focus
366 of social and intellectual concern” (209).

367 As a consequence, in a chapter on Bosnia, Sardar can conclude by asking the
368 reader to

369 “Consider a future 20 years from hence when the world will witness the emerg-
370 ence of a new brand of ‘terrorist.’ He or she will be a young, angry Muslim who
371 will have been born and grown up in Europe. But by that time the legitimation
372 of their anger will have been forgotten--postmodernism has no memory let along
373 much respect for history. The ‘terrorist’ will be seeking revenge, seeking justice,
374 seeking homelands--and their powerlessness will leave them no recourse but that
375 of terrorism. Thus today’s victims of the west will become tomorrow’s demons
376 of the west. And evil will have triumphed totally” (218).

377
378 But here I believe Sardar has gotten himself into a kind of a bind. I am no fan
379 of much of the writing and assertions of the many of the “postmodern” schools of
380 thought, especially if they encourage people to withdraw entirely from action and
381 only engage in criticism. Yet, I am afraid, Sardar perhaps to the contrary notwith-
382 standing, the fundamental PoMo analysis is valuable. We do live in a world where
383 each of us, increasingly, must come to our own individual conclusions about what
384 is right and wrong, true and false, real and virtual. We have come to this situation
385 not because we are more evil than previous peoples, or because we are using (or
386 watching and reading) more evil activities than did previous generations. Rather we
387 are individualizing and situationalizing our ethics and morals because each of us
388 tends to experience “reality” in ways that are increasingly different from each other,

and because we interact with that reality and each other through increasingly novel and artificial ways for which previous rules, mores, and ethical standards are less and less obviously useful or “correct”.

From my understanding of Sardar’s story, the ulema were correct: you cannot have old wisdom and new communication technologies. It is comparatively easy to protect “truth” (and the monopoly of those who “correctly” understand “the truth”) in an oral society where there are no authoritative written texts to refer to. Of course, “truth” is in fact quite fluid in oral societies that do not know how to read or write. Foundation and other basic moral and philosophical stories in fact change quite easily and often rapidly if the only way to retain and transmit knowledge is by memory and the spoken word. But this change is often not noticed, and is not in fact noticeable in any easily proven way.

Once writing is invented, or has come to be known, and an oral tradition is reduced to the printed word, truth becomes both more certain and frozen, and more arguable and complex. But it is also far easier once writing is known to create a priestly/scholarly class that knows how to read and write, and who possesses, creates, and interprets the few handwritten copies of the truth.

The Islamic case clearly shows that knowledge can flourish in a society where many people know how to read and write, even though all writing is by hand. But it also shows the severe limits to the spread of and increase of knowledge, as well as the ease by which a scholarly class can eventually obtain a monopoly over it. That class did the right thing, from their perspective, when they banned the printing press. Widespread availability of the holy texts and their interpretations almost certainly would have eroded the scholars’ power and led to modern “protestant” sects based on differing interpretations of the words, in addition to the traditional sects that still characterize Islam today.

CDs, and especially now the Internet, are fragmenting “truth” as never before, and creating an intellectual and ethical chaos that threatens the survival of us all. All facts, beliefs, myths and lies now fly about the globe free to be grasped and interpreted by anyone in anyway one prefers. And there is no clear obvious source of THE truth to which everyone in the world can and will turn.

But what is the best solution? To ban the individualizing communication technologies and keep all knowledge safe in a frozen interpretive past? To observe (as the PoMos do) that all truth is relative and that some people have been able to force their view of “truth” upon the rest, such that it is the task of scholars merely to expose this, since pretending there is some other “truth” that should be enthroned instead is simply to privilege those views over others? Or, as in my case, should we accept the “truth” that there is no “truth” but that learning peacefully yet powerfully to negotiate meanings and beliefs among people with highly diverse views is the challenge—the ethical challenge—of humanity from now on?

After many thousand years, humans moved from small, homogeneous hunting and gathering bands and tribes into largely sedentary and small agricultural communities, thence to empires (enabled by the wider communicative power of writing systems) featuring cities surrounded by agricultural areas, then to modern nation-states enabled by the printing press, and now to globally-connected electronic communities “infor-

med” by the economic and ideological desires of Fox, CNN, BBC, NHK, CCTV, Star-TV and Al-Jazeera leavened by a myriad radio talk shows and Internet chatlines and listservs—with numerous face-to-face conversations thrown in. Similarly cosmologies have also expanded over time from the utterly unquestionable truth of one’s experiences in a tribe, to the need for an absolute guide in order to deal with other True Believers in modern times, to the emerging futures of confusing complexity and uncertainty. Governance too has moved from the instant application of tribal taboos, to absolute written laws of the King (then the People) enforced by the threat of killing force by judges and police, now to the mediation of conflicts negotiated to “whatever works” and not to “what is correct” according to some authoritative external standard whether religious or legal.

The task for those of us who wonder about the impacts of these (largely technologically-driven) changes on humans, beliefs, cultures, societies, and environments is to determine how it is possible for each of us to develop ethical awareness and responses appropriate to the chaos around us. Once upon a time—in closed societies with uniform beliefs and practices—the Golden Rule was enough: we could with confidence “do unto others as we would have them do unto us.” Now, in a culturally-complex and fluid world, the Golden Rule is often a recipe for conflict, not a preventer of it. I may “do” to another something that seems perfectly fine from my point of view only to discover that I have just done something deeply offensive from the perspective of my companion.

The new Golden Rule must be to strive to “do unto others what they would have you do unto them.” That requires a prior desire not to offend others, recognizing their right to difference and indeed to delight in it; the willingness to spend the time figuring out what others feel is “the right thing to do”; and then the courage to behave a bit awkwardly, if not self-offensively, as we try to “do” as they would have us do unto them.

From what I understand of Sardar’s position, there is nothing in Islam that inherently prevents such an ethic. Indeed, perhaps more so than some other religions, Islam might well encourage this kind of inner-directed faith that permits outer-directed flexibility in the interest of global fairness, justice, and equity.

And if I am wrong, I am certain Sardar will correct me so we will all know about it.

Finally, readers of *Futures* will—or should—be familiar with the burden of Sardar’s third and last section, on “Other Futures.” Chapter 15, “The Problem of Futures Studies” comes from the introduction to his book, *Rescuing All Our Futures* (London: Adamantine, 1998), which itself was perhaps inspired by a raucous debate in *Futures* in 1993 between Sardar, Rick Slaughter, and Sohail Inayatullah on decolonizing westernized futures studies. Chapter 17, “Other Futures: Non-Western Cultures in Futures Studies” appeared in Rick Slaughter’s *Knowledge Base of Future Studies*, Vol. 3 (Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia, 1996), while the final chapter in the Reader, “What Chaos? What Coherence? Across the River I Called” was a plenary address at the World Futures Studies World Conference in Turku, Finland in 1993 (and was published in the proceedings of the conference subsequently).

All futurists—and all peoples of the world whose visions of the futures have not been heard over the blaring din of postmodernity—owe a great debt of appreciation

to Sardar for assuring, in his role as editor of *Futures*, that Others' futures have been a bit less marginalized than they might otherwise have been by vacuous views such as mine. But there is so much more that needs to be done.

And it will be done.

There is already a significant shift in the graduate students who study futures studies at the University of Hawaii. Once it was almost entirely (but never entirely) the purview of a small number of adventurous "haoles" (white, westerners). Now students from across Asia and the Pacific Islands flock to futures courses and do outstanding work that clearly shows they are beyond both blind obedience to tradition and blind infatuation of modernity/postmodernity. I believe they are but the vanguard of many more to come. I am also proud to say that our Department of Political Science (under the leadership of Michael Shapiro, an arch PoMo if there ever was one) also now features an academic specialization on Indigenous Politics that seeks to revitalize and further the views and futures of indigenous peoples everywhere.

In the essay on "Non-Western Cultures in Futures Studies", Sardar quotes me (actually quoting Madhi Elmandjra!) forecasting the future global population ratios of "whites" to "nonwhites" if current trends continue. In the middle of the 19th Century there were more people of European ancestry on the globe than ever before in part because they exported their "excess population" to the "New Worlds" of the Americas and Oceania. This also coincided with the peak of western imperialism and global technological domination. Since the middle of the 20th century, the fertility and formal imperial presence of "whites" has been severely declining while the fertility and independence of "nonwhites" has significantly increased, for the most part. The point is, there simply won't be that many white folks on the globe within another hundred years, compared to people of color, for westerners to dominant as they have for the past several centuries. While George W. Bush and his advisors seem bent on having America rule the world by military force for the foreseeable future (and they might succeed for a while), time is definitely not on their side (indeed, the face of the "average American" is also significantly and quickly darkening as the Empire threatens).

Soon, though perhaps not soon enough, *Futures* will be filled with myriad visions of cultural futures unimaginable by many privileged futurists now. Among these will probably be new and diverse visions of Islamic futures as well.

And when that time comes, then what's next? Naturally, I think futures visions of cyborgs, artefacts, clones, and assorted extra-terrestrials will be clamoring then to be heard. But my question is, do you suppose *Futures* Editor Zia Sardar will be among the first gladly to welcome them in?

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