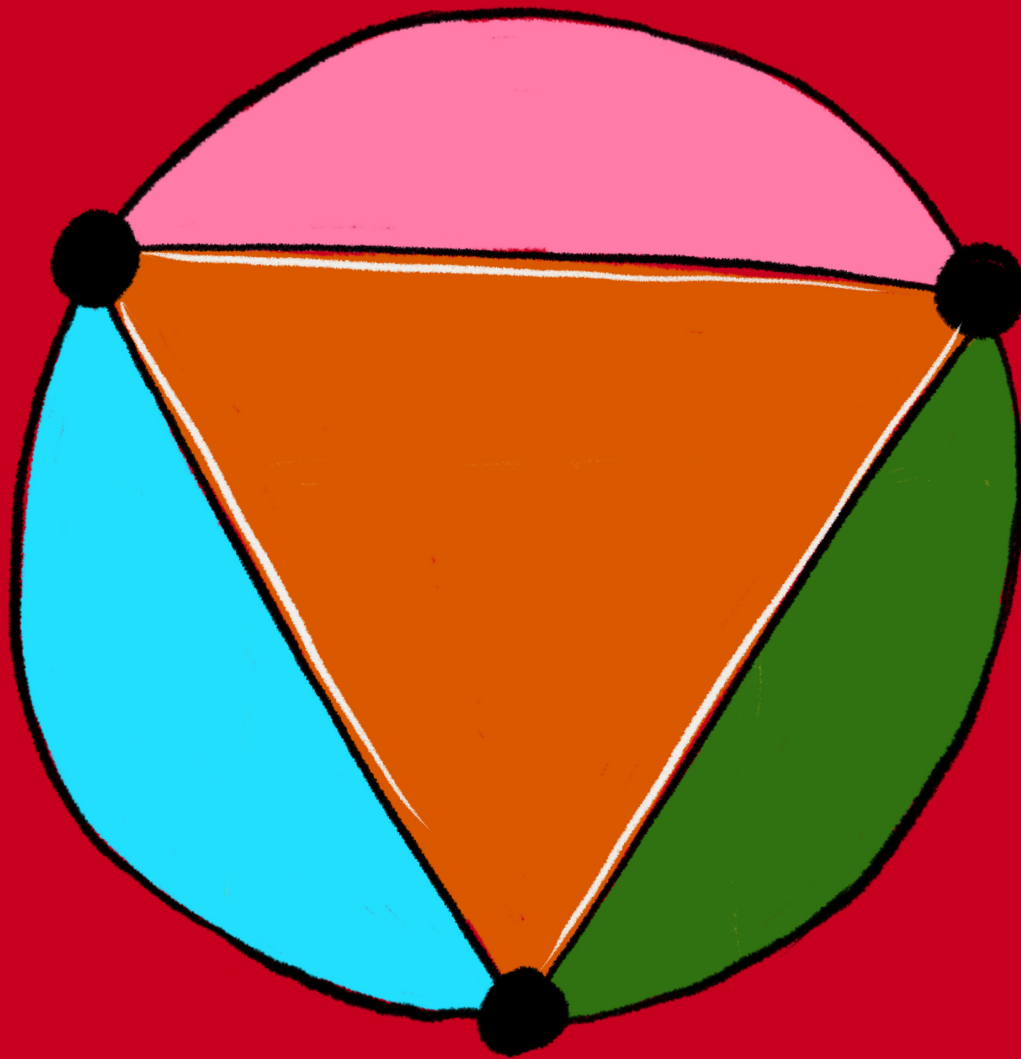# Decolonizing Futures: Exploring Storytelling as a Tool for Inclusion in Foresight

Pupul Bisht

December 2017

Decolonizing Futures: Exploring Storytelling as a Tool for Inclusion in Foresight

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

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Taking into account the dominant Western worldview that shapes the disciplines of futures studies today– as the singular form of futures exploration, this major research project explores ways in which storytelling can be used as a tool for opening up the discourse to non-western perspectives. Through a series of participatory and co-design workshops, the research highlights the dominance of a western perspective that 'colonises' most contemporary futures explorations. The research proposes an alternative method for storytelling futures that may be used as a new method in the scenario generation phase of the foresight process. This method is designed as an adaptation of the culturally-inclusive Kaavad storytelling tradition of India and offers an alternative framework that supports a futures exploration that is informed by non-western ways of knowing, doing and being. When tested with a diverse group of participants, the proposed method shows that transformative visions of the future that reflect authentic worldview of participants can be generated through methods and frameworks that support, respect and celebrate epistemological plurality.

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

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————

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Thank you Mumma and Papa for teaching me how to overcome self-doubt and for being the wind beneath my wings.

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A Short Story

Once upon a time, about seven months before I penned down my MRP proposal, I was given the task of reflecting on my favourite story set in the future for a class assignment. Instantly, several science-fiction novels, short stories, movies flashed in front of my eyes and I felt overwhelmed at the thought of picking one. "But everyone is going to pick one of those" I thought to myself. I decided I could contribute better to the class discussion if I brought a different kind of story to the table, instead.

"I should write about an Indian story set in the future", I was determined to offer a different perspective and excited to see how my Canadian classmates would react to it.

What followed was two weeks of endless searching with no success. Google failed me first, my memory failed me second and then about a dozen family members, including my grandmother, could not recall any story that would fit my assignment brief. Disappointed and surprised, I ended up writing about a short story by H.G. Wells for the sake of meeting the deadline. "Does the Indian culture not think about the future?" was the reaction I was met with when I shared my experience of fruitless searching in class.

I knew that wasn't true. The Indian culture thrives on storytelling. Stories are so intrinsically woven in our cultural fabric that it is impossible to imagine a single phenomenon, event or place without associated narratives. We are also a culture of dreamers, filled with hope, aspirations and unbound imagination. Then why is it, that I could not find any Indian story set in the future?

Why was my culture not telling stories about the future? Or, was my culture telling stories about the future differently?

1

Introduction: Many Different Tomorrows

Storytelling has been omnipresent in human culture, as a crucial tool for preserving memories of what came before and for imagining what could come after. Over the course of human history, the role of storytelling in transferring knowledge, communicating values and inspiring action has been undeniable. 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 what attitude he/she has towards the future and how he/she behaves 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. In a world that is becoming increasingly multicultural, large scale projects that rely on foresight 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.

Recognizing this lack of inclusive participatory methods, this project began as an exploration aimed at developing an alternative futures method that uses storytelling as a tool for inclusion of diverse voices in the foresight process. Research quickly made it clear, however, that any attempt to decolonize the discourse would need to move beyond mere inclusive participation and explicitly address the dominant eurocentric worldview that shapes the discipline today– as the singular form of futures exploration, pushing for epistemological plurality by opening up the discourse to non-western perspectives. Previous efforts to include non-western perspective in futures discourse through frameworks such as Causal Layered

supporting epistemological plurality and accessible to non-expert stakeholders

setting a bias towards a methodological focus rather than theoretical or synoptic

How might inclusive storytelling serve to decolonize Foresight processes?

· What are the features of inclusive storytelling?

· How might it work as a futures thinking tool?

· What is foresight? What is the current process?
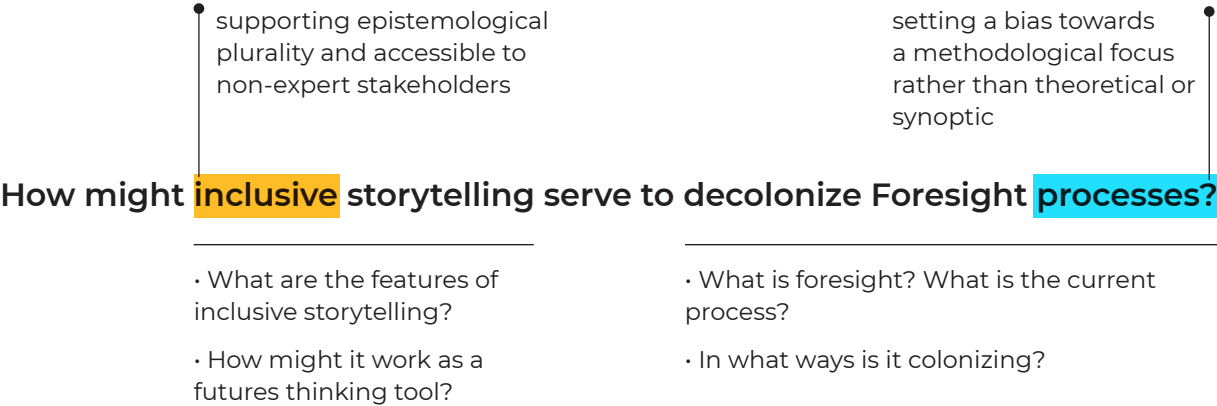
· In what ways is it colonizing?

Figure 1: Breakdown of the research question

Analysis (Inayatullah, 1998), Integral futures (Slaughter, 2004) and Sardar's four laws of futures studies (Sardar, 2010), acted as a point of departure for this research. The research that follows thus focuses on design and development of a new futures method that supports plural epistemologies, mental models and worldviews in generating and storytelling transformative visions of the future.

As will be shown, the prospection phase of a normative foresight process was chosen for this intervention after careful considerations. The proposed method, thus, presents an alternative way of generating futures scenarios and storytelling the preferred vision. Given my own cultural background, the proposed method is an adaptation of a folk storytelling tradition native to the state of Rajasthan in north-western India. It is my hope that by uncovering the often invisible worldviews underlying popular foresight methods that prevent true cultural inclusion and, by presenting an alternative method that takes cultural diversity into account, this project might contribute to the effort of those who came before me and inspire imagination of new ways of doing foresight in those who come after me.

Areas of Inquiry

This research is at the intersection of three areas of study – Foresight, Storytelling and Decoloniality. Below, I summarize the scope of inquiry under each of these areas, as carried out in the context of this research project.

FORESIGHT

Strategic foresight is the ability to create and maintain a high-quality, coherent and functional forward view, and to use the insights arising in useful organisational ways. For example to detect adverse conditions, guide policy, shape strategy, and to explore new markets, products and services. It represents a fusion of futures methods with those of strategic management (Slaughter, 1999). The practice of strategic foresight is a methodological discipline within the umbrella interdisciplinary field of futures studies. Throughout this research document the terms 'foresight' and 'futures' may be used interchangeably. However, since the final outcome of the project is not limited to 'organizational' foresight, the term 'strategic' has been deliberately omitted in writing of this research

unless specifically addressing organizational foresight practices/outcomes. This research lies in the critical realm of foresight and examines the popular practices of the contemporary futures discourse through the lens of cultural and epistemological plurality. Some of the fundamental principles used for the design of the research interventions are informed and inspired by the preceding futures work done by futurists such as Ziauddin Sardar, Sohail Inayatullah, Ashis Nandy and Ivana Milojevic in the areas of critical, cultural, civilizational and feminist foresight.

STORYTELLING

This research examined storytelling practices at two levels. First, the research investigated existing methods in foresight that use storytelling techniques either in their process or in the communication of their outputs. This was done with an aim to understand the value and significance of storytelling as it relates to futures work as well as to identify gaps and scope for intervention. Second, the research looked into storytelling techniques and traditions as practiced in non-western cultures. While I scanned literature for storytelling practices from a wide and diverse range of non-western cultures, a deep dive was only made into traditions native to Indigenous North American and South-Asian cultures. In this phase, the inquiry was focused on understanding salient features that distinguish western and non-western storytelling traditions as well as to see how different cultural epistemologies of time, space and futurity are expressed through storytelling. Given the time constraint and my personal cultural background, an Indian tradition of storytelling was chosen for adaptation in the design of the final proposed method.

DECOLONIALITY

Through the course of this research, I learnt that the theoretical landscape of literature criticizing colonial rule is divided into post-colonial theory and decolonial theory. While both challenge the insularity of historical narratives and traditions emanating from Europe, it was an important part of

my learning process as a researcher to understand that each theory emerged in different socio-historical contexts with distinct experiences of colonialism. In this research, the critique of existing foresight methods been done with an intention to challenge dominant worldviews and highlight epistemic limitation. This project understands decoloniality 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 (Minolo, 2011). The construction of an alternative method has been done with an intention to recover and rearticulate alternate forms of knowing, being and doing as originating from previously colonized cultures. The post-colonial literature is predominantly shaped by the works of subaltern authors such as Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak and Homi Bhabha amongst others. Since the pedagogy of my training as a designer at National Institute of Design, India was shaped by the subaltern thought, the lens of decoloniality used in this research also uses the work of these authors as a foundational base.
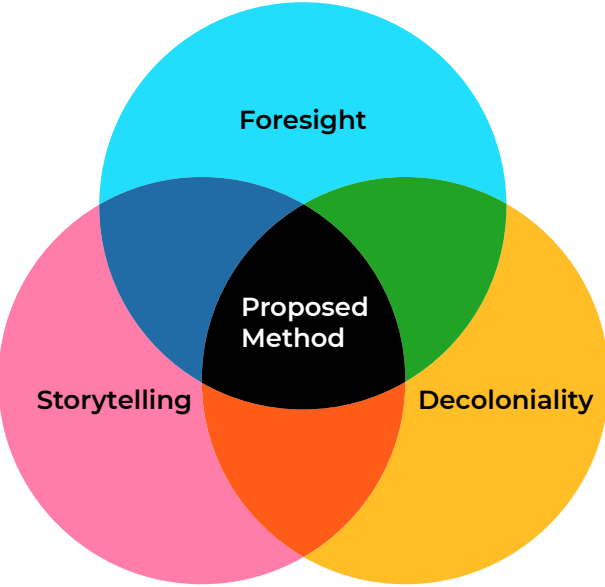
Figure 2: Areas of Inquiry

Figure 3: Schematic representation of the research methodology [1]
Adapted from Pacini (2017)

2

Project Methodology

his project uses a combination of tools and methods from the fields of design thinking and foresight. The various phases of the research process followed in the project can be understoon through the steps in the double-diamond design thinking methodology.

These four typical steps: discover, define, develop, and deliver, were guided by a set of research questions at each stage. (See Fig 3)

Primary research

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Two primary research methods were used in this MRP. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight (three females and five males) experts in foresight, non-western storytelling and decolonial design/research methodology. Given the focus of the research, all experts interviewed for this project were generally from non-western backgrounds and specifically from south-asian backgrounds (Indian, Pakistani, Indo-Caribbean).[2] Out of these, about half of the interviewees were first or second-generation diaspora members in Canada, United States and UK.

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[1] It is important to note that the actual project methodology was highly non-linear and messy in parts. However, in the reporting of this research, a conventional western design-thinking framework has been used to communicate the process keeping in mind the primary audience of this work as well as to reflect my training as a design researcher in the SFI program at OCAD U.

[2] While studying non-western storytelling traditions I had interviewed indigenous storytellers in Toronto as well. However given my lack of familiarity with their culture and given the time-constraint of the project, I intentionally did not analyze the data collected during these interviews. This was done as an act of respect and to avoid misinterpretation in reporting.

Their reflections on themes of dual-cultural identity and decoloniality within their respective fields of practice/study provided a rich and complex data for the project. The experts in Indian storytelling traditions were all trained and practicing in India. Recognizing that 'non-western' cultures are vast and varied, it was important for me to locate this research in a specific non-western context. My decision to include the voice of experts of Indian/South-Asian backgrounds was influenced by this need and the significant minority of South Asian voices in contemporary futures discourse. Given my own cultural background and my prior experience with Indian arts/cultures, this seemed to be the most authentic scope for this research.

The experts interviewed for this project include:

Lina Srivastava- Lina Srivastava is a social innovation strategist with over 15 years of experience working at the intersection of social action, community-centered design, and interactive storytelling. The founder of CIEL, Lina is the co-creator of the My City project, and the lead on the Transformational Change Leadership storytelling project, and has been involved in engagement campaigns for several documentaries, including Oscar-winning Born into Brothels, Emmy-nominated The Devil Came on Horseback, Oscar-winning Inocente, Sundance-award winning Who Is Dayani Cristal?, and climate change film How To Let Go of the World and Let Go of All Those Things Climate Can't Change.

Dr. Nalini Mohabir- Dr. Nalini Mohabir is Assistant Professor, Geography, Planning and Environment at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. Her research is at the intersections of history, memory, geography, and literature. Her doctoral research focused on the last ship to return ex-indentured labourers from the Caribbean back to (a post-independence) India. Her current research interests centre around Caribbean studies, diaspora, migration, and postcolonialism.

Ahmed Ansari- Ahmed is currently a PhD student in Design Studies at Carnegie Mellon University. His research interests intersect at the junction between design, cultural & media studies, and the philosophy of technology. He is also a member of the Decolonizing Design Collective, and writes on decolonization, cultural theory, and design. Apart from research, he teaches courses in systems theory, critical and cultural theory, and design studies at Carnegie Mellon University.

Santanu Bose- Santanu Bose is Associate Professor and Dean, Academic Affairs at National School of Drama, India. With a background in comparative literature from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, Santanu is a trained actor and theatre personnel. His knowledge and current creative practice focuses on creating performances in multi-cultural situations.

Rajesh Tailang- Rajesh Tailang is an critically acclaimed, international actor of an Indian background. With a background in theatre, Rajesh's current practice lies at the intersection of diverse areas of expertise such as writing, acting and direction. Additionally, Rajesh is also a poet and writes extensively in Hindi and Urdu. Currently he also teaches phonetics at National School of Drama, India.

Nina Sabnani- Nina Sabnani is an artist and storyteller who uses film, illustration and writing to tell her stories. She graduated in painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Vadodara and received a master's degree in film from Syracuse University, NY, which she pursued as a Fulbright Fellow in 1997. Her doctoral research at the IDC focused on Rajasthan's Kaavad storytelling tradition. After teaching for two decades at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, Nina has made Mumbai her home. Currently she is Professor at the Industrial Design Centre, IIT Bombay. Nina's research interests include exploring the dynamics between words and images in storytelling. Her work in film and illustrated books, seeks to bring together animation and ethnography.

Ziauddin Sardar- Ziauddin Sardar is a London-based scholar, award-winning writer, cultural critic and public intellectual who specialises in Muslim thought, the future of Islam, futures studies and science and cultural relations. Prospect magazine has named him as one of Britain's top 100 public intellectuals and The Independent newspaper calls him: 'Britain's own Muslim polymath'. He is also the Director of the Centre of Postnormal Policy and Futures Studies, East West Chicago, and the editor of its journal East West Affairs. Formerly Editor of Futures (1999-2012), the monthly journal of policy, planning and futures studies, he is now consulting editor of Futures. He was a long-standing columnist on the New Statements and has contributed to the Guardian, the Times, the Independent and numerous other newspapers and magazines.

Shekhar Sen- Shekhar Sen is an Indian singer, music composer, lyricist, playwright and actor. Since 1998 as playwright, actor, singer, director and composer, Shekhar Sen's well researched musical monoact plays "Tulsi", "Kabeer", "Vivekanand", "Sahab" and "Soordas" have received global acclaim for their amazing amalgam of skill, sensitivity and soul power. Shekhar has been the recipient of critical acclaim from the international community and innumerable awards, honours from prestigious organizations. He was honoured with "Padma Shri" award in 2015 by the Government Of India.

WORKSHOPS

Second, two participatory design workshops were conducted at OCAD U with two different groups of participants recruited for each workshop's purpose. The workshops served to initiate a dialogue around the need for culturally inclusive methodologies in futures discourse. Through the use of dialogic and generative design methods, the workshops also helped in developing deeper understanding of how diverse worldviews play out in practice. The workshops conducted for this project include the following sessions.

Figure 4: Proportional representation of different areas of expertise/knowledge in the sample

1. Workshop #1: Design with Dialogue Session–'Decolonizing Futures through Storytelling' (20 participants)

This workshop was conducted as a DwD session and saw the participation of 20 individuals with expertise/knowledge in foresight, storytelling and non-western perspectives. While there was significant overlap in areas of expertise, with most participants bringing in knowledge on more than one of the above mentioned fields, during the workshop each participant was encouraged to identify one primary area of interest/expertise. Fig. 4 shows the proportion of representation of these primary areas of expertise in the participant sample.

Through a structured series of co-design activities, diverse teams of participants engaged in a futures exercise designed to explicitly address culturally subjective worldviews. The research design of this workshop used a combination of methods such as drawing, storytelling, collective brainstorming and survey forms. 'Metaphors' and 'drawings' were the the primary tools used to elicit and understand the culturally conditioned perspectives that tend shape and dominate futures conversations.

Foresight

Non-Western Perspectives

Storytelling

2. Workshop #2: Pilot Workshop– 'Re-imaging Kaavad as an Inclusive method for Storytelling Futures' (9 participants)

The second workshop in this project, served as a pilot workshop designed to test the adaptation of traditional Indian storytelling technique as a foresight method. A group of 9 participants from YSI Ontario network, engaged in a day long pilot study exploring the futures of 'Healing from Colonial Trauma over the Next 30 Years'. This workshop was the first study that saw the use of Kaavad adapted as a futures method and was a crucial in exploring the application of the method as well as scope for improvement for the next iterations. The participants in this workshop came from a variety of professional/creative backgrounds such as social work, activism, theatre and youth movement organizing. The cultural backgrounds of the participants was a diverse mix of settler Canadians (of varied ethno-racial backgrounds) and indigenous.

In accordance to the design of the Kaavad methods, the primary methods employed in this workshop were visual and oral storytelling and live performance. At the end of the workshop, participants were also asked to reflect on their experiences through a facilitated dialogic sharing circle.

The workshops served to initiate a dialogue around the need for culturally inclusive methodologies in futures discourse. Through the use of dialogic and generative design methods, the workshops also helped in developing deeper understanding of how diverse worldviews play out in practice.

Figure 5: Participants storytelling their visions of the future during the workshop

Image Credit: Nannini Lee Balakrishnan

Study Limitations

While every effort was made to create and execute a comprehensive research project, the following study limitations are acknowledged:

1. Time and resource limitation- Additional funding for this project could have facilitated the development and testing of more than one iteration of the proposed alternative method. Additional expert interviews could be conducted with other experts in foresight and non-western storytelling. The research acknowledges that the alternative method proposed here is only the first design iteration and like any work-in-progress, it would require further testing to refine and develop it further.

3. Other non-western traditions- Given the vast variety and diversity of storytelling traditions from non-western cultures, this project had to limit its scope to studying a handful traditions from India. This decision was influenced both my the time constraints and limitation of the researcher's background. Due to this limitation, the research could not delve into the nuances of differences and similarities between non-western worldviews, however, such a comprehensive and comparative study would be greatly beneficial for the current futures discourse.
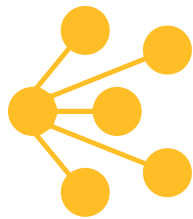
2. Sample size and participant mix- This project could benefit from participation of individuals with non-western perspectives. Given the geographical constraint of the project, the participants recruited for both the workshop were from Toronto, Canada. This study would benefit if similar methods are tested in non-western geographies/cultures. Since the proposed alternative method is an adaptation of an Indian storytelling tradition, testing the method in its native cultural context with participation of individuals that hold an Indian worldview is recognised as essential but could not be achieved within the scope of this project.

3

Part I: Foresighting Futures

While there seems to be stress on rigour and creativity in the contemporary foresight practices, many argue that popular methods are still significantly limited in their ability to be participatory, culturally inclusive and accessible. Due to the high uncertainty of our times, the discipline of foresight has gained considerable popularity in both private and public sector. Given the rapidly increasing scale of impact of futures work, paying close attention to the underlying biases and assumptions in the theories and frameworks in use has become more important than ever. Several scholars and practitioners of the field have recognized this need and have proposed solutions to fill this gap. Before investigating some of these efforts, it is important to understand how we got to where we are today because disciplines and discourses do not emerge out of vacuum. Rather, they emerge from a certain social and cultural milieu and reflect the biases and myopia of that worldview. In the case of futures studies, eurocentrism is deeply embedded in the structure of the discipline as well as in how knowledge is acquired and propagated. This dominant mode of thinking about the future has a clear western genealogy which is evident from the way time and space are perceived, masculinity and technology are privileged, social organisation and institutional arrangements are structured, and non-western cultures made invisible (Sardar, 2010).

The Origin Story

Our current practice is shaped by a series of key historical events that led to the genesis and subsequent evolution of futures studies. The literature traces the inception of futures studies, as a discrete scholarly activity, back to World War II. In its initial few decades, the following three 'approaches' in the evolution of futures studies have been identified (Masini and Gillwald, 1990):

1. Between the end of World War II and the 1960s, futures studies was dominated by a **'technical/ analytical perspective'** and functioned primarily as a subdiscipline of other disciplines concerned largely with military research and goals.

2. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the **'personal/**

individual perspective' of futures studies gained influence. The work of individual writers and thinkers such as Toffler, de Jouvenel and Jungk became influential during this time.

3. During the 1980s, the **'organizational/ social perspective'** asserted itself as the third approach of futures studies.

The epistemological traditions underpinning the current foresight practice, described in the following section have been categorized by these three approaches.

While Masini and Gillwald considered the above mentioned shifts as the most significant and 'distinctive' phases of evolution of the discipline; in his paper titled 'Colonizing the future: the 'other' dimension of futures studies', Ziauddin Sardar argues that these three approaches are distinctive only from the perspective of the West, but are remarkably, and historically, consistent in the way they approach the non-West. (Sardar, 1993)

MADE IN USA

During the period between World War II and the 1960s, the USA was adjusting to its newly acquired status of a global superpower thanks to the military-industrial complex that sustained the US economy and its political and economic domination of the non-Western world. Resultantly, the inception of futures studies at this time came as an offshoot of military and intelligence research: with a clear purpose to identify possible future trouble spots, political and national movements within newly independent Third World states that could move towards socialism and the communist bloc, and map out strategies and programmes for 'development' of the Third World. This first technical/analytical phase of futures studies thus emerged from the need to keep the non-Western countries ideologically pure and in full agreement with Western political and economic interests. (Sardar, 1993)

The purpose of identification of possible trouble spots as well as the mapping out of strategies is still

an essential part of the current foresight practice, in the form of wildcards, black swans, signposts, and roadmaps. Evidently, even after seven decades since its inception, the tools employed by foresight practitioners are strongly reminiscent of the discipline's post-war military/industrial roots. Moreover, for many strategic foresight projects, the core function still remains to make clients and businesses 'future-ready'/ 'future-proof' with their political and economic interests in mind.

DISCOVERING ALTERNATIVES

In 1970s, futures work grew rapidly and —the institutional side of futures research had taken what remains its present shape (e.g., World Future Society, World Futures Studies Federation). The new social movements, especially environmental movements, broadened the futures field, which had previously been dominated by —a few big North American think-tanks serving military and related industrial goals. Although the most famous futurists still dealt mainly with trends, the focus in futures studies started to shift towards the choices between alternative futures, processes of change, desirable futures, cultural issues, and world problematique (following the publication of Predicament of Mankind in 1976) (Milojević, 2002). Amongst the more technocratically oriented segments of Western society, the environmental awareness led to the belief that new worlds had to be discovered and colonized-perhaps the Moon, perhaps Mars (Sardar, 1993).

The fantasy of colonization of new worlds, especially Mars, still remains a popular theme in many futures projects and narratives. Science-fiction, which is a popular genre of storytelling used by many present day foresight practitioners, too has an unmistakable obsession with discovery of new territories and invasions by the 'other'. John Rieder in his eye-opening book Colonialism and the Emergence of Science-Fiction notes how H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds begins with an explicit comparison of the Martian invasion to colonial expansion in Tasmania. "The Tasmanians," Wells writes,

"in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?" (Wells in Rieder, 2008)

An article published in The Atlantic highlighting the prevalence of reverse-colonialism narratives in modern day science-fiction, notes:

The fact that colonialism is so central to science-fiction, and that science-fiction is so central to our own pop culture, suggests that the colonial experience remains more tightly bound up with our political life and public culture than we sometimes like to think. Sci-fi, then, doesn't just demonstrate future possibilities, but future limits—the extent to which dreams of what we'll do remain captive to the things we've already done. (Berlatsky, 2014)

IN TIMES OF CRISIS

With the rise of OPEC and the accompanied scare of energy shortages in the West, combined with the aggressive anti-Western stance of the Iranian revolution, almost every multinational corporation acquired a futuristic research cell and the US government created a special national energy department, the Office of Technology Assessment. The origins of futures studies lie in a crisis related to environmental politics and economics of growth. It was further enhanced and shaped by a perceived threat from the non-West, as well as an idolization of the non-Western cultures (Sardar, 1993). Highlighting 'selective' idolization of non-western cultures by futurists, Sardar further notes:

The point is that those futurist thinkers who use non-Western philosophies and modes of knowing as the basis for constructing alternative visions of the future, and work for that vision, operate strictly in the European tradition of humanism-a tradition that is totally enveloped in the secularist worldview. The end-product of their thought is often a grotesque parody of non-Western thought, philosophy and tradition. As such, even the 'new spirituality' and 'values' that the futurists suffering from the 'More syndrome' seek have to conform to the dictates of secularism. Hence, it is always the secular forms of Eastern mysticism-like Zen Buddhism-with which these futurists find sympathy. The vast corpus of non-secular non-Western traditions are almost totally ignored. (ibid.)

Current Practice

THE FIVE PARADIGMS OF FUTURES STUDIES

Recognising the contextual specificity linked to origin of the initial three 'approaches' of futures studies, discussed in the previous session, futurists in the past few decades have addressed the limitations and biases by developing new methods, theories, frameworks and concepts.
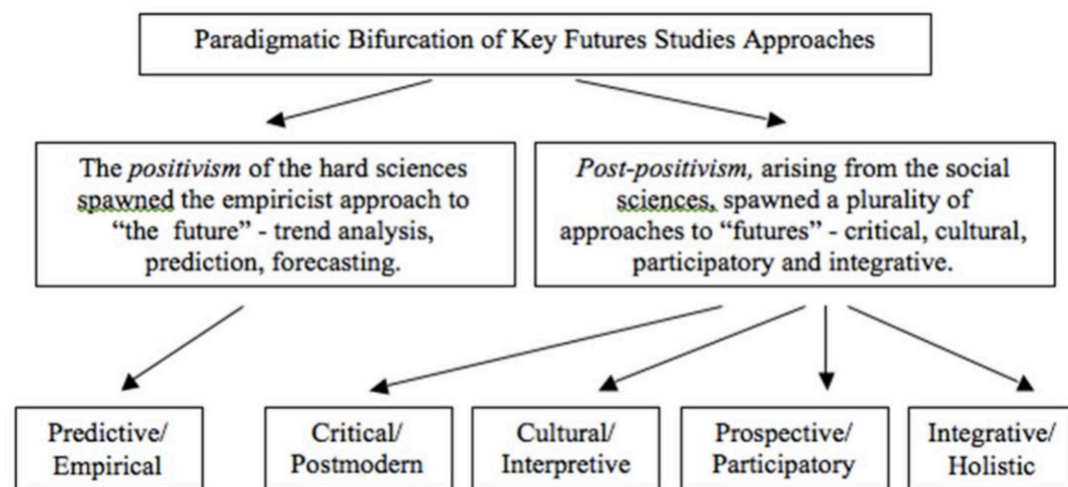
Paradigmatic Bifurcation of Key Futures Studies Approaches				
The *positivism* of the hard sciences spawned the empiricist approach to "the future" - trend analysis, prediction, forecasting.		*Post-positivism*, arising from the social sciences, spawned a plurality of approaches to "futures" - critical, cultural, participatory and integrative.		
Predictive/ Empirical	Critical/ Postmodern	Cultural/ Interpretive	Prospective/ Participatory	Integrative/ Holistic

Figure 6: Paradigmatic Bifurcation of Futures Studies Approaches (Gidley © 2010)

There are several typologies to describe the different futures epistemologies and how they have emerged.

Richard Slaughter divides the current futures field into: (1) futures research commissioned by corporations and governments, which is generally —analytical and quantitative and involves sophisticated, time consuming and costly methods; (2) futures studies, which are more academic and combine consulting with teaching and popularization; and (3) futures movements that promote social innovation (Milojević, 2002).

Sohail Inayatullah divides the discourse of the future into four dimensions: (1) the predictive/ empirical, attempts to predict and control the future; (2) the cultural/interpretive, examines how different cultures, cosmologies, discourses approach and create the future; (3) the critical/ post-structural, makes problematic the categories used to construct the future, asking what are the particular social costs for any approach or view of the future (Inayatullah, 1993); and (4) anticipatory action learning, in which the future is re-created by stakeholders through a shared and deep process of questioning (Inayatullah, 2002).

Building on the above mentioned typologies, J. Gidley adds a relatively new fifth dimension of 'integral/holistic' futures perspective, that is concerned with enabling normative visions of 'planetary futures'. She proposes a five-stranded futures typology, beginning with a single bifurcation between positivist and postpositivist (Fig. 3) (Gidley, 2013).

The methodological alternatives explored and proposed in this research are located within the critical futures studies and are not concerned with predicting/forecasting the future. Growing out of the critical theory tradition, this perspective of futures studies was developed out of Europe in the 1970's as an act of balancing out the empiricist practice of futures in US. Being 'normative' this approach explores the realm of 'prefered futures' and explicitly questions uncontested images of the future by addressing contextual dimensions. The critical futures approach is often criticised for being too 'subjective' (Gidley, 2013). However, since this research aims to challenge 'normalized' worldviews, 'subjectivity' was seen as essential in defining theoretical positioning of the inquiry. Highlighting this aspect, Inayatullah writes:

The critical approach to futures studies, then, does not ask comfortable questions but rather seeks to use questions to disturb power relations. The goal is not to clarify the future but to see how we have created the category of future in the first place. The task is to distance ourselves from present conversations and the language used that makes these conversations intelligible. Values are not considered universal, as in the interpretive approach, or considered to be essentially vacuous statements, as in the empirical, but as historically derived and particular to social structure and practices that contextualize them. (Inayatullah (1993), p. 239)

One of the most deeply rooted manifestation of a western worldview in foresight methods, as will become clearer in the following section, was the concept of time and how it is visualised. The linear conception of time is inherent in most methods and is often taken for granted as the only way of understanding temporal relationships between past, present and future. By making this dominant view of time problematic, the critical approach seeks to explore the role of constant interaction between past, present and future (Hideg, 2002). This view of interpreting time zones as constantly intertwining entities, is resonant with the way in which many non-western cultures perceive time and temporality.

The proposed method is both 'cultural/interpretive' and 'prospective/participatory' because it deals with opening up the foresight process to historically marginalized perspectives. In doing so, the method centres the conversation around discovery of culturally and historically specific narratives, specifically of non-western origins. One of the recognised strengths of the these approaches is their creativity and engagement of different perspectives. These two principles are identified as core principles for the design of the new method.

A theoretical criteria was developed for the conceptualisation and design of the new method, informed by the literature review of various paradigms of foresight. According to that criteria, a method is inclusive if;

1. It challenges normalized categories of time and space, and initiates a conversation around normative visions of the future that may fall outside mainstream narratives/imagination.

2. Supports plural ways of knowing, doing and being as well as allows for plurality of interpretation/expression.

3. Is truly participatory by way of being accessible to non-expert stakeholders, and by creating a sense of agency to (re)shape the future in the participants.

NORMATIVE FORESIGHT PROCESS

Given the methodological focus of this research, it was important to study the generic process framework followed by present day practitioners. It is important to note that the dimensions discussed above are not mutually exclusive and are often used in combination depending on context of the inquiry. The relevance of this section is to understand how different epistemological paradigms overlap in practice.

The generic foresight process framework used here was developed by Joseph Voros based upon prior independent work by Mintzberg, Horton and Slaughter. The framework recognises several distinct phases, leading from the initial gathering of information, through to the production of outputs intended as input into the more familiar activities of strategy development and strategic planning (Voros, 2005). Besides the quality of organisation, this framework was chosen for its high-alignment with the process followed and methods taught in SFI at OCAD University. The framework has been used as a diagnostic tool for examining how strategic foresight work is typically undertaken.

Step 1: Input
What IS happening?
This initial step of the foresight process is for gathering information and data of patterns of
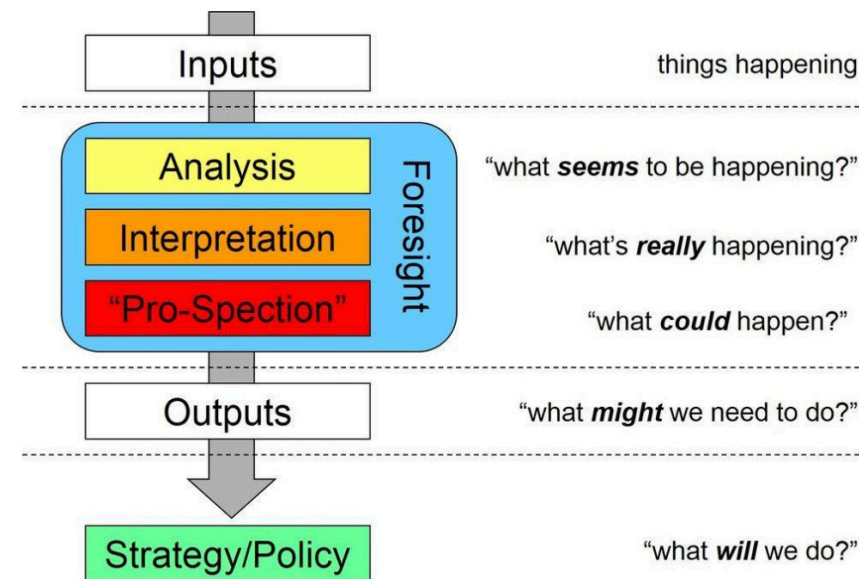
Figure 7: Typical questions which illustrate the type of activity or thinking which is undertaken at each step (Voros © 2010)

Figure 8: Popular methods corresponding to each step in the generic process framework (Voros © 2010)

change, trends, weak signals and emerging issues. Some of the most commonly used techniques employed at this step are environmental scanning and Delphi method. Resultantly, step is characteristically limited to participation of 'experts' and top-level stakeholders. Since this step provides 'raw-material' for the foresight project, the lack of inclusion and diverse participation can be considered a matter of grave concern. If the intention through futures work is to truly move towards 'prefered' futures, the question of 'To whom are the imagined futures preferable?' needs to be diligently held at the core of any inquiry. And any effort to answer this question without the involvement of those who will have to live with the consequences of the imagined futures outcomes, would be self-defeating.

Step 3: Analysis
What SEEMS to be happening?
Analysis can be considered as a preliminary stage to more in-depth foresight work, rather than as a stand-alone technique itself. The goal is to a better understanding by creating order out of the bewildering variety of messy data which the Inputs step usually generates. (Voros, 2005) The results

of the analysis are then fed into the next step of Interpretation. Common tools here are trend analysis, cross-impact matrices and other such analytical techniques.

Step 4: Interpretation
What is REALLY happening?
This step lies in the realm of critical futures studies and seeks to uncover what lies beneath the surface. Some of the approaches and tools commonly used in this step are Systems Thinking and Causal Layered Analysis (Inayatullah, 1998). The methods in this step of the foresight process were found to be most in-aligned with the purpose of checking assumptions and biases in futures work. However, most inquiries often go as deep as systemic drivers. In order to uncover epistemological assumptions, the last two levels of CLA are most crucial as they question the latent worldviews and myths of findings/ problem statements developed in the analysis section.

Step 4: Prospection
What MIGHT happen?
The word prospection was proposed by Joseph Voros to denote 'the activity of purposefully looking
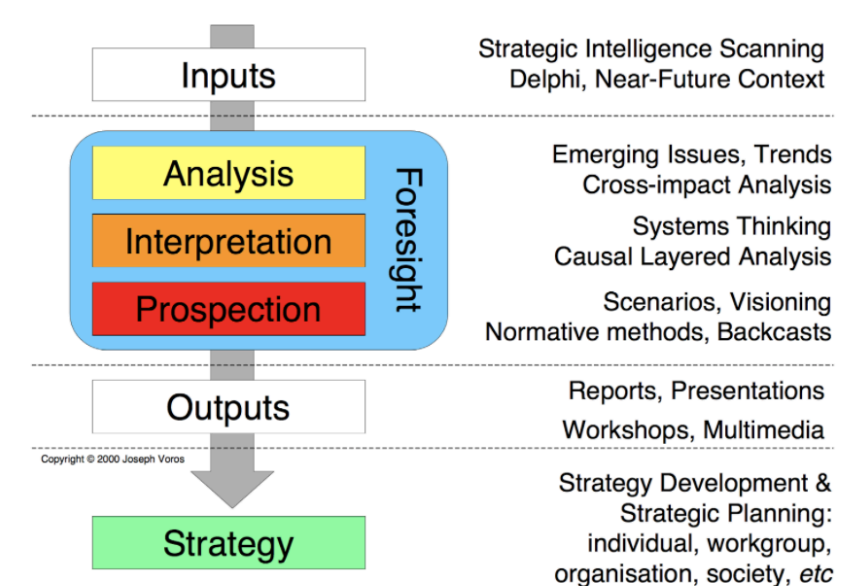
forward to create forward views'. In this step various views of alternative futures are explicitly examined or created. It is where scenarios and 'visioning' are located in the broader foresight process. (ibid.)

Since this step is concerned with creation and imagination of scenarios yet to come, narrative and storytelling methodologies are being extensively used both for generation and communication of outcomes of this step. While storytelling as a technique could bring tremendous value in terms of making the various steps of the generic process, discussed above, more inclusive, the literature as well interviews carried out with experts in foresight, identified the prospection phase as the most meaningful point of intervention for the scope of this research. In the following section, I discuss the significance of storytelling techniques in prospection/visioning and also examine the limitations and assumptions of three most popular methods of scenario generation.

Moreover, **Step 5: Output,** being the most 'playful' step in the process was also addressed in the design of the final proposed method. **Step 6:** Strategy, although briefly touched in the final application

testing workshop, falls outside the scope of this master's research and has not been designed for explicitly.

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Scenarios, stories, storytelling

This research began by recognizing a need to tell stories of futures that are different from the mainstream and popular 'futuristic' narratives. As mentioned in the previous section, through literature review it became clear that in the foresight process futures narratives and stories are generated as outcomes of the scenario-generation phase. The literature also revealed some significant work using narrative techniques done by futurists belonging to the 'cultural/interpretive' dimension. Some of these previously explored concepts and theories provided a foundation to build the design interventions explored in this project. In this section I will briefly touch upon scenarios and their significance in the foresight process. The focus of discussion would remain on examining three of the more popular methods of scenario-generation to uncover underlying assumptions, biases, and limitations.

A basic tenet of futures studies is that images of the future inform the decisions people make and how they act. The notion that human purpose can affect the course of events to create futures that are significant transformations of the present underlies all of futures research. A great amount of academic work done in this area has been dedicated to identifying existing and historical images of the future within a society and analysing their structures and content (Polak, 1961). The action research equivalent is creating images of alternative futures to provide a lens from which to critique and evaluate present day actions (Curry and Schultz, 2009). In contemporary foresight practice, the process of creating these images of the future is often referred to as scenario generation.

One of the earliest definitions of the word 'scenario' perhaps comes from Herman Kahn (1967):

> "…a hypothetical sequence of events constructed for the purpose of focusing attention on causal events and decision points."
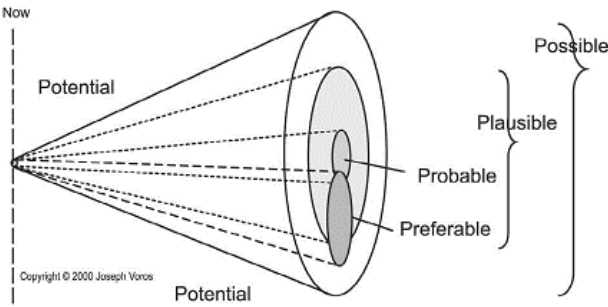
Figure 9: The 'Futures Cone' (Voros © 2003)

However, a more precise definition of scenario would focus solely on alternative futures depicted as stories, that is, descriptions with a narrative structure (Bishop, Hines, and Collins, 2007). Since the 1970s, and the famous success of the Shell and Mont Fleur scenarios, scenario-based planning has become a major business and policy-development tool, extensively explored by authors such as Kees van der Heijden and Peter Schwarz. Foresight practitioners are generally well aware that scenarios are already a form of storytelling and writing narrative fictions with characters in a particular setting, navigating a future world/state as outcomes of a foresight project is not uncommon. (Schroeder, 2011)

Since the post-positivist turn in the discourse, most practitioners of foresight have focused on generation and development of multiple scenarios, explicitly delineating themselves from those in the business of predicting a 'singular' future. This act of acknowledging the possibility of multiple futures outcomes diverging at varying degrees from our present state is a characteristic feature of the 'critical' approach (and other approaches thereafter) of foresight . This fundamental conceptual framing of present-day foresight is evident in the prevalent use of the plural term 'futures' and is often explained using the visual of the *Cone of Plausibility* also known as the *Futures Cone* (Candy, 2010; Hancock & Bezold, 1994; Taylor, 1993; Voros, 2003; von Reibnitz, 1988).
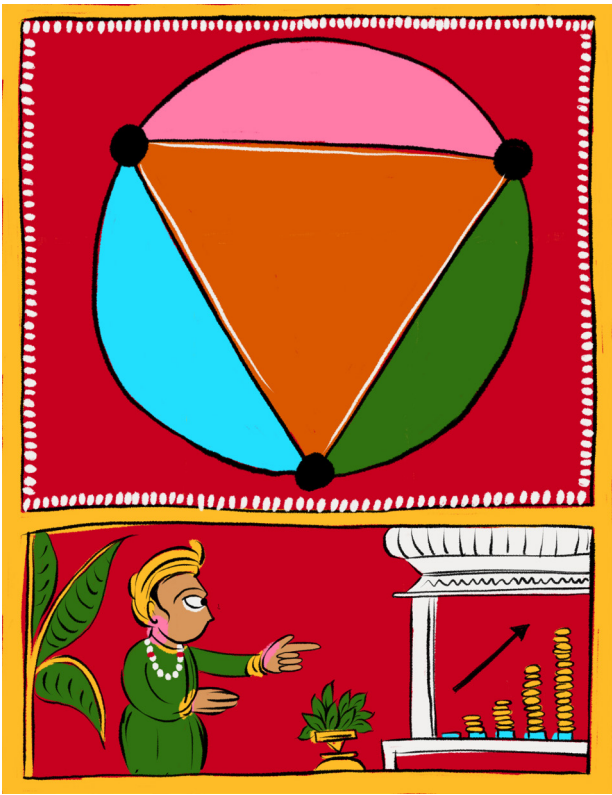
Figure 10: Different shapes and worldviews [3]

The futures cones successfully illustrates the core idea of 'many alternative' futures and explores a range of divergent 'P' futures on a scale of possibility to probability. Michael Marien proposes a similar classification that includes six main categories of futures– thinking: (1) probable futures; (2) possible futures; (3) preferable futures; (4) present changes; (5) panoramic views; and (6) questioning all of the above (Marien, 2002). This classification of futures is a commonly used typology in foresight, with many futurists and methods being committed to envisioning futures scenarios within a specific zone, *e.g. exploring the possible, acknowledging the plausible, and imagining the preferable etc.* In terms of these categories, the futures scenarios and stories developed through the proposed method in this research fall under 'possible' and 'preferable'.

While the futures cone stands to depict multiplicity of alternative futures, when examined through

the lens of cultural plurality it fails to be inclusive to diverse ways of seeing and thinking about the future (present and past). Upon evaluation against the three point criteria for inclusivity (formulated in the previous section), the futures cone does not comply with the first two points, such that;

1. Instead of challenging normalized categories of time and space, it upholds the western modernist worldview by visualizing present and future as linearly arranged entities.

2. By doing so, it also fails to supports plural ways of knowing as many languages and cultures around the world are known to visualize time as non-linear. A person with a worldview that sees time as cyclical or as spiral may find this representation alienating and/or challenging to adopt (Latour, 1986). In my personal experience as a student of foresight (with a non-western background), I found the cone of plausibility extremely limiting and 'incomplete'.

Additionally, another limitation of the futures cone was discovered during workshop #1. The fact that in the diagram the present is represented as a point with multiple futures diverging from this singular point of origin, overrides the fact that there is a multitude of different conditions in the present as there have been in the past. Without acknowledging alternative experiences and narratives of the past and present, imagination of alternative futures falls short of moving beyond numerical multiplicity. The explorations carried out with participants from diverse backgrounds during workshop #1 and #2 provided significant evidence for this and will be discussed in greater detail in the corresponding sections.

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[3] As discussed above, the common epistemology of time and progress in futures discourse is linear (shown by the lower panel). Hence, at any given point, the future is seen as 'lying ahead' of the present, which in turn lies ahead of the past. The circular diagram in the top panel depicts the Indian epistemology of time, that I discovered while studying Indian storytelling traditions. In this cyclic concept, past-present-future are seen as points on the same circle and any story talking about the future, talks about the past simultaneously.

Methods for generating scenarios

Winston Churchill once said, "first we shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us". In case of futures studies, it can be said, "first we shape our future and then our future shapes us". Since the future doesn't yet exist, the 'future' that we are referring to is merely an image of the future and it is this image that shapes our attitude and actions. But what shapes the image? The image of the future in any foresight project is shaped in equal parts by the participants of that exercise as well as the tools used to guide/aide the process of scenario generation. As is common in most modern fields of inquiry, the tools and frameworks themselves are often considered objective and neutral.

When it comes to inclusion, most research efforts fail to look beyond the question of "Who is in the room/at the table?". While representation is an important first step, many scholars and practitioners working towards decolonization of design and research have argued for the need for decolonization of methods (Tunstall, 2013). This is because like theory, practical methods and frameworks carry biases and assumptions inherent in the worldview of the context in which they have emerged (as was noted in the case of futures cone above). Any attempt to decolonize futures outcomes must first recognize the need to take account of cultural diversity in the frameworks, theories and methods.

Therefore, at the very onset of this research a bias was set towards developing an alternative methodological framework/tool-set that can provide an alternative way of doing a part of the foresight process. Moreover, most of the literature on decolonizing futures discourse was concerned with 'deconstruction' and provided a theoretical critique of the practice. While problem exploration and analysis is essential, being a designer and practitioner of foresight, I felt the need to move beyond theory and engage in construction of

practical alternatives so that we can transform practice by seizing to use methods that have been recognized as non-inclusive.

A prerequisite to the process of designing an alternative method of scenario generation was to first examine the existing methods being used in the field. Based on literature review and through observation of on-field practice, three specific methods of scenario-generation were identified as common/popular. The selected methods are; 1) 2X2 Uncertainty Matrix; 2) Four Generic Futures; and 3) Causal Layered Analysis.

There is no lack of studies in the literature dedicated to methods of scenario generation. Several authors have presented extensive and sophisticated typologies for scenario methods. There are also significant number of studies on process overviews of different methods. However, there is a lack of studies focused on comparative analysis of outcomes degenerated through the use of different methods. Recognising this gap, Curry & Schultz (2009) conducted a comparative research guided by the question 'do different scenario building methods generate distinctively different outputs?'. By using base data from a completed scenario project, the authors and volunteer participants reprocessed the raw and filtered drivers and interview data through four different scenario building methods: the 2x2 matrix approach; causal layered analysis; the Manoa approach; and the scenario archetypes (four generic futures) approach.

Their exploratory comparison confirmed that different scenario generation methods yield not only different narratives and insights, but qualitatively different participant experiences (ibid.). The findings of their research were highly relevant to my study, however, the question of 'latent/inherent worldviews and epistemologies' was not part of their inquiry but was an important question for this research.

FOUR GENERIC FUTURES
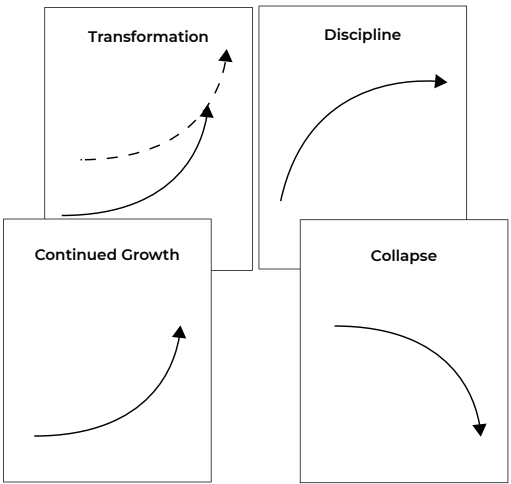
Figure 11: Dator's Four Generic Images

Through the analysis of wide range of narratives about the future from various sources, Datour (2009) concluded that all stories about the future fall under 4 generic categories (or piles, as he called them). He called these, 'Continued Growth'; 'Collapse'; 'Transformation'; and 'Discipline'. In practice, when using this method for scenario generation, participants are asked to imagine the future state as it would look in the case of each of the four images.

This method of futuring is extremely popular due to its exploratory nature and due to its ability to explicitly force participants to consider scenarios that may be outside their comfort zone. However, there are some ways in which this method is clearly 'Western'.

1. This method too prescribes a deductive style of knowledge creation since participants are required to "deduce" possible futures of anything by using the template of the four generic alternative futures, augmented by information about the history and present of whatever the object of our forecast might be. In Dator's (2009) own words; 'We also use the four generic alternative futures as the basis for what we call "deductive forecasting" (others might call if "backcasting").'

2. In many of his papers, Dator stresses upon the fact that the four generic futures are not "made up" but "are built on a very firm empirical base" (Dator, 2017). On scanning a recently published list of sources for the four generic futures, I found that no non-Western source was included. Most of the sources mentioned were published in USA with a few from Europe and Australia (ibid.) Evidently, non-Western perspectives of future may largely be missing from these categories that are derived from and reflected in Western sources.

2X2 MATRIX
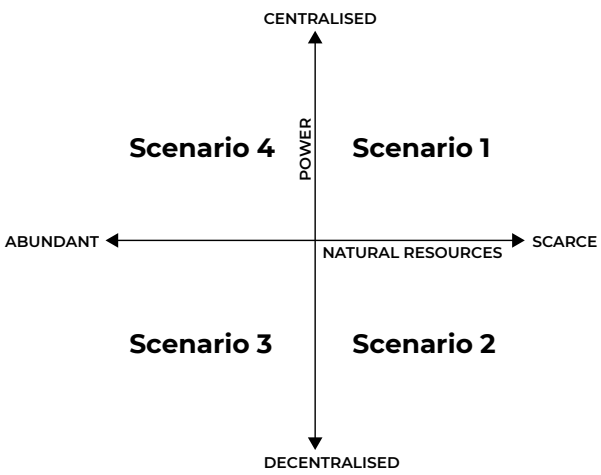
Figure 12: A representative illustration of a 2X2 matrix

In the 2x2 double uncertainty method, the two axes represent the most high-impact uncertainties of the overall system under scrutiny (the system is defined by the project question/problem statement). The scenarios are then created by combining uncertainties corresponding to each quadrant. A total set of four scenarios is typically generated in the process. Additionally, the scenarios created by the combination of the axes should usually generate challenging strategic questions for the organisation, sector, or domain.

When evaluated against the cultural inclusivity criteria of this research, the 2X2 matrix reveals obvious western epistemic biases.

1. The method uses a Cartesian plane and has a mathematical style of knowledge creation. This approach is solely informed by a deductive approach to reasoning.

2. The method of assigning values to the variables on axes, stresses on the need for defining binaries.

CAUSAL LAYERED ANALYSIS

Causal layered analysis (CLA) was developed by the futurist Sohail Inayatullah (2004) as a way of integrating different futures perspectives – the empirical, the interpretive, and the critical – within one approach. The purpose of so doing is to ensure that "the research and discovery process is open to different ways of knowing" (Inayatullah, 2003). CLA translates these different ways of knowing into four layers: "litany" (the way in which trends and issues are presented in the public domain); "systems" (causal and institutional-based understanding); "worldview"; and "metaphor". Of all contemporary foresight methods, CLA is one method that was specifically designed to initiate conversations around subjectivity of worldviews and cultural myths that shape our present day society and is informed by the post-structural theory.

The scenarios are developed in two stages. An analysis phase works through the layers to worldview and metaphor, then these are 'inflected', and the scenario is developed by reinterpreting the layers through the lens of the inflection.

While CLA comes very close to the core purpose of this research, through a pilot-workshop conducted with peers, I found the following limitations* of its use:

1. The terminology used to describe the different levels in the framework is very specific and can often intimidate participants by coming-off as too 'jargony'. In the pilot workshop, this initial hiccup hindered the ability of participants (despite them being students of foresight) to engage freely with the tool.

2. The second phase of the process, when the participants are required to change the identified metaphor in order to transform the layers above, can be extremely challenging without expert guidance.

Literature also revealed that most practitioners prefer to use CLA in the interpretation phase, pairing it with either 2X2 matrix or Four Generic Images method for actual scenario generation due to its limitation is generating narratives. Despite these finding, the concepts of narrative foresight (of which CLA is a part) were found to be resonant with my inquiry (Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015). Due to this I decided to work with the core components of the narrative foresight approach used in CLA and explored ways in which it could be made more accessible. In the next section, I discuss this process and my findings from a workshop modelled on the exploration, in greater detail.

However, it is important to acknowledge that these observations are not definitive and maybe affected by my own lack of fluency with CLA as a method and that of my peers.

The official description of the problem. Externalized reality. Often disconnected to other perspectives. Usually a repeated newspaper headline.

Often short-term analysis, either single or multivariable. Historical variables are explored. Policy reports.

Discerning deep assumptions behind the problem. Important to understand the issues from multiple worldviews.

Deep stories, unconscious dimension of the problem. Inner transformation is required here. Solutions emerge from new narratives.

Figure 13: Causal Layered Analysis. *Redrawn from Inayatullah (2017)*

Image Credit: Roberto Andrade

Figure 14: Workshop #1: Decolonizing Futures through Storytelling was conducted as a Design with Dialogue session

4

Part II: Multiplicity vs Plurality

From my study of the common scenario methods, I realised that there was still significant scope for designing a practical intervention that challenges dominant worldviews and supports generation and telling of stories about the future that may otherwise be marginalized.

Of all the contemporary practices of futures available in the literature, the concepts and frameworks of narrative foresight (Inayatullah & Milojevic, 2015) were found to be most congruent to the purpose of this research.

Narrative foresight is a specific foresight practice under the critical and interpretive traditions. This practice builds on previous theoretical work and pedagogical practice of futurists Ivana Milojevic and Sohail Inayatullah utilised in many countries (i.e. Australia, Pakistan, Serbia, Singapore, Iran, Bangladesh, South Korea, the United States, Taiwan, and Malaysia), settings (i.e. governments, universities, non- governmental organisations, corporations, professional associations).

Metaphors of future

With a primary focus on the stories individuals, organizations, states and civilizations tell themselves about the future, narrative foresight supports the exploration of the worldviews and myths that underlie possible, probable and preferred futures. In uncovering these underlying worldviews, the use of myths and metaphors is a characteristic feature of narrative foresight. In practice, the Causal Layered Analysis method, discussed in the previous section, is an important tool used in the process of narrative foresight (ibid.).

However, as discussed previously, I found CLA to not be very accessible as a method. Therefore, for the design of the first exploration in this research project, I decide to deconstruct the CLA and reconstruct a process using its most essential constituent element— metaphors of future, with an intention to make it more accessible and easier to use by participants that do not hold expertise in foresight.

This 'redesigned' process was then workshopped with a group of 20 participants. The purpose of this workshop was to explicitly explore the influence of differing worldviews on conversations about the future and to use those findings to design the alternative method for decolonizing the discourse. A series of questions that guided this first inquiry is as follows:

1. How do people from different cultures metaphorize/visualize future differently?

2. How does this worldview shape their attitude towards problem solving?

3. What are the implications of holding a particular worldview of the future?

4. How do people respond when asked to adopt a new worldview that may be different from their own? Do they find it challenging? Is it easier to adopt a worldview that is 'common' in pop-culture?

5. How does the narratives of future change with different worldviews?

In the quest of finding answers to these questions, 'metaphors' were chosen as a tool mainly due to their quality of being symbolic, and culturally contextualised yet open to interpretation. The landmark work done by Sohail Inayatullah and Ivana Milojevic through metaphors is not only inspiring but also testifies to the immense power that metaphors hold when it comes to storytelling and sensemaking. Inayatullah and Milojevic note the following about the power of metaphors in decolonizing narratives of future:

> Insight into metaphors, as part of narrative learning, is also an insight into the internal and external stories of persons and organisations as well as insight into societies. Such insights help with the removal of poorly functioning schemas, which often colonise futures with detrimental visions and images. For example, a recent article by Noni Kenny (2015) shows how governing metaphors such as "us versus them", "the West versus the rest" and "society

must be defended" continue to govern terrorism knowledge systems. Not only that, but there is an unquestioned reliance by theorists and decision-makers on "worst case scenarios", including "the accepted wisdom" that terrorism is "an ever-present and expanding threat"; a view which, in turn, sets the direction of counter-terrorism policy. Decolonising the future from such dead-ends and self-fulfilling narratives via the metaphor of a "maze" (Kenny, 2015) for example, disrupts problematic assumptions and opens up spaces for the exploration of alternative scenarios (Milojevic & Inayatullah, 2015, p. 160).

Speaking from an epistemic position, being figures of speech and a common literary tool used in most languages around the world, metaphors also offer a window into the ways in which different languages shape our perception of the world. Since the very onset of this research, the absence of non-western epistemologies of time, space and future in the foresight discourse have been of interest to me. In the field of linguistics, there are several studies that talk about the role that language plays in shaping our perception and visualization of time.[4] In my mother tongue Hindi, for example, both yesterday and tomorrow are denoted by the same word 'kal'. The word 'kal' in itself does not carry connotations of past or future but only indicates a time that is 'not' the present. This conceptualisation is reflected in many Hindi proverbs and metaphors as well as many Indian storytelling techniques that I researched. It makes sense, because these linguistic manifestations are well aligned with the cyclical epistemology of time which is prevalent in the cultures originating from the Indian subcontinent.

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[4] Aymara, an Amerindian language spoken in the Andean highlands of western Bolivia, southeastern Peru, and northern Chile, appears to present a fascinating contrast to well-known spatial and temporal patterns. The speakers of the language visualize themselves as facing their backs towards the future and point backwards when talking about a time that is yet to come. (Núñez & Sweetser, 2006)
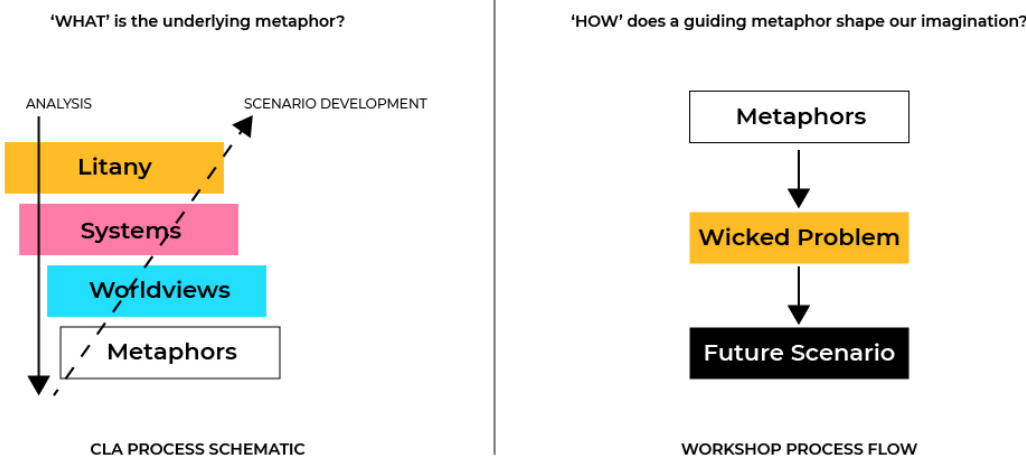
Figure 15: Comparative depiction of schema of CLA and workshop process

Therefore, an inquiry into how linguistic structures shape our worldviews which are then reflected in culturally specific metaphors was relevant to this research. In the following section, I will discuss how I re-arranged the core elements of CLA and narrative foresight to design a workshop around the exploration of how culturally contextualised metaphors impact our worldviews and how that translates into the stories we create and tell about the future.

A Message from the Future

RE-ARRANGING ELEMENTS

As noted previously, the Western epistemology of time as a horizontally-arranged, linear entity is prevalent in many futures frameworks such as the futures cone and three horizons. One of the ways in which CLA challenges and disrupts this spatiality is by visualising time vertically through its iceberg model. Apart from offering an alternative epistemological understanding of time, this vertical spatiality also disrupts the focus of the futures inquiry from "what lies ahead" to "what lies beneath". Therefore, the movement to the bottom-most layers is also a movement back in time, as it encourages us to access deep-rooted narratives that have become an 'invisible' part of our socio-

cultural fabric/memory. While the primary focus of the CLA is to discover metaphors that shape current day problems, the focus of my inquiry was to discover "how" underlying metaphors inform our imagination of the future. I realised that there was a need for me to put the metaphors at the forefront of the activity. As opposed to uncovering historical metaphors at the end of the process (as in CLA), I saw merit in beginning the activity by asking participants to articulate their respective metaphors of the future. The metaphors, then, were used as subjective lens through which participants were asked to approach/look at various wicked problems. Fig.12 below shows a comparative depiction of the schemas of the CLA process and that of the workshop. This alteration made sense because of the following reasons:

1. Given the short span of the workshop (~ 2 hours), accessing metaphors right at the beginning helped in establishing the focus of the workshop on the subjectivity of worldviews and frames that each participant was carrying within them.

2. Once the subjectivity and diversity of perspectives in the room was established, it became easier to explicitly address 'how' metaphors shape our attitudes towards problem solving.

By initiating a dialogue around the subjectivity of both normalized as well as marginalised epistemologies of future, the workshop aimed to create a space for intercultural empathy and interaction. While this intercultural dialogue seemed to be missing from futures pedagogy in North America, literature revealed that futurists in Asia and Australia had initiated such dialogues in their pedagogical work through the use of narratives and metaphors.

I was interested in seeing the response that such an inquiry would receive in Toronto, a city recognised as one of the most multicultural cities in North America.

Workshop Design

The structural design of the workshop was modelled using a four step Intercultural Learning Framework that was derived from the work of Indian philosopher and sub-altern author Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This framework was developed for an innovative history teaching project called 'Through Other Eyes', designed by Vanessa Andreotti and Lunn Mario T M de Souza, that focused on deconstruction of persistent colonial

prejudices in historical narratives and exposing learners to different perspectives in order to give them an opportunity to position themselves in relation to different views. The six metaphors 'employed' in TOE's design were collectively derived from the works of both Spivak and Bhabha. These are: writing of identities, construction of difference, positionality, the four lenses that frame otherness and reinforce unequal relationships of power, the scale of worth and the partiality of perspectives (Portera, 2017). The four conceptual principles drawn by Andreotti and de Souza (2008) for the design of TOE are as follows:

1. LEARNING TO UNLEARN

We learn to perceive that what we consider 'good and ideal' is only one perspective related to where we come from socially, historically and culturally. It also involves perceiving that we carry a 'cultural baggage' filled with ideas and concepts produced in our contexts that affects who we are and what we see, and that although we are different from others in our own contexts, we share much in common with them. Learning to unlearn is about making connections between social-historical processes and encounters that have shaped our contexts, and cultures, and the construction of our knowledges and identities. It is also about becoming aware that all social groups contain internal differences and conflicts, and that culture is a dynamic and conflictual production of meaning in a specific context (ibid.).
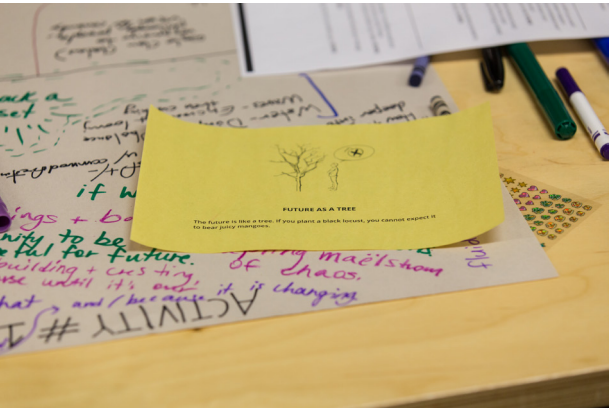
Thus, the first activity of the workshop was designed to enable participants to access and articulate their respective 'subjective' metaphors of the future. The diversity of metaphors generated at each table provided evidence for distinct ways in which different individuals think about the future. This step of the workshop was called 'My Metaphor'.

2. LEARNING TO LISTEN

We learn to recognise the effects and limits of our perspective, and to be receptive to new understandings of the world. It involves learning to perceive how our cultural baggage, the ideas we learn from our social groups, affects our ability to engage with difference. Hence, learning to listen is about learning to keep our perceptions constantly under scrutiny, tracing the origins and implications of our assumptions, in order to open up to different possibilities of understanding and becoming aware that interpretations of what we hear or see might say more about us than about what is actually being said or shown. This process also involves understanding how identities are constructed in interaction between self and other, not only in the communities to which we belong, but also between these communities and others (ibid.).

In keeping with this second concept, the second activity in the workshop was designed to facilitate sharing of metaphors created in the first step amongst participants on the same table. On doing so, participants were able to identify commonalities and contradictions in each other's worldviews.

(From left to right)

Figure 16: Participants drawing their individual metaphors of the future

Figure 17: Participants sharing their metaphors with the rest of their team members

Figure 18: In Activity #4 metaphors from various sources were assigned to the participating teams

Figure 19: The sharing circle at the end of the workshop was conducted as a reflective session 'under the banyan tree'

All Images Credit: Roberto Andrade

This served as a great icebreaking exercise which encouraged a healthy dialogue amongst team-members. This activity was called 'Your Metaphor'.

3. LEARNING TO LEARN

We learn to receive new perspectives, to rearrange and expand our own and to deepen our understanding, going into the uncomfortable space of 'what we do not know we do not know'. It involves creating different possibilities of understanding, trying to see through other eyes by transforming our own and avoiding the tendency to want to turn the other into the self or the self into the other. Therefore, learning to learn is about learning to feel comfortable about crossing the boundaries of the comfort zone within ourselves and engaging with new concepts to rearrange our cultural baggage and renegotiate our understandings, relationships and desires (ibid.).

In the third activity of the workshop, called 'Assigned Metaphors', each participating team was given a new metaphor. The teams were asked to interpret the metaphors assigned to them and then proceed to imagine future scenarios by adopting the worldview depicted by the assigned metaphor. Participants from different cultural backgrounds interpreted the same metaphor differently and the process of adopting a new worldview was described as "challenging" by majority of participants. This is discussed in greater detail in the findings section. The metaphors selected for this activity were collected through secondary research from a variety of sources such as news headlines, articles, film and common vernacular metaphors. I deliberately chose metaphors from a mix of western and non-western sources. The rationale behind this decision will be further discussed in the next section.

4. LEARNING TO REACH OUT

We learn to apply learning itself to our own contexts and in our relationships with others, continuing to reflect on and explore the unknown: new possible ways of being, thinking, doing, knowing and relating. It involves understanding that one needs to be open to the unpredictable outcomes of mutual un-coercive learning and perceiving that in making contact with others, one exposes oneself and exposes others to difference and newness, and this often results in mutual teaching and learning, although this learning may be different for each party involved. Learning to reach out is about learning to engage, to learn and to teach with respect and accountability in the complex and uncomfortable relational 'third' space where identities, power and ideas are negotiated. This process requires the understanding that conflict is a productive component of learning and that the process itself is cyclical: once one has learned to reach out in one context, one is ready to start a new cycle of unlearning, listening, learning and reaching out again at another level (ibid.).

While the fourth concept of intercultural learning was built into all steps of the dialogic workshop, the last and final step where workshop participants were asked to 'sit under a banyan tree' to debrief and reflect on their experiences of the workshop, was specifically designed to facilitate 'learning to reach out'. Some of the most important take-aways of the workshop were generated in this sharing circle.

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The imagery of a banyan tree was evoked in this process due to its association with storytelling, community sharing and conflict resolution in rural India.

Figure 20: Table showing the structure of workshop #1

Four Guiding Principles	Workshop Activity Brief	Activity Type and Duration	Data Collected
1. Learning to Unlearn	**Activity #1** *Draw Your Metaphor* · Participants were asked to visualize and draw a metaphor for the future that best represents their worldview. They were also asked to write an accompanying description in the margin provided on the worksheet.	Individual 10 min	Drawings of metaphors of the future + accompanying textual description
2. Learning to Listen	**Activity #2** *Share Your Metaphor* · Participants were then asked to share their individual metaphors with the rest of their table mates.	Group 10 min	Reflective statements shared during the debrief session at the end of the workshop
3. Learning to Learn	**Activity #3** *Message from 2047 (Part 1)* · Each participating team was asked to chose one metaphor from all the metaphors generated in activity #1. · Each team was assigned a wicked problem to work with. · Adopting the worldview depicted by the chosen metaphor, participants were asked to brainstorm on ways in which they would address the problem, as if they held the belief of the chosen metaphor. · Next, participants were asked to time-travell 30 years into the future to find that humanity actually addressed the problem as they have described in the previous step. They were to then write a short message from the future to someone back in 2017, narrating the story of how things unfolded. · Finally, participants were asked to reflect on aspects of holding this view of the future by filling the worksheet provided to them. **Activity #4** *Message from 2047 (Part 2)* · Teams were assigned new metaphors & asked to repeat Activity #3 with this new metaphor and write a new message from 2047.	Group 30 min X 2	Ideas discussed on each table were recorded as text, scribbles, doodles on big sheets of paper. Message from the future (text) Response form(s)
4. Learning to Reach Out	*Sitting under a Banyan Tree* · All participants reconvened in a circle to share and reflect on their experiences of doing these activities.	Collective 30 min	Audio recording of the session which was later transcribed

Findings and Observations

1. THINKING IN METAPHORS

In the research conducted, using metaphors as a tool to initiate dialogue around subjectivity of truths and worldviews held by individuals, groups and cultures was found to be highly effective. While most futures visioning exercises focus on creating detailed macro/micro images of future states, asking participants to visualize metaphors for future shifted the focus towards depicting and understanding the qualitative, often intangible characteristics of the future. To that effect, the metaphors created by the participants acted as a window into their subjective interpretation of the future. By examining the drawings and accompanying descriptions, one gets a fair idea of what are the adjectives/qualities that an individual, shaped by her cultural background and life experiences, associates with a time yet to come. While some metaphors depicted the future as 'adaptable', others associated the quality of being

'unpredictable hence scary' with the future. The figure below shows the various associated qualities of the future, as derived from the participant data collected in the workshop. The size of the bubble is directly proportional to the frequency of occurrence of ideas.

The highly contextualised nature of metaphors, generated and assigned during the workshop, made the task of interpretation and meaning making both challenging as well as revealing. On one hand, many participants expressed similar ideas and qualities through the use of culturally specific imagery. In most cases, participants used associated personal narratives or pop-cultural references to add meaning to these images. For example, Nannini used the image of 'poppins', a common candy sold in India during the 1990s, to depict the future as a mysterious place full of exciting possibilities. In her description she talks about how working her way through a pack of poppins in the hope of finding as many pieces of her favourite flavour is one of her fondest childhood memories.

> "Metaphors have a way of holding the most truth in the least space."
> — Orson Scott Card

Figure 21: Various adjectives used to describe the future as reflected in participants' metaphors
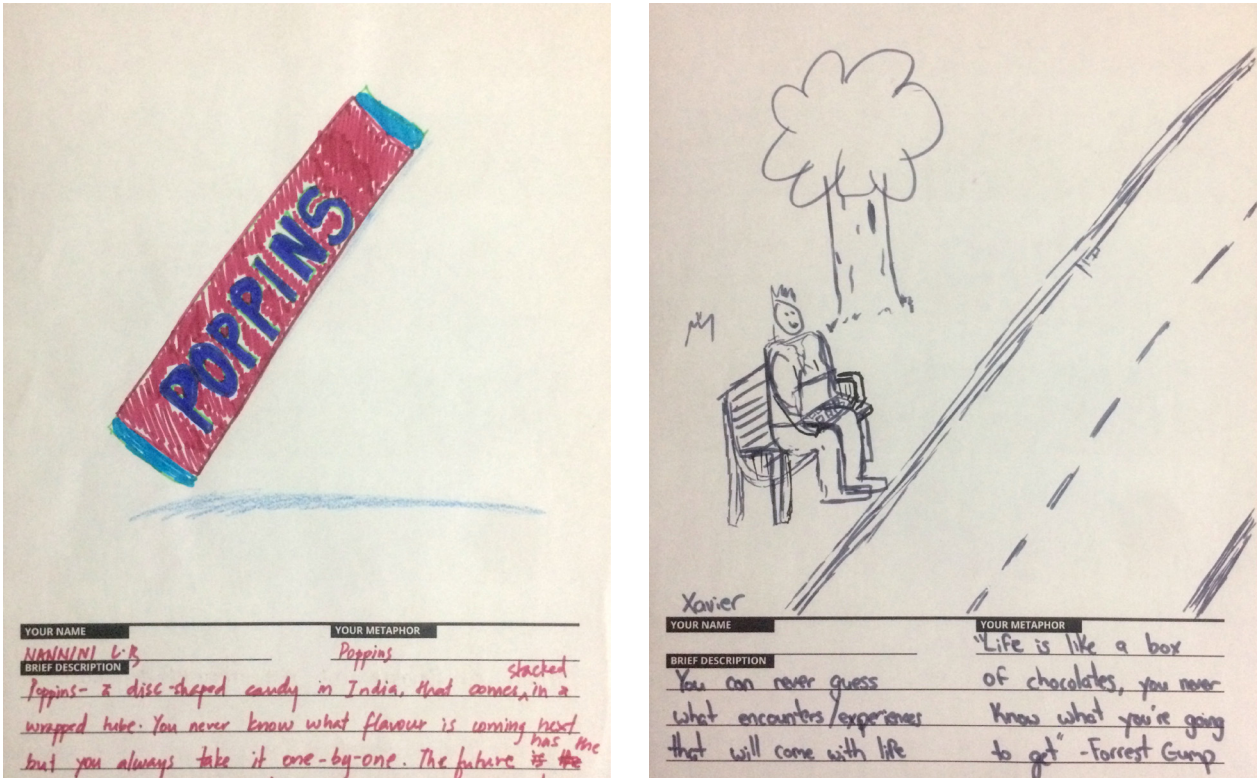
Figure 22: Participants used culturally specific reference imagery to illustrate their metaphors

By evoking this imagery in the exercise, she wanted to express that she sees the future as full of ambiguity and mystery yet the anticipation of encountering positive/desirable experiences keeps the journey exciting. In another example, Xavier borrowed the analogy of "a box of chocolate" from the famous Hollywood film Forrest Gump, to stress on the same unpredictable nature of life's offerings that Nannini had previously depicted through poppins.

On the other hand, participants also used similar elements/imagery to depict very different qualities. More than 1/4th of metaphors created by the participants used water/ water bodies to metaphorize future. However, each description highlighted on a distinct quality of water that the participants associated with future. For example, some participants used the imagery of water to depict 'flexibility' and 'adaptability' while others described the future to be 'endless' and 'vigorous' like a stream of water.

Since the workshop was designed to make metaphors guide the process of narrative construction, in most cases participating teams used the metaphors as qualitative lenses through which they examined the futures of assigned wicked problems. However, in some specific cases teams went beyond the use of metaphors for problem exploration but also used the characteristics and affordances of the object depicted in the metaphor as a source of inspiration for solution-finding. For example, participants on Table #2 used their chosen metaphor of 'box of chocolate' to conceptualise potential futures solutions for the wicked problem of 'fake news' that was assigned to them. The image below shows an example of one of the solutions they come up with. The team uses the analogy of a box of chocolate, where an unhealthy chocolate stands out amongst healthy ones, to conceptualize a situation where the abundance of good quality journalism makes fake news obviously stand out and hence detectable/undesirable.
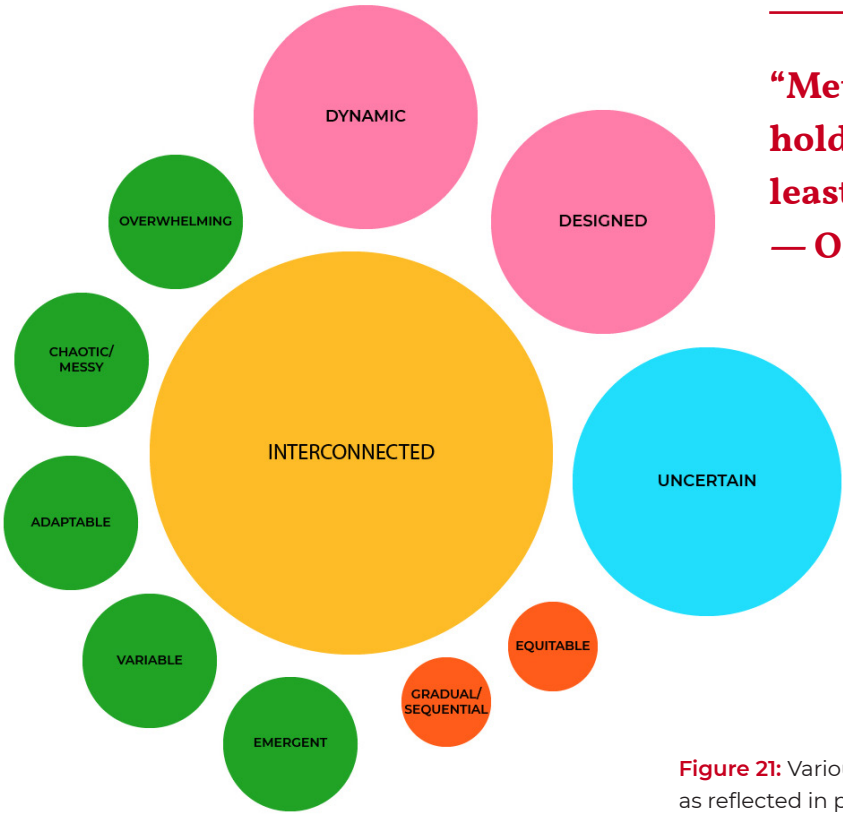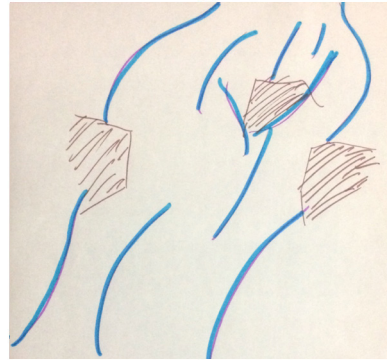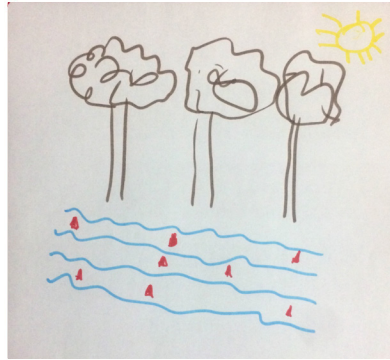
FUTURE AS A STREAM

- Vigorous

- Endless

- Continuous

- Flowing/Dynamic

FUTURE AS WATER

- Flexible

- Adaptable

Figure 23: The same metaphor of the water was used to depict varying properties/characteristic of the future
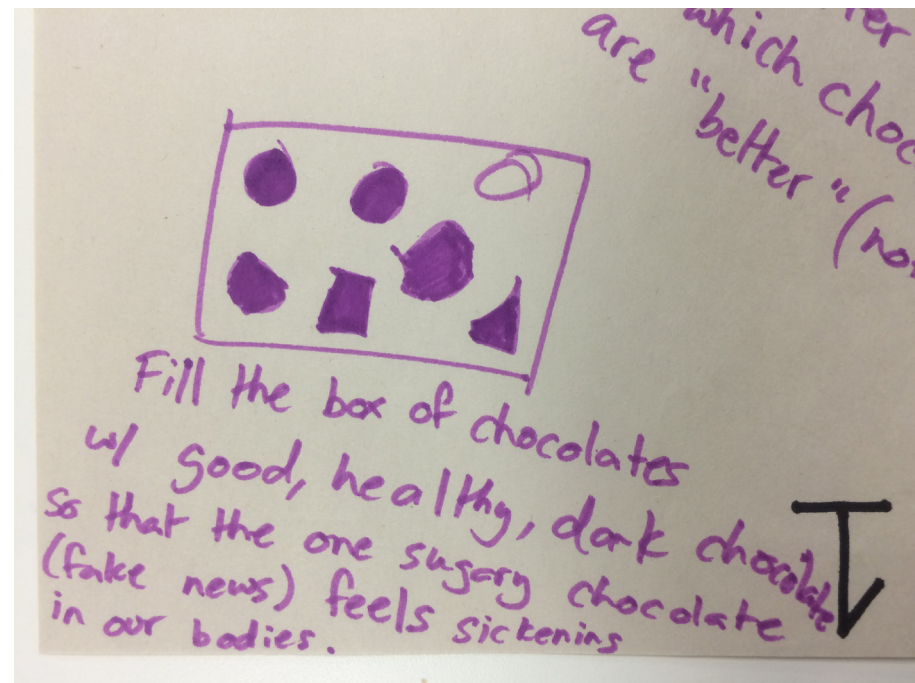
Figure 24: "Fill the box of chocolates with good, healthy, dark chocolate so that the one sugary chocolate (fake news) feels sickening in our bodies"

2. POLITICS OF WORLDVIEWS

Through the various activities and interactions in the workshop, clearly evident power dynamics emerged between worldviews. This played out both in the selection of metaphors at each table at the end of activity #2 as well as during the interpretation of the assigned metaphors. Going back to the metaphor of 'poppins' candy discussed in the previous example, the conversations recorded at the table during the sharing of metaphors revealed that being the only team member from a South Asian background, Nannini had a hard time communicating the meaning of her metaphor to the rest of her team. She had to think of alternative imageries of Canadian/North American candy that was similar to poppins in order to ensure that her team members could understand her metaphor. Her level of comfort with uncertainty and ambiguity as depicted in her drawing, did not resonate with the rest of the team either. On the other hand, Xavier's metaphor of 'box of chocolate' was easily understood by the rest of his team members due to the associated pop-culture reference.

During the debrief session at the end, many participants from other teams also noted how western pop-culture references (especially from hollywood) were constantly used as a means to legitimise/validate the interpretation of assigned metaphors. Sarry, a participant of Chinese background, shared her limitation of being able to communicate her perspective due to the collective lack of knowledge of East Asian references in her team. While she could see that the conversations in her team did not reflect her worldview, she could not make a strong case for it due to her inability to cite examples of futuristic narratives from non-western pop-culture. She notes;

"So this is just an observation, I don't know if a lot of people experienced this in their groups. But I noticed that throughout our conversations, we were using a lot of references that were western. And we kept going back to that as a reference frame for storytelling. What about the east besides the Japanese animation. I am

unfamiliar with what Chinese does in future storytelling? What do you guys think about other pop culture?"

Reflecting on this, another participant noted that there is a definite tendency to conform with popular opinion, especially due to our inability to reference, when working towards finishing a task in time;

"Yes we have a tendency to conform. Generally speaking you will just go along with what other people see it that way. Since our opinions are usually not rooted in anything deep."

Resultantly, in most of the teams western pop-cultural references ended up shaping the conversations and the generated narratives of the future. One may argue that this is due to the geographical location of the research, however, the general lack of familiarity with non-western futures narratives demonstrated by participants of non-western backgrounds indicates that a similar situation could have arisen even if the research was conducted in India, Pakistan or China. This is due to the widespread popularity of western science fiction, thanks to hollywood, that dominates futures imagination in most parts of the world. Moreover, given the rapidly changing demographics of a multicultural city like Toronto, it is important to think about how diversity of cultural backgrounds does not necessarily translate to diversity in perspectives in popular discourse. Due to reasons similar to the ones discussed above, mainstream conversations about the future tend to be largely shaped and informed by western worldview and references.

Another way in which the difference in western and non-western worldviews played out was reflected in the qualities/attributes that participants identified as 'desirable' or 'undesirable'. Many metaphors created during the workshop depicted qualities of uncertainty, unpredictability and ambiguity. In their descriptions, most non-western participants associated these qualities as 'exciting' or communicated a sense of comfort with perceived
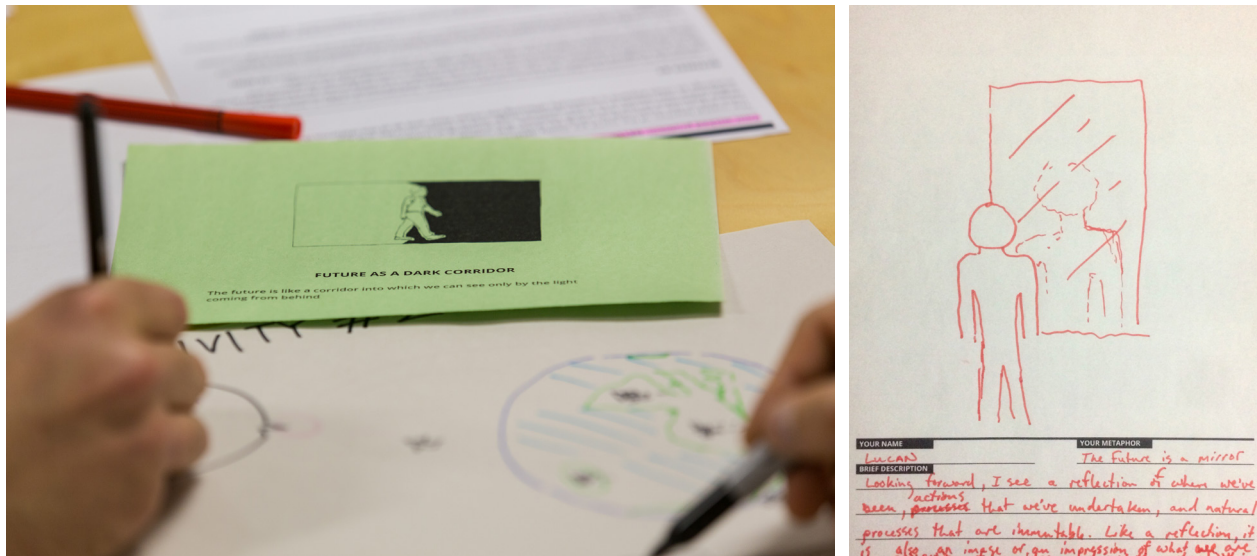
Image Credit: Roberto Andrade

Figure 25: Meaning and (mis)interpretation-The symbolic meaning of some metaphors, that participants identified as 'traumatic', was in fact very similar to the metaphor drawn by the participants themselves.

ambiguity. However, in teams where majority of participants were western, metaphors depicting 'uncertainty/ambiguity' were not chosen for activity #2. The metaphors chosen by majority of teams were the once that depicted qualities such as 'balance' and 'choice'. During activity #4, majority of participants also struggled with adopting metaphors that depicted the future as 'unknowable' and as having low self-agency.

3. CHALLENGE OF ADOPTION

Through this research, it was also observed that in general individual participants found it challenging to adopt worldviews that were identified as being different from their own worldviews. In some extreme cases, participants also described the process of adopting assigned worldviews as 'traumatic' and 'inorganic'. In most of these instances, the engagement of the participant was seriously hampered and level of enthusiasm subsequently lowered during activities that required forceful adoption. Interestingly in the few instances where individual participants expressed such extreme feelings of loss of interest, were cases where non-western metaphors were assigned to western participants. It is noteworthy that in a small percentage of these cases, the assigned

metaphors were in fact very close to the concept depicted in the participant's personal metaphor. It was the "perceived" meaning of the metaphor that participants reacted negatively to. This further highlights the fact that the metaphors can be easily misinterpreted when the audience is unable to 'step into the shoes' of the depicted worldview. The misinterpretation can also be attributed to the general marginalization of certain worldviews as in most cases these metaphors were also perceived to be 'uncommon'. For example, one of the participant from group Table 7 talking about the metaphor assigned to his team said;

> "I liked it better when we had a more positive natural tendency…But our second metaphor of dark corridor…Who walks down a dark corridor and doesn't feel (scared). Like does it matter that there is light behind you? Dark is instinctually scary."

An alternative interpretation of the word "dark" offered by his own team member was associated with 'ambiguity' without any connotations of negativity/positivity. In this metaphor, which comes from a quote by author Edward Weyer Jr. imagines the corridor as one in which "*we can see only by the light coming from behind.*" This light coming from behind
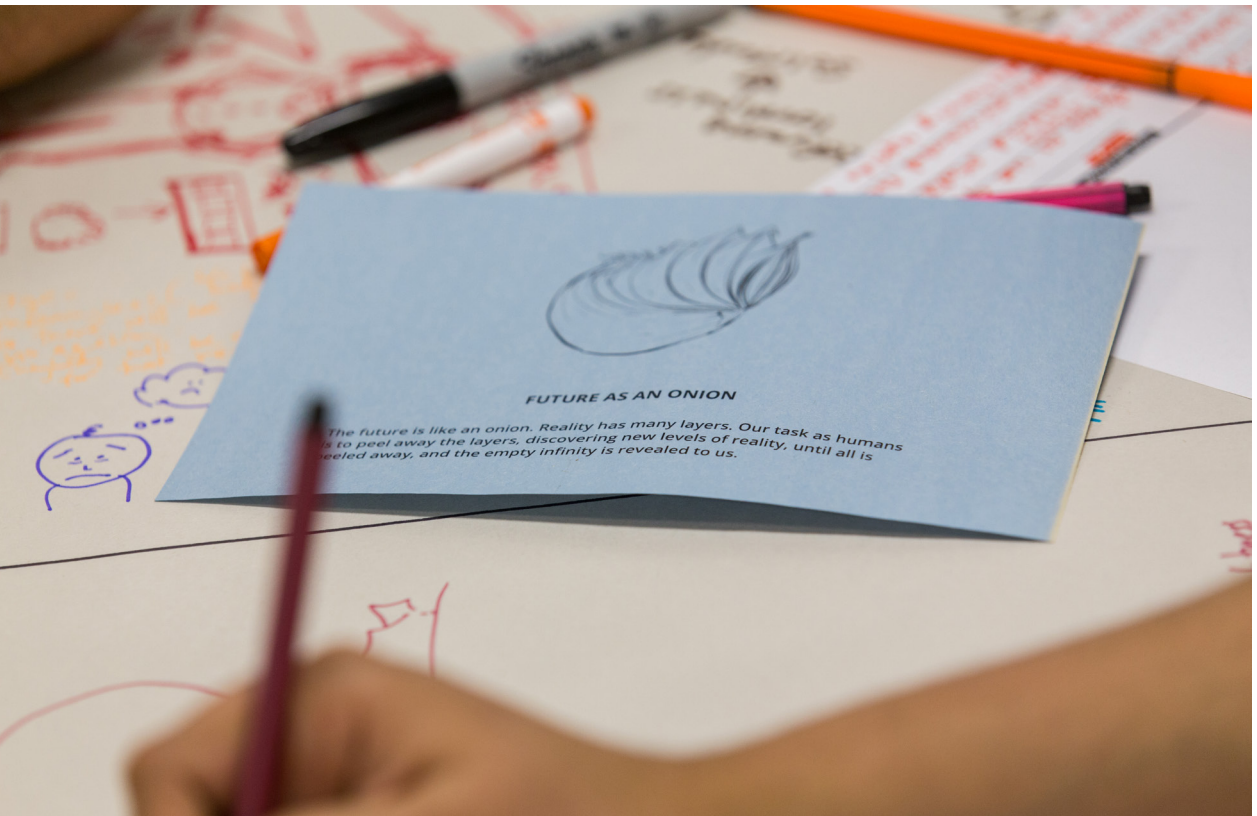
Image Credit: Roberto Andrade

Figure 26: Some metaphors such as the 'future as an onion' recieved a strong reaction from participants

can be interpreted as our knowledge of the past facilitating our ability to understand an unknowable future. Interestingly, Lucan's own metaphor of the future was that of a mirror, where the future is only visible as a reflection of our actions in the past.

On the other hand, many non-western participants noted that despite disagreeing with the assigned worldviews, they did not find it challenging to adopt them for the sake of the exercise. During discussions, non-western participants were also found to be more empathic with worldviews that they personally did not resonate with and said that 'they could understand where a particular belief was coming from'.

In the case of assigned metaphors, participating teams where the majority of participants were western focused too much on certain specific words in the description. This funnelled the way in which they interpreted these metaphors and in most

cases very strong attributes of being 'negative' and 'dystopic' were assigned to the metaphors. Some of the descriptive words that received this response were 'dark', 'infinite' and 'empty'. While expressing intense displeasure about the assigned metaphor of an 'onion', a participant on Table 6 was captured as saying, *"Does not look like a particularly pleasant future. I sense an unbearable lightness of being"*.

In another case, participants on Table 7 agreed that "*word dark definitely funnelled us into thinking that way*". This tendency to deconstruct the narratives and to look at specific constituent elements as opposed to interpreting the narrative in its totality– as a whole, is a distinctly western style of sense-making which is often reflected in many modern analysis techniques and frameworks. Evidently, due to this deconstruction the meaning/message of the narrative is lost in interpretation.

4. STORIES OF ALTERNATIVE PASTS

In the various cases, where the interpretation or adoption of certain metaphors and worldviews was found to be challenging, storytelling emerged as an effective tool in bridging the gap. This can be illustrated through a particular conversation during the debrief session at the end. A participant from table #7 expressed his displeasure from working with an assigned metaphor that depicted the future as a 'dark corridor'. The participant did not like how imagining the future through the lens of the given metaphor lead to the construction of a narrative that was 'negative' and 'dystopic'. When I offered an alternative interpretation of this metaphor by sharing a story from my own childhood to highlight that in certain contexts 'darkness' can be associated with comfort and familiarity, the participant agreed that the anecdote made him look at the metaphor differently. On hearing my personal anecdote, another member from the same team pointed out that she had interpreted the metaphor in a similar way but because she could not offer a narrative to support her interpretation, the rest of her team was unable to empathise with her perspective. During the debrief she said;

> "But then why see "dark" as just negative. I mean when I saw that word as "unknown" and that can be positive and/or negative. But my team saw the priming of the word "dark" as negative so I can definitely went down with that."

Similarly, in certain other instances also, participants found it helpful to use storytelling and sharing of personal narratives to explain perspectives that were otherwise unfamiliar to their team members. This observation is key as it stresses on how sharing stories of distinct personal experiences can be a helpful tool for generating empathy amongst participants coming from distinct socio-cultural backgrounds. Interestingly, while the specificity of metaphors makes it challenging to adopt/interpret them, stories on the other hand are perceived to be much more relatable when they are specific, contextualised, and nuanced.

Therefore, it is important to note here, that stories about alternative pasts and specific cultural experiences cannot be left out of conversations about collective futures.

5. DIFFERENT WORLDVIEWS, DIFFERENT STORIES

The 'messages from future' written at the end of activities #3 and #4 were distinctively different in most teams. This is a clear indication of the fact, that the worldview or perspective guiding any futures inquiry is directly reflected in the image of the future and narratives that are generated as outcomes of that inquiry.

Both the perspective depicted in the metaphor as well as the visual used to illustrate the meaning were noted to have a significant impact on the various stages of the exercise. Some of the teams noted that due to the stark contrast between their chosen metaphor in activity #3 and assigned metaphor in activity #4, they were forced to re-look at the wicked problem 'from scratch'. Consequently, the messages from the future written in both the cases were unique and contrasting as well. An example of this can be seen from the message written by table #1. In activity #3, their chosen metaphor was that of 'future as a stream over rocks' through which they imagined the futures of the problem of 'sleep epidemic'. The message that they wrote at the end of this activity was written as a lullaby.

While their message from activity #3 was influenced by the organic nature of their chosen metaphor, in activity #4 they were assigned the metaphor of 'future as a laboratory'. This changed the organic and sustainable tone of their narrative and they had to look at the problem of 'sleep epidemic' through the lens of experimentation. The new narrative generated was unsurprisingly technocratic. As opposed to reading as a lullaby, it now read as a commercial advert.

Reflections

The findings from this Design with Dialogue workshop provided me with a deeper understanding of how cultural differences play out when diverse groups of participants are asked to engage in futures dialogue. While many observations were emergent and surprised me, quite a few findings were well-aligned with my personal experiences and validated a few assumptions that I had started off with at the beginning of this master's project. For instance, the feeling of hopelessness and disengagement expressed by certain participants when forced to adopt a worldview different from their own, was reminiscent of the ways in which I was felt feeling at the end of several foresight exercises where I was not able to express my own worldview. The ease with which most non-western participants were able to empathise and work with perspectives that were not congruent to their own, also spoke to the fact that the practice of adopting unrelatable yet normalized/popularized perspectives was common-place for them. Each finding discussed in the previous section was an invaluable learning opportunity for me and ended up informing the design of the alternative method of futuring that I discuss in the next section. Some of the design implications identified at the end of the first workshop are as follows:

1. Storytelling was found to be more effective in generating empathy than metaphors. In the design of the alternative method, there is an opportunity to leverage storytelling as a tool for empathy by creating room for participants to share personal and diverse narratives. This observation is consistent with reviewed literature that discusses use of storytelling as a research methodology. Discussing this elemental need for stories, to organise and transmit our experiences to others and to help form meaningful connections, peace educator Jessica Senehi says , "*stories create and give expression to personal and group identity. The very process of storytelling and narration fosters empathy as listeners identify with the characters in a story*" (Senehi, 2002, p. 48).

2. Drawing as a method helped participants to access and express ideas that may be suppressed by the conscious mind without destroying the complexity of their experiences and thoughts. Images can be crucial in eliciting the infallible as they help us access those elusive hard-to-put-into-words aspects of knowledge that may otherwise remain hidden or ignored (Weber in Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith, Campbell, 2011). Moreover, since drawing is not an everyday activity for most individuals, ideas expressed visually seemed to be 'uninhabited' and 'authentic'. It also contributed greatly to level of engagement and was perceived as a 'fun-activity' by most participants. The design of the new method could greatly benefit from using a visual-style of narrative generation.

3. No act of decision-making can be considered neutral or apolitical. Even in the simplest act of choosing a metaphor "for the sake of the exercise", power dynamics between worldviews emerged that played into the marginalization of "uncommon" perspectives. The teams that re-created collaborative metaphors did not experience this as all members felt that the new metaphor reflected their voice. Thus, there may be value in giving group members an opportunity to co-create a metaphorical representation of the future that they all feel represented through.

5

**Part III:
A New Tool for
Storytelling
Futures**

The focus of this research document up till this point has been on deconstruction and examination of foresight practices. While this inquiry provided a useful critique of the discourse, a considerable time and effort in this project was spent on thinking of alternative ways of practicing foresight. In this third and final part of the document, the conversion shifts its focus on construction of an alternative foresight method. In the sections that follow, I will present and discuss the development of this new method for storytelling preferred futures that was designed to reflect non-western ways of thinking, doing and knowing.

What does inclusive storytelling look like?

This project began with my inability to include stories from India as part of a class assignment. When it came to thinking about an alternative method of storytelling, I organically went back to my South Asian roots to look for ways in which marginalized ideas about the future could be

brought into the discourse. Through a process that involved both secondary research and in-depth interviews with non-western storytellers and storytelling experts, I identified some unique storytelling traditions native to the Indian subcontinent, that seemed to have the potential to be adapted as a futures narrative generation method. Simultaneously, I also looked at ways in which other authors/researchers/designers have been using storytelling as a tool for decolonization in their own fields of practice. As a result of the above mentioned inquiries as well as the research discussed in the previous two chapters, I was able to develop a set of seven design principles that informed the selection and adaptation of the chosen storytelling tradition. These principles are:

1. RESEARCHER AS A 'LISTENER'

While narrative and story is often used in qualitative research and ethnography, the use of storytelling as a means to explore decolonization specifically aims to alter, reverse and/or disrupt the power dynamics often inherent in the research process and in the very roles of the 'researcher' and 'researched'. With the power of story creation and storytelling in the

Image Credit: R. Ashok from *http://www.thehindu.com/profile/photographers/R_ASHOK/*

Figure 27: Women making traditional 'Kolam' outside a temple in Southern India

hands of participating stakeholders, the researcher assumes the role of a 'listener' (Cunsolo Willox, Harper, Edge, 2013).

The alternative futures storytelling method proposed in this research is designed to remove the foresight expert from the role of 'narrative-creator/ storyteller' and to be positioned as the 'story-listener'. In this new position as viewer–listeners (or in some cases, researcher–listeners), we are tasked with the responsibility and the privilege of listening deeply and collaborating in the communion that occurs when sharing and bearing witness to stories (Hendry, 2007).

2. TOTALITY VS DECONSTRUCTION

During my conversation with Lina Srivastava, a social justice activist who uses narrative as the core methodology in her activism work, she stressed upon the distinction between 'ethnographic' vs

'creative' use of storytelling. She notes how *"the current use of storytelling in social innovation is more ethnographic investment in people's stories as opposed to creative investment. And they are different. Ethnographic is more directed. Ethnography has always been about deriving answers to very direct questions. But creative investment is about capturing the totality of experience which is slightly different. And so when I am looking at story, it is the connective tissue among humans, what binds us, it is the glue. I am looking at story to understand how a community sees itself, how it functions, how a person sees himself in that community and what needs arise from that as opposed to a more directed, sort of, structured conversation."*

Lina's views on the importance of learning from the 'totality of stories' are closely aligned with the critique of western style of 'interpretation by deconstruction' found in decolonial literature. In most non-western cultures storytelling and the style of sense-making is relational and often symbolic. When a story is told, it is the whole story that is

taken in and learned from. It is not possible to receive a theme or quote from a story and learn in the same way (Simonds, Christopher, 2013). Wilson describes this process and product in his book Research as Ceremony,

> *"analysis from a western perspective breaks everything down to look at it. So you are breaking it down into its smallest pieces and then looking at those small pieces. And if we are saying that an Indigenous methodology includes all of these relationships, if you are breaking things down into their smallest pieces, you are destroying all the relationships around it"* (Wilson in ibid.).

The alternative method was designed to treat stories shared by stakeholders in first person with utmost respect as per the non-western perspective. Throughout the process, the focus remains on creating and understanding the stories of preferred futures as a whole rather than analysing individual constituent elements/themes in isolation.

3. COMFORT WITH DIVERSITY AND UNCERTAINTY

The storytelling traditions of India demonstrate a high level of comfort with plural perspectives, diverse voices and conflicting views. This is a characteristic feature of the Indian worldview in general where the cultural ways of knowing are influenced by 'pluralism' rather than 'binary' or 'singular' expressions. This is also reflected in several other spheres of socio-cultural life. Talking about how 'plurality' and 'diversity' as concepts are perceived and experienced in India, mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik uses the analogy of a 'Kolam' (see figure above). The 'kolam' is an auspicious pattern that is traditionally drawn at the threshold of houses in India. Devdutt explains that while the underlying pattern is a simple grid of dots, each woman drawing the kolam joins the dots differently. Moreover, the 'kolam' drawn by the same woman on different days and occasions is also remarkably distinct.

Most storytelling traditions in India also allow for a similar room for reinterpretation and re-telling of stories where each teller renders the story differently each time the story is told.

The proposed method was designed to facilitate multiple interpretations of the narrative and its constitutional element. The tool is versatile in that, multiple stories can be generated from the same version of the tool and each resultant narrative would reflect and celebrate the subjective voice of the storyteller.

4. PARTICULARITY = UNIVERSALITY

Reflecting on her successes from the field, Lina also pointed that in her experience, *"the more human the story, the more particular the story, the more universal it is. The more you can incorporate the universal elements like human emotion, the better it is."* This was also found to be true in the first workshop, where specific and subjective narratives of individuals' experiences helped participants empathise better with each other.

Therefore, the alternative method was designed to explicitly bring the personal voices and subjective perspectives of the participants into the conversation. Most of the prompts are designed to encourage the participants to reflect on and express personal stories.

5. CONSTRUCTIVE STORYTELLING

In their successful endeavour to create alternative futures through storytelling in the primary schools of Serbia, Ivana Milojević and Aleksandra Izgarjan (2014) used 'constructive storytelling' as a tool to move away from hegemonic futures narratives, which continue to reinforce inequity, human 'one-dimensionality' and various forms of violence. They note that *"sometimes stories need to be re-told in ways which open up new avenues of communication and which offer visions of a more just and equitable world (ibid.)."*

Peace-educator Jessica Senehi (2002) explains 'constructive' storytelling as that which is *"inclusive*

and fosters collaborative power and mutual recognition; creates opportunities for openness, dialogue, and insight; a means to bring issues to consciousness; and a means of resistance. Such storytelling builds understanding and awareness, and fosters voice (ibid.)."

By engaging participants in imagination and articulation of preferred/desired futures and by prompting conversations that are often overlooked or marginalized in futures work, the alternative method hopes to actively engage in constructive storytelling. This effort is furthered by the overall collaborative nature of the process which is designed to create a safe space for dialogue and exchange of ideas.

6. NOT WITHOUT MY HISTORY

As noted at the end of the previous chapter, it was observed in the first workshop that sharing stories of alternative pasts could be helpful in creating empathy in people from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Additionally, since the core aim of this project is to work with narratives and voices that are historically marginalized, it is important to revisit, reclaim and re-tell history in a way that is often left out of popular discourse.

The proposed method explicitly addresses alternative individual and collective histories by extending the futures cone backwards.

7. POWER OF ORALITY

Most non-western traditions are oral traditions. In my interactions with both Indian and Native Canadian storytellers it became clear that the first and most natural mode of expression for these cultures is oral. Historically, colonisers used the 'written word' as a tool to marginalise the oral wisdom of these cultures and even today most modern discourses use the 'written expression' as the de facto form of knowledge creation and communication. In the spirit of acknowledging and valuing alternative non-western ways of instruction, this proposed method was designed to use 'orality' as the primary mode of expression.

Moreover, many Indian storytelling traditions that I researched, also used visuals as supporting material for the oral narration where performance is never detached from storytelling. Use of visuals in promoting narratives was also found to be a fairly successful medium in workshop #1. The proposed method, therefore, leverages the power of visuals to guide the performance and storytelling.

Finding Inspiration

In the course of this project, I researched several storytelling traditions native to India. Given the focus on inclusivity and collaboration, most storytelling traditions that were found to be resonant with the above mentioned design principles were folk-traditions. While most of these traditions showed potential to be adapted as an inclusive storytelling futures tool, one tradition in particular stood out. This was the Kaavad storytelling tradition that is native to Rajasthan, a desert state in the north-western India. Like most folk-traditions of India, Kaavad too is a dying art form which has been adversely affected by the changes brought in by modernization and globalization.

In the past two decades, Nina Sabnani, an Indian animator, researcher, and storyteller, has dedicated her practice to the research and revival of the Kaavad tradition. Nina's phD research on the same, as well as several projects undertaken by her served as a point of entry for me. In many of her papers, Nina makes a compelling case for Kaavad as being a highly inclusive and pluralistic storytelling tool (Sabnani, 2015).

Through extensive research and in-depth conversations with Nina, the salient features and affordances of Kaavad as a storytelling tool were found to be highly aligned with the design principles that I had outlined for the project. At a later stage, I also learnt that the genesis of Kaavad as a tradition in itself was motivated by a need to create socio-cultural inclusion. I discuss this history

as well as my process of adaptation of the Kaavad as a futures storytelling tool in the upcoming sections.

Kaavad

A STORYTELLING TRADITION FROM RAJASTHAN

Since much before the advent of modern forms of entertainment and communication, several unique forms of storytelling, that brought the tellers and listeners together in the worlds of mythical heroes, gods and saints, have been in practice all around India. Most of these traditions are centered around communal storytelling and often have religious and/or cultural significance. The Kaavad tradition of Rajasthan is one such rich oral storytelling tradition that is known to be around 400 years old (Lyons 2007). This art of storytelling gets its name from Kaavad– a painted wooden shrine, used by the itinerant storyteller (Kaavadiya) to recite stories and genealogies for his hereditary patrons. The word Kaavad comes from the word 'Kivad' meaning door and the shrine does consist of several panels that open up like many doors (Sabnani, 2007). This travelling shrine, shaped like a box, contains within its doors elaborate tales and epics from Hindu mythology. There are also images of donors and local/folk heroes and heroines. It has a highly evolved symbolic language for its images, which can only be deciphered by the initiated. This storytelling tradition is unique for its verbal and visual quality that celebrates plurality (Sabnani, 2015).

DESIGNED FOR ACCESSIBILITY: If you can't go to the temple, the temple will come to you

The following section discusses how the unique characteristic features of the Kaavad make it a highly inclusive tool for storytelling. However, research revealed that social inclusivity was perhaps the very reason why the Kaavad tradition came into being. The Kaavad has been defined as a portable shrine 'chalta phirta mandir' (Hindi

Image Credit: Nina Sabnani
from *http://www.dsource.in/resource/kaavad/storytellers*

Figure 28: A traditional Kaavadiya storyteller uses a peacock feather to point to images on his Kaavad tool to accord them meaning and tell the story

for 'walking-roaming temple') that comes to the devotee rather than the devotee going to the temple (Bhanawat, 1975). The Kaavad is made by a community of carpenters (Suthars) in the Mewar district for storytellers (Kaavadiya Bhats) from the Marwar district who 'recite the Kaavad' (Kaavad Baanchana) for their hereditary patrons (jajmans) spread over Rajasthan and neighboring states in the country. Intrestingly, Bhakti Saints like Meera, Kabir, Raidas and Narsinh are found in the extant Kaavads (Sabnani, 2012). The Bhakti movement was characterised as a revolt against the hegemonic practices within Hinduism and the associated saints extensively produced literature in the vernacular expressing feelings of devotion together with protest against an oppressive social order (Pandey & Zide, 1965). It is possible that the Kaavad may have provided access for personal worship and a virtual pilgrimage. The inaccessibility to an actual temple could be attributed to Rajasthan's sandy terrain

Image Credit: Nina Sabnani from *http://www.dsource.in/resource/kaavad/storytellers*

Figure 29: A Kaavadiya performing a storytelling session for his patrons

where temples would be hard to build and to the strong hierarchical and feudal system of caste and race. It is also possible that there was a paucity of Vishnu temples in the region and therefore a shrine dedicated to Vishnu and his avatar Ram had to be brought to the devotees (Sabnani, 2012).

It is also important to note that the Kaavad community is a marginalized community that lies outside of the classical Hindu caste system and are referred to as OBCs (Other Backward Classes) by the government of India. Through the narration of specific myths, a Kaavadiya storyteller often establishes his own lineage and that of his patrons as direct descendants of gods and kings, thus uplifting their social status and identity through storytelling.

The act of challenging conventional social order is so deeply embedded in the Kaavad tradition, that stories from the epics that are included in the Kaavad shrine are often the ones where an

impossible relationship has been forged between two castes that may otherwise never eat or drink together. The conflict experienced in real life is resolved by the story which serves as a 'mechanism to relieve anxiety' (Csapo, 2005).

AN INCLUSIVE TOOL FOR STORYTELLING

While it was crucial to understand the historical context in which Kaavad may have developed in order to appreciate its social and cultural significance, a closer examination of its physical attributes reveal that the Kaavad is a culturally inclusive tool in its physical design as well. In her Doctoral thesis research, Nina Sabnani performs an in depth structural analysis of the Kaavad object and highlights some salient features that make it culturally inclusive (Sabnani, 2010). Some of these features, as identified relevant to the development of the futures method, are:

1. Kaavad is multidimensional and multitemporal

Despite being highly symmetric, in practice the Kaavad is used as a multidimensional object. Storytellers open and close the various panels of the Kaavad in a particular order while telling the story. This adds dimensionality to the narration by creating an illusion of movement through time and space. There is also a sense of travelling inside a real temple as the panels open and close simulating the various thresholds in a temple, starting with the dwarpals (doorkeepers) and seated lions. Interestingly, there are three kinds of persons from different times (mythical, historical, present) depicted on the same space (panel). The persons depicted are the Gods, the saints and normal mortals from all castes, all sharing the same space which in real life was denied to persons of different castes. The representations merge time and space here as a single vertical column in space divides different times. During the interview Nina, while pointing to the multi-temporal nature of the Kaavad, noted;

_____

"Just like many other Indian stories, the Kaavad represents past, present and future fused into one. There are images of real people/ patrons who are dead and gone, patrons who are living, the saints like Kabir who once existed and then there are gods that are eternal. So it accommodates all kinds of time and all kinds of spaces. The artifact in itself represents coexistence of many time periods within one space and within one story."

2. The single Kaavad holds multiple narratives

Contrary to other practices where the image particularized the word, in case of the Kaavad the word or voice particularizes the image. This makes the Kaavad highly inclusive because it allows an image to hold many stories and several persons to be a part of a narrative or shrine. The images in the Kaavad are emblematic and hence polysemic. With each recitation, the storyteller accords different identities to the same image in order to contextualise the storytelling in relation to the identity of the listener. The depiction of human figures in particular is conceptual, such that, all men look the same and all women look the same and may assume different roles in different stories or contexts. So the generic becomes specific and the specific may become generic at another point. From a Bakhtinian perspective, the images may also be considered as 'polyphonous' texts (Bakhtin, 1985) since they not only represent multiple voices but also allow for various conflicting voices to be heard. Different storytellers may use similar Kaavads to tell different stories or to tell different versions of the same story (Sabnani, 2015).

3. Listener is part of the telling

The generic and symbolic nature of visuals on the Kaavad also calls for a deeper engagement of the listener with the story. Since the image is emblematic and does not really illustrate the event or story the listener patron has to exercise his imagination to complete the picture and the events in his mind. With this action, the image is now invested with more meaning than when the image is seen for the first time. Therefore, the sense-making process in a Kaavad recitation hinges on a collaborative process between the teller and listener. "The Kaavad's distinctive characteristics lie in its ability to be inclusive and collaborative, to negotiate place and space, bringing together imagination and reality, and connecting space, time and memory, pictures and words, and a sense of an imagined real." (ibid.)

Kaavad as an alternative futures method

After closely studying the Kaavad tradition of storytelling, I was convinced that it was a fitting inspiration for the alternative futures method. Recognising that the features of the Kaavad discussed in the previous section were most relevant to my research, I decided to design the futures method while retaining the key characteristics of the Kaavad. In this section I will discuss the design of the method and illustrate how I adapted the traditional tool of Kaavad into a futures method.

THE FRAMEWORK

For various reasons, outlined previously, the Kaavad functions as a portable shrine that brings the deity to those devotees that are otherwise unable to visit the temple. The concept of 'pilgrimage' is prevalent in many religions and can be understood as a journey of spiritual significance that is undertaken to a sacred place. Typically, this journey is taken on account of a self-defined goal and requires commitment on the part of the pilgrim.

In Hinduism, a typical sequence of pilgrimage can be summarized in ten steps/actions. By performing a Proppian analysis [5] on the typical sequence of Hindu pilgrimage as well as on the Kaavad, Nina Sabnani in her doctoral research concluded that structurally both the Kaavad performance/ recitation and narratives imitate the model of a pilgrimage. She notes:

> "All three begin with Absentation and a lack that is liquidated only after the protagonists have endured hardships, passed tests of faith, made sacrifices and accepted the magical agent, however challenging it may have been. The initial liquidation of lack is followed by a difficult task put before the devotee and the end always leads to recognition of an 'identity'. There is a similarity between the Kaavad performance and a pilgrimage and between the Kaavad narratives and the pilgrimage because both are reflective

of life itself. This is further corroborated by the storyteller and his patrons. A pilgrimage is an act of re-invention, an egalitarian feeling of being a part of the larger world, of connecting with others."

Conceptually, I saw an opportunity to draw parallels between this feature of the Kaavad and the gap that I was trying to fill in the foresight practice.

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While the Kaavad compensates for the ability of the patron to perform an act that he is typically not allowed to, with the new method my hope was to open the futures discourse to participants that are typically left out.

Many contemporary futurists have identified this gap in the recent years and have advocated for the need for practices that encourage 'futures literacy' in non-expert stakeholders. I realised that this feature could be used to design an alternative futures method that was accessible.

Therefore, using the ten step framework of a Hindu pilgrimage as an underlying structure, I modelled procedural steps of the new futures method.
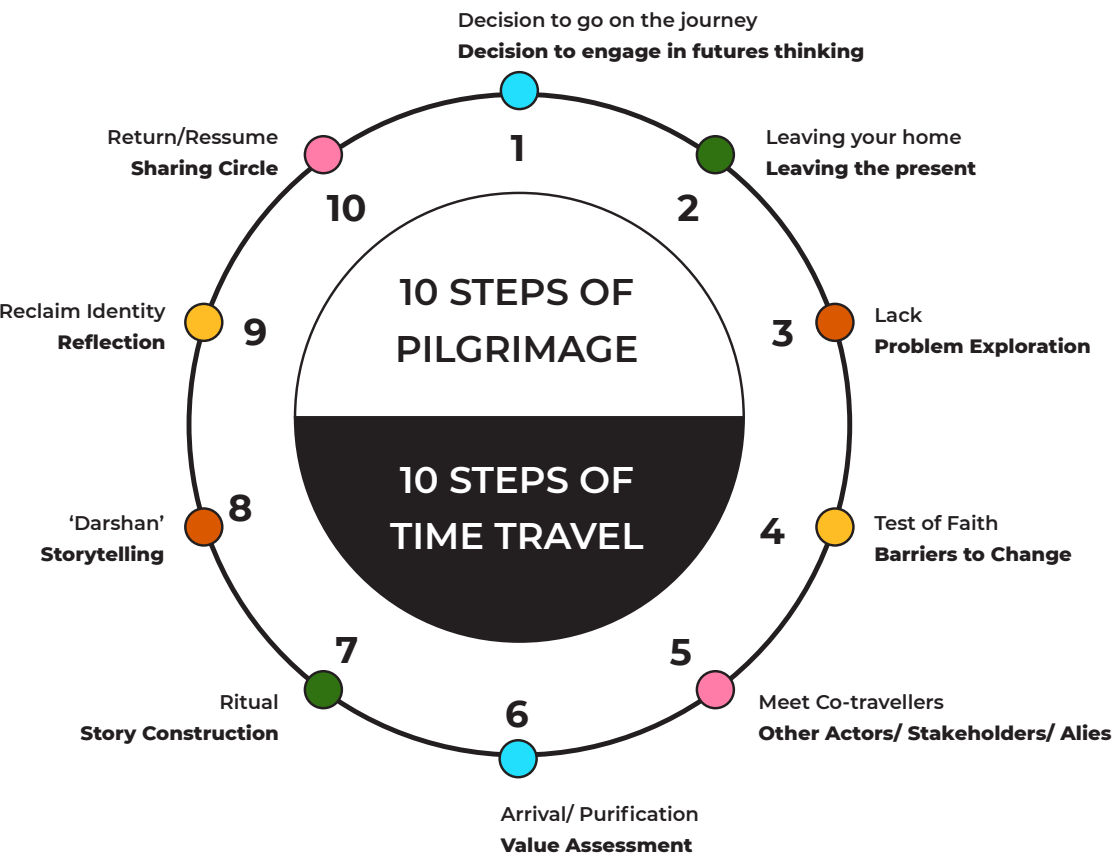
Figure 30: A diagrammatic representation of the framework adapted for design of the new method

While the traditional Kaavad imitates pilgrimage to facilitate the Darshan (act of seeing) of the deity by the devotee, I designed the Kaavad as a futures tool, to facilitate the Darshan of the vision of a desired future by the participating stakeholders. In this way, the '10 steps of Hindu pilgrimage' were reinterpreted as '10 steps of Time Travel' (see Fig.)

An actual pilgrimage begins with the act of the pilgrim deciding to undertake the journey. The traditional Kaavad performance begins with the patron agreeing to get the Kaavad read/opened/. Similarly, in the case of this method, the futures exercise begins with stakeholders deciding to engage in futures thinking. On the following page, I elaborate on how the various other steps in the design of the new method closely imitate the steps of pilgrimage.

The traditional Kaavad imitates pilgrimage to facilitate the Darshan (act of seeing) of the deity by the devotee, I designed the Kaavad as a futures tool, to facilitate the Darshan of the vision of a desired future by the participating stakeholders.

10 Steps of Hindu Pilgrimage	10 Steps of Time Travel
1. Person decides to make a pilgrimage	By agreeing to participate in the workshop, the participants acknowledge the value of futures thinking and decide to engage in the exercise.
2. The pilgrim leaves their home or is obliged to go.	The act of engaging in a futures conversation symbolises the decision of the participants to leave their preoccupation with the present condition and step outside their temporal zones. In their respective groups, participants discuss and draw a metaphor for their "preferred futures", in relation to the topic/problem statement identified for the inquiry.
3. S/he lacks something. Gives up familiar identity	Problem Exploration- Participants will open the Kaavad and through a series of prompts, they are asked to populate panels 1-3 on the Kaavad. **Panel 1- Institutional/ Mainstream History** Participants are asked to illustrate all the knowledge that they have about the history of the topic/problem from institutional sources and mainstream media/narrative. **Panel 2- Personal/Cultural History** They are asked to illustrate personal memories and cultural memories (stories/myths) related to the topic/problem. **Panel 3- The Present Condition** They analyse the problem as it exists in the present day. They are also prompted to identify some trends/emerging issues related to the issue.
4. The journey is arduous and difficult, test of faith	Barriers to Change- On **Panel 4**, the teams are asked to identify and illustrate all the barriers to change (in moving from the present state to their desired future) that they have encountered/expect/perceive.
5. There are other travelers with them and they encourage each other to continue with struggle	Other Actors- On **Panel 5**, the teams are asked to identify and illustrate all the actors/stakeholders/allies (present or future) that are involved/interested in making the same change. Or those that may support them in bringing about the change.

10 Steps of Hindu Pilgrimage	10 Steps of Time Travel
6. They arrive at the sacred place, purification by water, bathing in a sacred river etc.	Value Assessment- On **Panel 6**, the teams are asked to identify and assess the core values that they currently hold that they might need to get rid of in order to achieve the desired future. They are also asked to identify and illustrate new values that they will need to adopt. *The teams are free to device a way of visually distinguish between the values that are deciding to keep, adopt and remove.*
7. They locate their priest who takes charge and discusses all the rituals that need to be performed. The pilgrim may make some sacrifices or pledge something The priest performs the morning rituals and then takes them around the temple and they perform the circumambulation	Story Construction- On the **central panel**, the teams are asked to place the metaphor of the desired future that they created in Step #2. The teams are then instructed to proceed to construct their stories of the desired futures. The teams will then plan and rehearse their story narration.
8. The pilgrim has a 'Darshan' of the deity	Storytelling- At this point in the workshop, each team is invited to use their Kaavad to narrate the story of their preferred future.
9. The pilgrim pays the priest The priest enters their names in his record book. The pilgrim is 'recognized'. Reclaim identity	Reflection- After sharing their visions of the future, the teams are asked to reflect on how aligned they currently are with their prefered future. They will do so by responding to a set of guiding questions. Q1. What are some of the key conditions needed in order for this future to be realised? Q2. What steps can we (as individuals/organizations) make in order to facilitate the conditions for our pre ered futures?
10. The pilgrim returns home feeling renewed and is greeted with respect. The pilgrim feeds the whole village/community. The pilgrim re-integrates into the routine life with a sense of achievement.	Sharing Circle- In this final stage of the workshop, all participating teams reconvene in a sharing circle to reflect on their experience of engaging in this futures exercise. Participants are encourage to share their thoughts on how they might see their present actions differently in the light of the vision of their desired futures.

Figure 31: Table shows how each step in the method is designed to mirror the steps of a typical Hindu pilgramage

THE TOOL

The physical structure of the tool used in the workshop, follows the structure of the traditional Kaavad artifact. The Central panel, denoted by C in the figure, is flanked by six identical blank panels on either side. During the workshop, the Kaavad is unfolded following the numerical order of the panels. The participants only see and populate one panel at a time from Steps 2 to 7.

For the ease of production, simple cardstock paper in letter-size was used to make the Kaavad. The panels are held together with masking-tape which also allows for easy folding. In the traditional Kaavad artifacts, the images are arranged and illustrated in a variety of grid-like patterns. These can be, single image per panel or multiple images per panel.

For this pilot workshop, I decided to provide the participants with Kaavad where each panel was divided into three equal horizontal divisions. However, the participants were encouraged to add more divisions or disregard the divisions provided completely, as per their need and discretion.

While in my previous workshop, I found that drawing and visuals are an effective way of narrative research, given the length and intensity of this pilot workshop, I recognized that expecting participants to illustrate and populate six blank panels from scratch would be a big cognitive ask. Keeping this in mind, I prepared a basic visual kit of some generic imagery and icons that somewhat related to the topic of the workshop. This kit also included some basic packs of stickers from the dollar store on themes such as animals, nature, traffic signs etc. Since in the traditional usage of the Kaavad, the images are particularized through the imagination and narration of the storyteller, the workshop participants were also encouraged to use the generic images provided and to use their imagination to reinterpret the images/icons to convey the meaning that they wanted to.
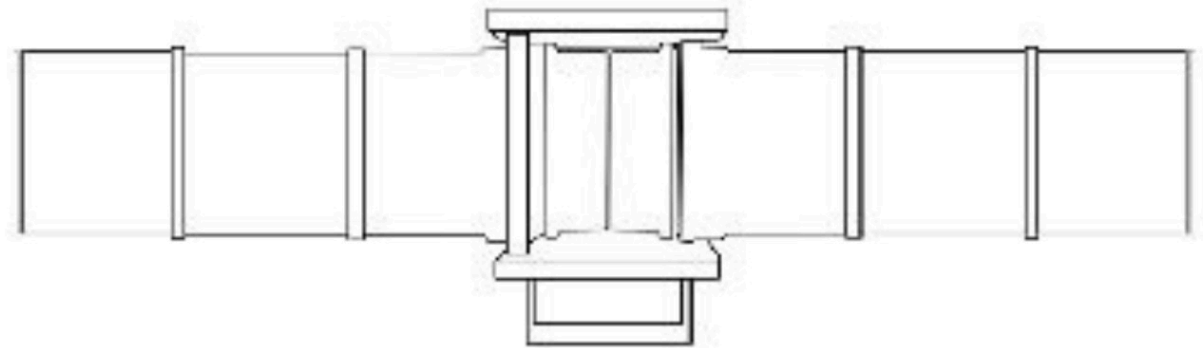

Figure 33: Traditional Kaavad structural layout. *Source: Sabnani (2010)*
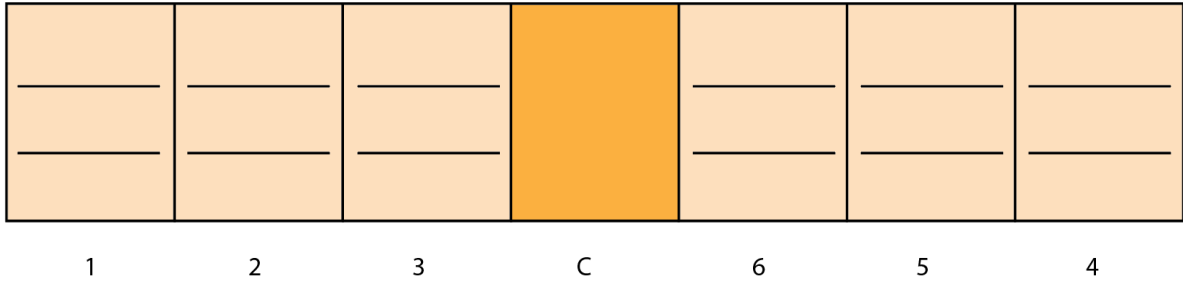
Figure 34: Structural layout of the proposed tool

Image Credit: Nina Sabnani from *http://www.dsource.in/resource/kaavad/storytellers*

Figure 32: Various arrangement of images on the traditional Kaavad

Image Credit: Nannini Lee Balakrishnan

Figure 35: Context and Voice- Given that none of the participants were Indian, it was assumed that they would be largely unfamiliar with Kaavad storytelling tradition. I began the workshop by choosing to introduce myself and the project by using a customised Kaavad (similar to the ones used in the workshop) instead of going for a digital power-point style presentation. The image of a Banyan tree was used as the backdrop (as in the Design with Dialogue workshop). This helped me bring my own cultural identity into the room and the participants greatly appreciated the way in which they were introduced to the tool. They noted how this gave them an opportunity to hear my '*authentic voice*' and see my own '*connection to the medium*'.

Testing the process

PILOT WORKSHOP

The second workshop conducted during this research project, acted as a pilot workshop to test the application of the alternative method in practice. Since this was the first iteration of the method, the workshop was conducted such that the participants not only engaged with the tool but also shaped/altered the tool as per perceived emergent needs. In this way, the entire process was iterative and the workshop participants acted as 'co-designers', informing and reflecting on the tool. For me, as a designer and researcher, the feedback provided by the pilot participants was invaluable in terms of refining the tool further as well as in imagining other ways/contexts in which the tool could be used.

Right from the beginning, participation of individuals who hold non-western frames/ worldviews was recognised as a prerequisite to the success of this pilot study. After an intense period of searching, a non-profit network was selected for participation and collaboration.

The selection of this network in particular made sense due to a high degree of alignment of core values between those of the network and of this research project. The amount of cultural diversity amongst the members of the network was another obvious criteria for selection. Moreover, the network was already in the process of exploring some futures-oriented questions and themes, and therefore, it was recognized that a collaboration like this would be mutually beneficial for both parties.

ABOUT YSI AND THE COLLABORATION

The Youth Social Infrastructure (YSI) collaborative is an intergenerational network and community of practice that co-creates the supports that young people need to make things happen in their communities. They offer venues, skills, opportunities and relationships so that diverse generations and cultures can learn from each other, grow more resilient as a network and community, and take their contributions and innovations to the next level of impact. The YSI network is vast and extensive and connects local youth-led initiatives across Ontario. Given their focus on facilitating intercultural knowledge exchange and the diversity of the network, YSI was found to be great fit for the pilot workshop. The entire process of collaboration for the workshop was tailored to fit the needs and vision of YSI.

In the weeks leading up to the workshop, I conducted pre-workshop sessions with Myia Davar, the director of the network. Amy Hosotsuji, an SFI colleague and a current member of the YSI network, was crucial in facilitating and shaping this collaboration. Together Myia, Amy and I, with the help of remote feedback from other YSI members, designed and defined the scope and frame for the pilot workshop. From a list of fourteen detailed questions, the focus of inquiry was narrowed on the following two questions:

1. The possibility of 30 year life cycles of change, with 4 year political cycles and funding cycles of 5 years if we're lucky and usually much less. Why is it the expectation that organizations 1) survive and 2) make significant change, when the structures don't exist to support that? What does 30 year commitment look like?

2. How do you do this work being mindful of trauma in yourself and those you work with, while not compromising the collective work - how do we be more reliable for each other?

In our third and final pre-workshop session we were also joined by Jessica Bolduc, the Executive Direc-tor of 4R's – a youth movement related to the YSI network. In this session we brainstormed on ways in which the two-shortlisted questions could be further refined for the purpose of the pilot workshop. Defining a clear futures orientation in the question was important. Additionally, given the principle of 'constructive storytelling', discussed previously, I stressed upon the need for the question to be framed such that it imagines the participating stakeholders as having significant agency in the futures being imagined. At the end, the following question was articulated as the focus of inquiry;

How might we heal from colonial trauma over the next 30 years?

A 30-year frame was defined based on an internal consensus amongst the participating members from YSI and 4Rs. They noted that a time frame as long as thirty years gives them an opportunity of thinking freely without overlooking the need to "act" in the present/near future.

WORKSHOP DESIGN

The design of the pilot workshop, that followed a generative-participatory and iterative design structure, was modelled on the '10 steps of time-travel' discussed in the table above. The total duration of the workshop was six hours, from 11am-5pm. The facilitation was designed to introduce each step of the process to the participants sequentially.

Each step also had a time-duration assigned to it and the participating teams were instructed to more-or-less follow those time constraints. The pilot workshop saw the participation of a total of nine members of the YSI network. The participants were divided into two groups for the exercise and resultantly two Kaavad tools were illustrated during this pilot.

A significant challenge in the workshop was posed by the need to accommodate remote participation of two members who were unable to travel to Toronto. This required the design of the tool and

Image Credit: Nannini Lee Balakrishnan

Figure 36: Remote Collaboration- Participants in group 2, collaborated with team members from Thunder Bay virtually. Despite the geographical barrier, the team was able to retain the collaborative nature of the entire exercise without creative compromise and/or significant time setbacks.

Image Credit: Nannini Lee Balakrishnan

Figure 37: Participants point to generic imagery on their Kaavad to give it meaning and use as an element for storytelling

session to be altered so as to ensure that the process of collaboration between participants in the room and those joining us virtually from Thunder Bay was smooth. Although, this constraint was not ideal given that this was my first time working with the new method, in retrospect the perspectives and stories brought in by the remote participants was enriching to both the process and the outcome.

FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

I began this project with a hypothesis that the worldview in which a research/design method emerges, gets reflected in the epistemologies that are privileged and/or expressed in the outcomes. Through research I found that since the discourse of futures is informed by a western eurocentric worldview, the stories/narratives of futures that are generated as outcomes of the process also reflect western epistemologies of time, space, progress, growth etc. With this third and final phase of my research, my effort was to explore how looking

elsewhere for inspiration could help in opening up the discourse to plural epistemologies. If methods informed by western worldviews generate stories reflecting western perspectives then, can a method inspired by an Indian worldview make room for different perspectives on futures that often get marginalized? Through the pilot workshop, I learnt that the adaptation of Kaavad as a futures storytelling method, did infact make room for plural ways of thinking about time and future. Some key observations that provide evidence for plurality of worldview as facilitated by the Kaavad are discussed below.

Space, temporality and the shape of future

The use of metaphors in this pilot workshop was slightly different than in workshop #1 in that, the teams were asked to collaboratively create a metaphor for their 'desired' futures. These metaphors were then placed on the central panel of the Kaavad and acted as a guiding symbol for the creation of the stories. Interestingly, both teams
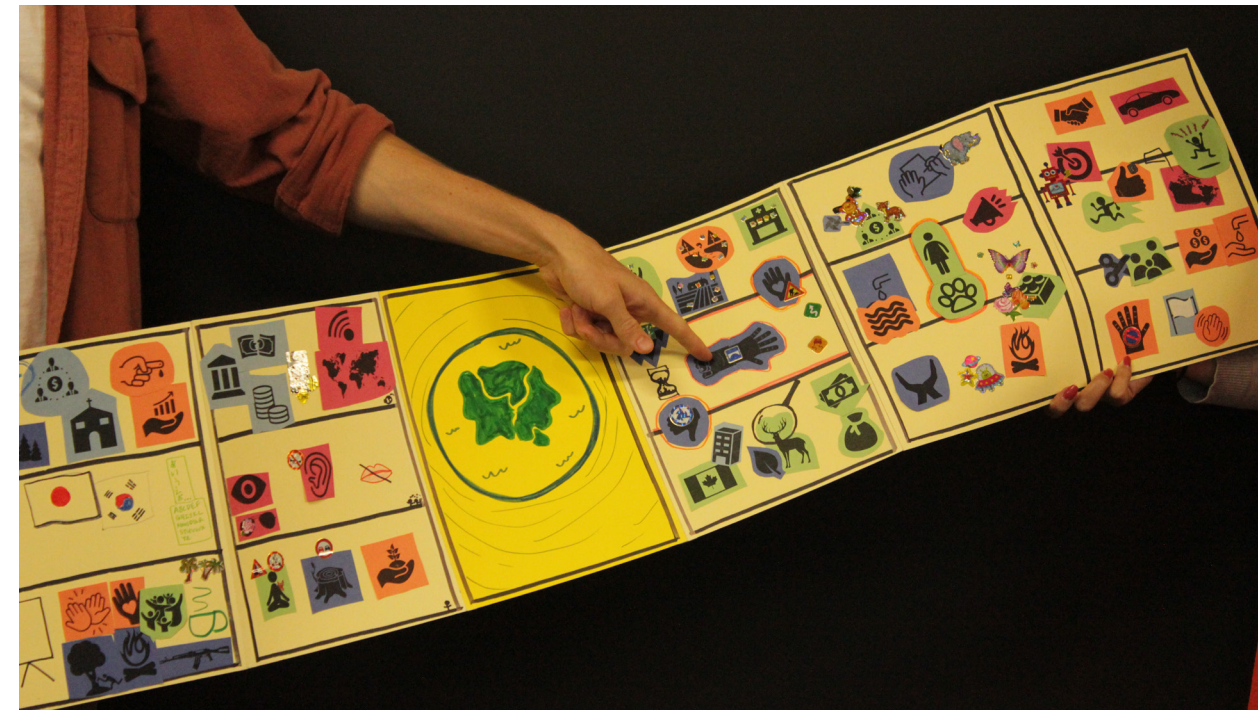
used circular imagery to visualise their metaphors. This circular nature of the metaphors was reflected in the stories created by the groups, as the narrative was built to constantly link the future, present and past. The circularity also got reflected in the values of 'connectedness' and 'holistic growth' that was a fundamental theme in both the stories created. But the most interesting observation was in the way that the metaphors got manifested in the storytelling. During their storytelling session the first team chose to reveal the metaphor, hidden in the innermost panel of the Kaavad, right at the beginning.

Once the vision of what their desired future was communicated through this, the storytellers proceeded by linking various elements from the other panels to trace the path of how they realised that future. The narration of the story was still highly non-linear, since the storytellers constantly went back-and-forth in time and space to establish a narrative link between visual elements that acted as 'pieces' of the story. Similar to how a Kaavadiya uses

his traditional tool, the storytellers in the workshop pointed at general visuals to give them specific meaning or offer interpretation.

Alternatively, the second group chose to re-imagine the physical space of the room as a giant spiral. As they began telling their story, the requested that the listeners join the tellers to move in a spiral around the centre of room. Before beginning the storytelling, the tellers evoked the imagery of water and for the entire duration of the storytelling, both listeners and tellers embodied the metaphor of water moving in a spiral.

While the manifestation the metaphor was remarkably different from that of the first group, the storytellers in this case also used the spatiality of the spiral to link past, present and future as interdependent entities. Instead of revealing the entire narrative at once, this group revealed their story in parts, on panel at a time. While the imagery of a spiral was evoked throughout the telling, it was

Image Credit: Nannini Lee Balakrishnan

Figure 38: Group 2 reimagined the space as a giant spiral which was used to guide the performance/storytelling

Image Credit: Nannini Lee Balakrishnan

Figure 39: A participant from group 2 begins the storytelling by singing a song about their protagonist- Water

only at the end of the performance that the audience was shown the central visual of the spiral.

Unlike conventional foresight methods discussed in the previous section, the Kaavad does not prescribe temporality on those engaging with the tool. The diversity of ways in which the participating groups were able to visualize and use time/space in their stories and storytelling, points to the ability of this tool to accommodate different perspectives and imaginations.

Perspectives, protagonists and pronouns

A common critique of a western modernist worldview, as found in the literature, was the implicit ways in which it privileges technology and masculinity. It is also a common observation that most narratives/stories related to futures often have a strong technocratic focus which can be attributed to the dominance of science-fiction as a genre on futures imagination. However, the stories generated in the pilot workshop were found to talk about the

future without placing technology as a core element in the narrative.

One of the group used 'water' as the protagonist for their story of the future. They imagined and told the story of humanity's journey towards a desired future by tracing the path of water. Their choice of using water as a protagonist, reflects an indigenous worldview in tuned with value of interconnectedness of all living-beings with the land and nature. Moreover, throughout the story, the storytellers used the female pronoun of 'she' while referring to water. For a narrative outcome of a futures process to be so free of technological references and to use an 'unusual' protagonist as water, personified as a female entity is extremely rare. The fact that all members in this group were BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) females is a testament to that fact that the method allowed for their authentic worldviews and personal voices to be reflected in the final story of the future. Interestingly, at several other instances during the course of the workshop, participants were allowed

for room to re-interpret the prompts and briefs. In one particular case, while illustrating panel #5 teams were asked to identify co-actors and allies in their journey to their desired futures. While explaining the brief, I instructed the teams to focus on 'human' entities while still stressing on the core idea of identifying 'allies'.

Both the teams, however, took this opportunity to reinterpret what an 'allie' looks like and chose to include other elements such as water, earth, trees/forests and even non-human organism as their 'allies'. The design of the process and the method, by virtue of being open to interpretation & non-prescriptive, did not allow the limitation of my own worldview (as a facilitator) and the participants were able to express their own interpretation.

Figure 40: Participants re-interpret the brief to include 'non-human' entities on their 'Allies/stakeholders' panels

Figure 41: One of the Kaavads created during the workshop

Figure 42: Reflection- In a reflecting dialogic session at the end of the workshop, the participants provided some great insights into the success and failures of the workshop. The shared their experience of working with Kaavad for a futures exploration and also suggested some next steps.

Plurality, subjectivity and a new story everytime

The two characteristic features of the Kaavad that make it a highly inclusive storytelling tool, as outlined previously, is its polysemic images and that there is no implied sequence in which the panels are to be read. Each image in the Kaavad can hold multiple stories and each time the Kaavad is opened, the same set of images can be differently arranged to generate a new narrative. Through the use of generic icons and imagery during the workshop, my hope was to retain the above mentioned features of the Kaavad. In practice, the imagery was found to afford a similar effect on the storytelling. In each case, the storytellers pointed to specific images or cluster of images to build their narrative. Without the presence or voice of the storyteller, the images in the Kaavad could not be particularized or identified. Any attempt to read the Kaavad in the absence of creator can only be considered an 'interpretation' of the original story. Alternatively, each reader on the Kaavad can become a new storyteller who brings his/her own voice into the tool.

In this way, the purely oral and visual nature of the Kaavad ensures that each each narrative of the future is fully owned by the storyteller and his/her voice. It also means that the same Kaavad has the capacity to hold multiple narratives within itself and can be read in diverse ways. Thus, the narratives generated by the Kaavad are plural not because they are multiple in number but because they cannot be told without subjective voices. The Kaavad does not claim to be objective and is not a neutral tool for imagining futures. It acknowledges the subjectivity of truths and perspectives, and explicitly claims it.

SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT

While in practice the adaptation of the Kaavad as a futures tool was successful in achieving many of the initial goals, many shortcoming surfaced during the pilot workshop too. As designer, observing and acknowledging these gaps is important for me as every version of design is a work-in-progress that can be made better by incorporating feedback. Some of the key issues as observed by the facilitators and participants of the workshop are as follows:

1. The duration of the workshop was felt to be too long. The Kaavad is a tool that requires deep cognitive and creative engagement and a full day, six-hour workshop left the participants feeling tired. In the next iteration of the method, duration of various segments will be a key element that will require to be re-evaluated.

2. One of the participants, Jessica, suggested that it would a fascinating exploration to have different groups of people generate stories using the same Kaavad tool. Another participant, Sharrae, who works with the Children's Peace Theatre, resonated with Jessica's ideas and added, "it will actually be interesting to see what the tool would be with different demographics. I really appreciated the history and also the emphasis on power of story because stories are a transformational tool. It was cool to be able to go through the process and seeing the parallels and as well the difference which I think is very powerful;. It can be so powerful for youth and younger people. I am thinking about how it can be so impactful and really connected to their stories." The difference in narrative and interpretation of visuals could give an interesting comparison of perspectives. This suggestion is in keeping with the way in which the traditional Kaavad is used and would definitely be worthwhile exploration.

3. Another caveat may be the size and diversity of the visual kit itself. Noting that "at times there wasn't images that could capture, what the participants really wanted to depict", Jessica made a great suggestion that it might be worthwhile 'to let people to bring in their own images that into the mix'. In the following iterations, I would like to provide other visual material such as newspapers, magazines etc. along with the visual kit so that the participants have a wider collection of imagery to play with. This may have reasonable impact on the stories created.

Figure 43: The story of '*Six wise men and the elephant*', illustrates the philosophy of *Anekantavad*

6

Conclusion

The value of diverse ways of thinking about the future, as discussed in preceding literature reviewed as well as demonstrated through the various explorations in this research project, cannot be ignored. The opening up of the futures discourse to plural perspectives has a two part significance. First, given that our world today is no longer limited to 'perfectly' homogenous cultural demographics, it is important that the diversity in epistemology and perspectives is reflected in public discourse, policy making as well as futures imaginaries. For an interdisciplinary practice such as foresight, intended plurality of imagination can never be achieved merely by creating many-visions. Multiple visions of the future can only be truly plural and inclusive if they accommodate for and celebrate the vast diversity of knowledge that exists in our world. In the Jain philosophy there is the concept of *Anekāntavāda* (literally translates to many *view-ism*) that takes a non-absolutist position in epistemology. The central proposition of the doctrine of *Anekāntavāda* is that the nature of reality is complex and multifaceted and no single perspective can explain it adequately. It serves as a useful reminder that no single

perspective can offer complete or absolute truth and we must at least consider the narratives that do not resonate with our own. As foresight moves outside its purely organizational confines and engages in conversations about a collective human/civilizational future, practical frameworks for reconciliation, tolerance and consideration of diverse views and ideas must be designed, promoted and used.

Second, with the rapid growth of 'developing' nations, the very notions of 'development' and 'progress' must be challenged, deconstructed, and re-articulated. Since the role of foresight work in imagining and presenting guiding images of desired futures is crucial, foresighters need tools that are able to facilitate the process of challenging hegemonic definitions and of re-articulation of ideas that are informed by the specific context in which they arise. For example, for a country like India with population of 1.2 billion, to reproduce the American model of 'progress' would be catastrophic. What is needed instead, is for it to be able to imagine and express a vision that is shaped by its own unique circumstance, constraints and strengths. Arturo Escobar's vision of a new design theory and practice

as presented in *Designs for the Pluriverse* is resonant with this thought. Noting that most design— from consumer goods and digital technologies to built environments—currently serves capitalist ends, Escobar argues for the development of an "autonomous design" that eschews commercial and modernizing aims in favour of more collaborative and place-based approaches. Such design attends to questions of environment, experience, and politics while focusing on the production of human experience based on the radical interdependence of all beings. Mapping autonomous design's principles to the history of decolonial efforts of indigenous and Afro-descended people in Latin America, Escobar shows how refiguring current design practices could lead to the creation of more just and sustainable social orders (Escobar, 2011).

The proposed method of foresight in this research, inspired by storytelling tradition native and specific to India, hopes to be a small step in the direction of creating such alternative and transformative design practices.

The alternative method proposed in this research fills a significant void in the contemporary futures discourse, that of methods/frameworks directly derived and reflective of a non-western perspectives on the future. It aims to facilitate and inspire creation of positive and compelling images of the future that may otherwise remain ignored and/or marginalised. It cannot be denied that the themes and characters depicted in the stories created and told by the participants in the pilot workshop reflected their authentic worldview and presented unique and refreshing ideas that are seldom seen in outputs of futures discourse.

Polak (1961) arguments first raised the issue of the lack of positive guiding images of the future. In 2017, the same observation would still hold true. He also argued that when faced with new, potent and positive images of possible futures, society begins to mobilise its creative energies (Hicks, 2002). Imagining these positive, equitable and desired futures are within the creative capacity of our society for as long as we are willing to see differently and listen respectfully.

As I mentioned in an earlier part of the document, in my native language of Hindi the word "kal" is used to signify both for yesterday and tomorrow. While the present moment is transient, yesterday and tomorrow provide space for introspection/ contemplation and imagination. In the Indian worldview the past and the future are two sides of the same coin. The same time being re-expressed/ re-imagined. In futures work, valuing this intimate relationship between our pasts and presents would mean that we continually look back to make the future different and better. And the same goes for our methods, practices and discourse in general as well. If futurism is all about moving outside our comfort zones, we need to embrace it wholeheartedly by challenging and reimagine our own tools.

NEXT STEPS

The methodological framework and tool created and tested in this research showed promising results and also provided hope that the conversation can be shifted and that the future can indeed be different. However, given the scope of this project, several stones were left unturned. In the time to come, this research will be further developed in following ways:

1. Further iterations of the method will be developed keeping in mind the scope for improvement identified in the last chapter.

2. A series of futures workshop will be conducted in India to see the applicability of the framework in its native context.

3. A compilation of stories that get created through some of these workshops may be produced at a large scale to offer alternative visions of the future in the mainstream.

AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

Through this research, several under-explored areas of study were uncovered. While I did not have time to delve into all of these areas within this project, I do think that following explorations may benefit the aim of bringing a non-western voice into the futures discourse.

1. Work on linguistics- The 'universal' status accorded to the English language in contemporary times is a direct result of colonisation and a strong evidence of the western dominance over popular discourse. Through the course of this research, an interesting observation noted was that most non-western participants identified themselves as bilingual and expressed a serious limitation in their ability to imagine 'futuristic' themes and visions in their native languages. There may be related to the fact that science-fiction, which is identified as the singular most prominent popular futures genre, comes mostly from Hollywood and hence is rendered in English. Reclaiming knowledge in one's native language has been a significant part of the decolonization project and it would be interesting to explore how people's imagination of the future is shaped by the language of instruction/facilitation.

2. Storytelling traditions from other cultures- As specified earlier, the scope of this research intervention was inspired by and limited to a few storytelling traditions from India. While many of the features of these traditions were representative of many non-Indian, non-western traditions, the commonalities between these cultures cannot be taken for granted. There is immense scope to dive into the depths of storytelling traditions from across the world and draw inspiration for them to design many more such tools that are culturally and geographically contextualised.

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