

## **Title: Decolonizing Anticipatory Practices**

**Abstract:** What does the future look like? Who owns/shapes these images of the future? Whose identity, knowledge, needs, and desires are not represented in these futures?

In the field of futures studies, various narrative methodologies are extensively used to build impactful images of possible futures. Futurists widely accept that the image of the future that one holds determines their attitude towards the future and how they behave in the present.

It should surprise nobody then, that as practitioners of foresight we spend significant time and effort in generating narratives of possible, plausible and preferred futures. In doing so, while the concept of alternative futures is held at the core of the discipline, the conversation around alternative histories gets left out. More often than not, the subjective yet widely-accepted (as most 'legitimate') frameworks of time, space and meaning-making tend to shape these narratives. Resultantly, the generated images of the future are predominantly expert-led and 'colonised' by historically popularized worldviews. Often, the dominant worldviews are largely tacit and practitioners may be unaware of these biases. However, in a world that is highly globalized and increasingly multicultural, large scale projects that rely on anticipatory methods for designing future-ready products, policies, and strategies, cannot afford to ignore this gap that further perpetuates inequity and power imbalance between stakeholder groups. These anticipatory practices, while aimed at exploring plural possibilities, can contribute to the alienation of marginalized and underserved communities from the process as well as outputs of futures work.

Taking into account the dominant Western worldview that shapes the disciplines of futures studies today— as the singular form of exploration, this paper explores ways in which anticipatory practices in contemporary times may be decolonized and opened up to non-western cultural perspectives. Recognizing the role of anticipation as a way of engaging with uncertainty and exploring alternatives in order to build more sustainable and equitable futures, the paper argues for a need to account for the diversity of perspectives in our world and the lack of it in our methods.

The paper begins by taking a long-form view on the history of anticipatory studies and examines the popular theories, frameworks, and methods found in literature through a critical-cultural lens. This is done with an intention to problematize and surface underlying values and assumptions in the discourse calling attention to the implicit definitions of growth/progress as well as the dominant linear conception of time. Thus making evident, the epistemologies privileged and normalized in the various contemporary methods of anticipation as well as the knowledge produced. Rooted in the multidisciplinary research undertaken by the author during her master's thesis, this work lies at the intersection of futures studies, non-western perspectives of anticipation and decoloniality. It discusses explorations aimed at bringing epistemological plurality to the discourse drawing from the author's own identity as a racialized, female practitioner from the global south. Decoloniality is understood, here, as an

act of delinking from the hegemonic narrative of Western civilization and to engage in building knowledge and arguments that supersede the current hegemony of Western knowledge (Mignolo, 2011). Additionally, this work is an attempt to build on previous efforts to include non-western perspective in futures discourse through frameworks such as Causal Layered Analysis (Inayatullah, 1998), Integral futures (Slaughter, 2012) and Sardar's four laws of futures studies (Sardar, 2010).

The paper explores the use of an intercultural learning framework (Andreotti & de Souza, 2008) derived from the work of Indian philosopher and subaltern author Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as a way for building critical spaces for engaging with diverse cultural perspectives on futures by initiating a dialogue around the subjectivity of both normalized as well as marginalised epistemologies of future. These sites for critical anticipation also serve as a space for intercultural empathy and interaction and provide an enriching insight into how competing worldviews might collide/resolve in practice in a multicultural urban setting. Some of the key issues discussed in relation to this are that of politics of participatory frameworks of anticipation, and the care on the part of the facilitators needed to acknowledge, celebrate, and negotiate the varying lived histories at play during any act of anticipating futures.

Finally, by presenting a case of adapting an Indian folk-storytelling tradition as an anticipatory tool, the paper offers a tangible way of bringing epistemic plurality to the methods in practice, designed by recovering modes of anticipation from previously colonized cultures. As foresight/anticipatory practices move outside purely organizational confines and engage in conversations about a collective human/ civilizational future, practical frameworks to facilitate and support reconciliation, tolerance, and consideration of diverse views and ideas must be designed, promoted and used. The alternative method discussed in this paper fills a significant void in the contemporary futures discourse, that of methods/frameworks directly derived and reflective of non-western perspectives on the future. It aims to facilitate and inspire the creation of positive and compelling images of the future that may otherwise remain ignored and/or marginalized in anticipatory work. Through discussion of case-studies of this method in use, the author highlights how the themes and characters depicted in the stories created and told by the participants reflect their authentic worldview and present unique and refreshing ideas that are seldom seen in outputs of futures discourse, making a case for decolonization as a key cultural marker of inclusive anticipatory practices.

## References:

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**Key Words:** Cultural foresight, decolonization, non-western worldview, epistemological pluralism