

## The Challenge of Imaging Peace in Wartime

Elise Boulding

for *Futures*

The idea of consciously setting about to create mental images of better futures in order that these images might in themselves be uplifting to the spirit and empower otherwise paralyzed societies to action on behalf of an actual better future was born in the mind of Fred Polak, Dutch historian and sociologist, during the period of social paralysis that characterized the ending and aftermath of World War II. As a Jew living in hiding during the war years, he had plenty of time to ponder history. His extraordinary macrohistorical work *The Image of the Future* (1953), describing how societies have moved toward their imaged futures through the centuries, or declined because of a lack of a sense of possible futures, was Polak's contribution to setting the West once more on a dynamic course after a bleak period of self-doubt. The atomic bomb, the holocaust, the incredibly destructive war unleashed by civilized nations on each other in the early 1940s had had the cumulative effect of numbing an otherwise activist, optimistic group of Western countries. Polak's reminder that we are a futures-creating species was part of the larger post-war futures movement that set about recovering a lost dynamism.

The next forty years came to be seen as a period of re-creation, a time when growing islands of stable peace were spreading across North America and Western Europe (K. Boulding 1978), and unprecedented economic and social development was taking place. The old European colonies of the Third World became independent states. But they were still the Third World. The

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term, Third World, for some a useful characterization of the poorer countries of the South, for others a denigrating phrase, was here to stay. The fact that the "islands of stable peace" kept shipping arms as well as inappropriate development advice to that Third World, and the increasing frequency of warfare and failed economic development in many countries of the South, were not generally seen as phenomena in any way linked to the very stability that was so much enjoyed by the North.

It was of course a pseudo-stability that the countries of the North were enjoying, and the bills have come due now that we are entering the last decade of the twentieth century. Those post-War images of the future which the North enjoyed generating were indeed images not only *by* but *for* the North. Polak himself was very clear about that. The future of the South could come later. Now it is later. The Gulf war that is raging as I write this represents the very quintessence of the failure of the North to develop more inclusive imagery, more inclusive identities, and to learn from the countries of the South about history, cultures, lifeways and traditions of community and problemsolving not based on high-tech lifestyles. Most of all it represents a failure to recognize that there *was* futures-imaging going on in these countries, an imaging that separated modernization from westernization. The rage of the Arab and Islamic worlds, of Africa and of parts of Asia, at the useeign, unhearing, self-satisfied ways of a still-imperial West, has set a wall of fire between the two worlds that will burn for a long time.

How can we in the North image better futures now? On the one hand we live with flat social identities, deprived of and cut off from the richness of the 10,000 societies that live scattered through the 168 nation states of the modern world, their ethnicity, languages, values and traditions more intact than might have been supposed from contemporary modernization theory. On

the 19th century high technology has turned away from family high technology with no industry hand high technology era industry kibuse with the future moment receive decades have had roots in the 19th century optimism. The twentieth century art work with the High Peace Office hide to each fire by many display among on the subject development the League Nations and the United Nations major breakthrough rounds high and development and creation in saying it through physics technology that our improve human high hand we first became possible with was rapidly disrupted by positive professional vision. say this with see see because that the way was

Anti-Dead End High Technology Workshops to assist people in work with the it weapon and control the material and high person process the field during the workshop of art and engineering to be empowered by the technology have had to reflect on what that empowerment means. On the 1st of frequent case on when there were workers in the workshop they came rather differently from the workshop with western participants with more diversity. However the empowerment of and North American

The workshops are referring now to magic War Without Weapon Workshop may be unfamiliar to many readers. Briefly explained these workshops were designed to enable people who took disarmament seriously see what work which they go had been completed might like like. Participating in the concept of "breach time" the possibility of futuristic scenarios for our art participant. Finally, in the future 30 years hence time enough for mij

changes, such as the post-war process of independence for 100 new states). In this future they find a world in which their best hopes for humankind, previously entered on individual "wish-lists", have come about. They spend time in this imagined future, then come back to report about it, and subsequently analyze what they saw in terms of the institutional infrastructures and socialization patterns that would be required to maintain such a society over time. Eventually, they have to account for that future by an imagined history of the society/the world.

This is all very hard work, but it is a fact that once participants have been persuaded to set aside their doubts about what "could" happen, they become very involved in the process, and become empowered by their own imaginings. Now as I look back on the decade of workshops, I worry that the empowerment was too easy. The world is indeed a dark place, and human beings are capable of dreadful things. We are now in a war that is being brutally fought in deliberate rejection by western leaders of all the knowledge we have gained about alternative modes of dispute settlement, in deliberate rejection of all the knowledge about history, lifeways, culture and negotiation patterns in the Arab/Islamic world, patterns that have evolved over thousands of year in the area we call the cradle of civilization. That rejection of knowledge about the other is all the sadder for being a mutual rejection from both sides. It has been pointed out by historians and archaeologists that the war threatens to obliterate all carefully preserved records of humankind's earliest achievements

While it has never been more important to be able to imagine the better society than today, since we cannot work for a betterment we cannot imagine, how can we do this responsibly, with a full acknowledgement of the diversity of experience and cultural preference that lie strewn across humankind's path to the future?

## Knowing the Past

As I have pondered this question, I find the answer has two parts. First, we cannot responsibly imagine futures without knowing the heights and depths of human experience in the past. We must have a much more in-depth knowledge of human history than ordinary school curricula provide. We must know what catastrophes societies have faced in the past, and how they have dealt with them. Prolonged droughts, famines and wars that have stretched over centuries, decimating populations, putting streams of pitiful refugees on the move from continent to continent, have repeatedly reappeared throughout history. While nature herself has generated many catastrophes, humans seem to have the capacity to create catastrophes even when nature is kind. Barbara Tuchman's *March of Folly* (1984) is must reading- a graphic account of the determined pursuit by leaders of courses of action which are suicidal, in the face of a great deal of knowledge about alternatives that could avoid catastrophe. (The Gulf War could be another chapter in that book.)

Why should the past help us face the future? I have come to realize there was a reason why I was ready to work with Warren Ziegler in adapting his futures invention workshops (Ziegler 1988/9) to a format of imaging a world without weapons at the time we did it in 1980. It was because as a peace activist in the sixties my travels had enabled me to go through an intense experience of reliving the Hiroshima bombing, in Hiroshima itself; and of reliving the holocaust, in Auschwitz. I had come to feel that there were no depths to which the human spirit could not sink and I knew despair. At the same time I came to know wonderful people in Japan and in Poland who were envisioning, working for, building a new world on the ashes of the old. The human spirit seemed to be unstoppable. My despair had to take second place to my discovery of the human spirit that could survive despair and rebuild

the world. That was the experience that Polak went through, that enabled him to write *The Image of the Future*

Despair is hardly a new phenomenon in this decade. Many people have indeed been despairing ever since the atomic age began, and we acknowledge this in the imaging workshops, ask people to look despair in the face and then lay it aside. Another type of workshop, developed by Joanna Macy (1983), focuses much more directly on dealing with despair and lets the empowerment come out only after the despair has been dealt with. Both types of workshops are however basically future-oriented and empowering. Since human beings are so different, different approaches meet different needs.<sup>1</sup>

#### Knowing the Dreams of Others

The second part of the answer to how we can responsibly imagine good futures in dark times has to do with gaining some knowledge of the cultures and aspirations of peoples of the South, and in engaging in cross-cultural imaging. If we do not do this, then we are indeed guilty of colonizing the future, as Robert Jungk and Johan Galtung warned us years ago (Jungk and Galtung, 1969:367).

For gaining an understanding of history and cultures, there are many sources available in local libraries. For aspirations about the future, two books appeared three years apart that represent sustained effort on the part of first Arab, then African, Scholars, to examine alternative future scenarios about scientific, technological and cultural development in the light of the highest values of traditional cultures (Abdalla et al 1983; World Futures Studies Federation 1986). The infrastructures and networks for indigenous development developing in the Arab/Islamic world can be gleaned from the World Muslim Gazeteer (1985) and from Yachir (1989), and on the African continent from the series of publications on African Regional

Perspective: led by American from the United States University  
 Okyo period when the name of the fund in the name and  
 it: western world war with technology many parts of the  
 world become the more important to get the world what  
 the are from the regions with broad trade in both western and  
 western trade possible time  
 the Red Cross and the World Workshop  
 the part of the world who wanted participate  
 mag workshop: on the computer and sciences the research  
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 as the name of the world study of the world beyond the world  
 North America the one who would enter the world mag workshop  
 high level of world development the world development  
 history the two human species and  
 possible world ground: them in sensitivity to the  
 on the name of the world the ways

My own time: 70 years and my reading of history has shown me over  
 and over that matter how bad things are the human race has been  
 the before. There is a way past destruction that is the  
 world that makes the mag workshop so important. Clarity about  
 the present two species and recognition of the undreamed of  
 human diversity us from shallow optimism. We do have  
 abandoned the methods developed in that better world, only broader and  
 deeper them

Preparing for New Year: if necessary About the future

Now that the Gulf War induces something the same kind of paralysis  
 that people felt at the end of World War I. We are going to find out  
 many people are preparing for a new world workshop in the

world of 2025, when new social identities, social structures new social processes have emerged that have bridged the chasm between North and South that looks so unbridgeable today. We know these workshops must be conducted in Arabic, in Hebrew, in other non-European languages, on other continents, and that any workshops held in the United States and Europe must include participants from the South, including the South internal to countries of the North (what is sometimes referred to as the Third World internal to the First world. We cannot afford to image a future for northerners only. And we cannot afford to enter into our work of fantasy without more understanding of the mistakes of the past.

What keeps this kind of imaging from being escapist is that it is *grounded* imaging. *Grounded* in a deeper spiritual awareness of the human condition, grounded in an intellectual awareness of human folly, and grounded in a historical resonance with human groupings from the earliest hunting and gathering bands, whose oldest tales tell us of fireside imaginings of human beings living together in a green and lovely world, in peacefully shared abundance, knowing love and joy (E. Boulding 1987). What gives me confidence that the imaging process is a basically sound one, is that, in spite of cultural differences, the same basic image themes appear in the imagined utopias of the ancient past as appear in the imagery of our late-twentieth-century imagers: a clean, green world of abundance, joyfully shared by men and women (E. Boulding 1988). This kind of imaging is a special human gift, that no follies have been able to extinguish. And as long as we can imagine a better world with minds adequately equipped for the complexities of the twenty-first century, we will be able to work for it.

#### Endnote

1. These ways of dealing with despair should be clearly distinguished from

the culture of despair that makes an art form of horror. A fascination with horror does not lead to the future, it only leads to a living death. am talking about a despair that leads to life.

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