



QUEST TO RESCUE OUR FUTURE

Glenn Sankatsing



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BOOK DETAILS AND FIRST CHAPTERS

[For critique of the concept sustainable development see www.crscenter.com/sustain.pdf]

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[BACK COVER]

Humanity has been tampering dangerously with the exceptional conditions that made life possible on Earth. We have disconnected recklessly from the life-enhancing force of evolution, targeted nature as a legitimate object of predation and turned war into the supreme arbiter to settle discords. Humanity has gone astray and is already hanging over the abyss of oblivion. Now, the planet is sounding severe warnings – some of them with the intonation of a final call – but the reigning system has turned off the thermostat of pain. The anomaly of selfishness, individualism and competition at the service of the triumvirate of greed, power and fame needs to make way for the warmth of solidarity, cosmopolitanism and communitarianism as the life-enhancing worldview. If we join together to take command of our destiny, humanity will have a powerful synergetic force to rescue its future. We simply need to make the right choice. If we do not learn to live together we will die together.

[FRONT FLAP]

Quest to Rescue Our Future chronicles the path of humanity, diagnoses our present misfortunes, identifies the dangerous trends and maps the desirable and feasible futures. Most importantly, it locates the transformative social forces that are still intact – the moral reserves of humanity – and delves into the strategy and actions that can shape a different version of humanity. The quest

identifies *Life looking for more life* as the underlying force of evolution, which reveals how culture, freedom and evolution merge in development, understood as the mobilization of inherent potentialities in interactive response to the challenges posed by nature, habitat and history to realize a sustainable project with an internal locus of command. This life-enhancing force of development offers humanity a powerful tool for the urgently required overhaul. We may well stand before the last opportunity to reconnect to the evolutionary process that gave us existence, before nature proceeds to remove us as an unreliable companion of life and an obstacle in evolution. Today, we are not running out of options but we are running out of time. We need to act quickly. Action is the best prediction. It is now or never, hence now.

[BACK FLAP]

Rescue Our Future Foundation

President, Cees J. Hamelink

www.rescueourfuture.org

The *Rescue Our Future Foundation* offers a global forum to bring together critical minds and concerned people for discussion and dialogue on rescuing humanity's future, at a time when we are facing existential threats. Inspired by the ideas and views in *Quest to Rescue Our Future* on humanity's current predicaments and responsibilities, the Foundation stimulates critical reflection and concrete action for mobilizing the countless moral reserves that the species still possesses. Awareness, alertness and liberation from mental enslavement take a central place in the Foundation's activities, with a special focus on the empowerment of those who are destined to populate the future, the youth on all continents. *Quest to Rescue Our Future* is the first of a series of publications that propose challenging points of view and reflections on our contemporary conditions and that can contribute to a better future for humanity.

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GRATITUDE

[Excerpt: Introductory Chapter and Chapter 1 and 2]

TEAMING UP FOR THE QUEST

We live on a small planet that a boundless Universe privileged with the chemistry of life. Humanity has been tampering dangerously with the exceptional conditions that made life possible on Earth. With thoughtless acts, our species has antagonized nature to unbearable levels and has disconnected from evolution's logic of survival. We have broken cherished bonds of solidarity and compassion, opening ample space for selfish competition and ruthless rivalry among self-interested individuals and powerful elites. The main casualty of humanity's long and arduous voyage has been harmony with nature, with fellow humans, with other cultures, with other worldviews, and with other paths to the divine. War has become the supreme arbiter to settle discords.

Has humanity gone astray? Is our species already hanging over the abyss of oblivion? Can a species really disconnect from the evolutionary process of which it forms part? Are there still survival options? Is a peaceful world that offers a fair living space to all still possible? What can we do to avert the existential threats that are growing by the hour? Humanity urgently needs answers to so many difficult questions. We all admit it in silence. These dangerous times can decide the fate of our species.

The urge to dominate nature for selfish purposes has disrupted our embedment in our life-giving environment and our interconnection with Mother Earth. The solitude of egoism has undermined the opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation and has destroyed the warmth of solidarity. Our historical record is worrisome, while bad omens augur worse to come. Ruthless competition has blocked roads to cooperative engagement for negotiated solutions, and war has become the guardian angel of peace. Today, what may well have been the most gifted species ever to appear on Earth is pointlessly roaming across treacherous meadows toward the point of no return without a clue how to turn the tide to secure its future.

Far from being complex, the choice before us is as simple as it

is dreadful. It is between a better world and a world without humans. It is the choice between survival and extinction. Evolution can deal with both; humanity can only live with one. Nature is accustomed to catering for survival, but evolution is not equipped for taking care of a species that opts for self-destruction.

There is a chance that in the end things will work out well. So far, the Universe and its life forms have proved immensely creative, with a remarkable ability of finding solutions at the right time. The capacity to self-adjust, to adapt, to innovate, to remedy and to cure showed up along the whole path of history. Sometimes, even a dose of natural disaster was required for readjustment, such as earthquakes that release tensions between tectonic plates or catastrophes like famines or pandemics that decimate species and restore ecological balance. Matters become different when a species ignores the imperatives of nature, the logic of evolution, the warnings of the environment, the pleas of the majority, and the lessons of history. No universal law guarantees that humanity is always bound to survive. Free will can end free will.

In reflections on restorative options, one should be neither a pessimist nor an optimist, for both optimism and pessimism are types of superstition. The fatalism of the pessimist is pointless. Yet, the worst remedy for an imminent disaster is the anesthesia of optimism. Pessimism and optimism are the staring twins of nightmare and dream that invite us to inactivity either by apathetically waiting for disaster or by passively longing for the magic wand. Trying to amend reality by desperate hope or hopeless despair has never opened any escape route. Maybe the appropriate answer in today's troublesome reality is to focus on creative action to remedy what has gone terribly wrong, following the thoughtful advice of Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano (1940–2015): “Let us leave pessimism for better days.”¹

Only by accurately diagnosing our current conditions can we successfully frame our endeavors. This should put us on our guard against dogmatic people who want others to believe and accept their version of the world and their reading of facts, as part of a strategy

¹ Rosa Miriam Elizalde, Galeano: Dejemos el pesimismo para mejores tiempos, *Cubadebate*, April 13, 2015 (reprint of an interview with Eduardo Galeano in 2001)

to keep their preferred system going with tales that do not match reality. On the other hand, we should resist from claiming any definitive truth, but rather present the outcome of our critical reflections and scrutiny in a candid way as well-argued proposals submitted for the perusal of others, in a pluralist dialogue and joint quest for valid answers.

Even more dangerous than siding with doom thinkers who amplify fear by exaggerating our unfortunate condition is joining the chorus of self-interested corporate capital and centralized government in swiftly downplaying the dimension of our misfortune. Without excluding any option beforehand, both those people who believe that things may work out well and those who are deeply concerned about an imminent disaster now face the urgency of coming together in assertive action beyond mere contemplation or carping. Now that we have gone so far in the wrong direction, apathy is tantamount to self-destruction. There is no safe sidewalk. Inactivity is also action. To do nothing is to do the wrong thing.

Dire current conditions and troublesome trends raise vexing questions. Our spaceship Earth is faltering. With strident ecological alarms, the planet is sounding severe warnings – some of them with the intonation of a final call – but an adequate response to species-threatening crises has yet to appear. This prompts us to raise a number of questions. Did today's dominant system, shaped over half a millennium, really stall? Has such a sophisticated model of society – based on rationality and modernity and erected upon a solid scientific, technological and military edifice with powerful global infrastructures still in place – truly exhausted its response capacity?

Any hasty rejection or uncritical endorsement in answering these questions is premature and reckless. While the writing is already on the wall, our conditions invite us to a thorough analysis with open minds to decrypt the omens of our time beyond pointless scientific and political polemics that may only add to our frustration. Yes, we know that things are complex. But 'complexity' should not be a smoke screen for plain answers that we are not getting from experts, politicians and self-proclaimed gurus, who are even afraid to pose the right question, out of fear for the answer.

Can humanity reconnect with the survival logic of evolutionary continuity? The first and foremost task before us to answer this

question is mapping our condition, starting with a diagnosis of our reality, which neither downplays the symptoms of distress nor exaggerates the scope of our misfortune. The magnitude of the challenge before us today requires a quest that reaches beyond prefabricated answers or circumlocutions amounting to ‘damage control’.

The purpose of the quest we are about to initiate is to address these existential matters of our species. This will take us through the passage of time and the incidents of history all the way back to the origins of humanity to decipher the historical path of a species, answering a singularly important question. When did humanity take the wrong turn in its social evolution, and what powers have been accountable for the derailment that brought us to today’s fateful times?

The answer to this question will be critical for the quest to rescue our future, which will require an alliance among diverse peoples almost as big as a species. We need to restore what handfuls of selfish elites – like the ones we endure today – have managed to tear asunder by millennia of ruinous domination of nature, fellow humans, culture and mind. We face a challenge that will demand an unbiased, unprejudiced and open solidarity, assembled across barriers of race, religion, worldviews, nationality, class, gender, tribe and ethnicity.

In all latitudes, we find concerned people who ask the same questions about our possible fate. Yet, there is no answer and no guidance. Academic, political, religious and economic leaders saturate the air but fail to offer any useful alternative to the destruction of nature and the tyranny of small elites over their fellow humans. Secluded in embarrassing silence, they have no message to deliver and no new project to announce to continents of disconcerted people.

From the five-star universities, which have quarantined wisdom with zero-star performance in countering our deteriorating conditions, to the much publicized pilgrimages to world summits, what stood out among political leaders, corporate managers, religious hierarchy and academic circles was a nervous concern about system maintenance rather than a commitment to remedial transformation. Earth summits on the environment and climate change were in fact business meetings of the powerful industrialized countries as the

trustees of state and corporate interests to safeguard the existing favorable conditions for profit and economic growth, with all their destructive ecological effects.

Mainstream science and technology too readily served the mammon of money, the totem of greed, the arrogance of power and the machinery of war. Triumphant ‘truths’ of religion, ideology and philosophy have failed to stop the derailment of the human race. Humanity has grown weary of religious, scientific, philosophical, ideological and ethnic narratives of futile futures that exude pride in defending polarizing sectarian principles and imperial designs with violence and war. Peace has been the main casualty of ethnocentric polemics and parochial appropriations of God, Reason and Body. A degree of violence has accompanied the historical path of humanity that is unprecedented in the evolution of life on Earth and probably beyond.

‘Modern civilization’ – shorthand for the model that originated in Europe and went global in many variants, local adaptations and mutations – has played a leading role in the core problems humanity is facing today. Its global ramifications and its successful overruling and marginalization of the projects of social evolution of other destinies make the deep existential crisis even worse for humanity. Fortunately, not even the stall of such a civilizational model needs to mark the end of history or the end of humanity. Other projects with promising springs can fill the void with a new continuity on a planet that may still host us for times to come. In human evolution, the breakdown of a dominant model has always closed a stagnant historical episode, but fortunately, it has never driven our species out of options. In history, civilizations have risen and fallen as epiphenomena in an ongoing social evolution.

Left with no other choice but to ‘step up to the plate’ and demand appropriate responses to perilous predicaments, humanity is resuscitating its deeply hidden morality, solidarity and respect for nature that Civilization, Religion, Party and State have disregarded. Unwilling to accept the fundamentalist fables of one-sided truths, a species has begun to take perpetrators of destruction to task, demanding restorative transformations to prevent collapse.

As we look for valid answers for today’s deep troubles, we cannot just follow a recent tendency of banning general explanations

by dismissing them as ‘grand narratives’, as has become fashionable in postmodernism’s rejection of what it contemptuously labels as ‘metanarratives’. Big problems need big answers instead of a fatalistic surrender to dangerous conditions, retreat into subjective ‘relativism’ or capitulation to ungraspable ‘complexity’. Today, humanity desperately needs a grand theory that is grand enough to deliver a strategy for securing its permanence on Earth. Evolution has always been a big narrative.

The historical failure of the false parochial narratives of an expansionist, civilizing mission that globalized its model is no proof of a universal breakdown of human endeavors. Such a failure will not stop others from continuing to search for alternative roads to a possible future that can reconnect with the survival logic of evolution. The end of a monopolizing project that succeeded in endangering humanity’s historical path rather triggers multiple alternative engines to propel us toward new horizons with more advantageous and life-fulfilling options, instead of death-dealing outcomes. This harbors the potential to bring better futures for all, for the endless rows of victims of historical injustice, but also for the brothers and sisters in countries that victimized other destinies on the planet.

In brief, we face the challenge to find a viable future without any narrow geographic, ideological, religious, ethnic or other sectarian entry ticket that excludes people. This turns our endeavor to rescue our future into a joint and open quest of a fellowship. There is one mandatory requirement, though, for joining the fellowship: color-blindness. Racism is a terrible, inexplicable and indefensible lie for a human species that was born in its entirety out of a single family of common ancestors who decided to roam the world. Humanity is a diverse quilt of the same silk. What humans should laud as a successful adaptation of the body to climatic and contextual circumstances to secure survival debases a species now into a source of polarization and war.

The abundance of resources, the beauty of lands and the pleasantness of environmental conditions invited migrant populations repeatedly to halt their journey and settle down. The voyage has given rise to a beautiful diversity in striving to adapt to climate, latitude, altitude, deep forest and ocean borders. In the trek, the sun tanned

some, gave others blue eyes, while some reduced their size and adjusted their posture to deal with mountainous slopes. It is among the darkest disappointments in human evolution that people who should be bursting with impatience for a rendezvous with their original kin to share exciting and rewarding adventures now resort to the humiliating practice of racism.

To have any chance of success, our search for corrective paths must eschew all prejudices, parochial creeds and universalizing wisdoms that have brought so much harm on our species. We need to listen more attentively to others who voice similar concerns. Options are as open as the joint commitment of our courage to turn hope into action. Rather than pre-established dogmatic truths, such a pluralist quest requires well-argued proposals submitted to constructive dialogue without excluding any audience. In the first place, it needs to mobilize the vast majority that has been bereft of control over their fate, forced to choose between two or more evils.

Critical scrutiny holds the key for the success of our quest. A critical stance is the commitment to accept the outcome of one's reflections, analysis and argumentation in an unadulterated way, regardless of whether in contradiction with one's self-interest, in line with cherished tenets, at variance with established wisdom or censorious of the dominant system. The bottom line is faithfulness to the results of our own inquiry and analysis.

A critical stance may pose a difficult tension between, on the one hand, presenting the outcome of reflections in a candid way and, on the other hand, toning down conclusions to subdued positions to gain endorsement by established views in the reigning system or to make findings more palatable for a wider public. Rather than nuancing or 'editing' the discourse to engage powerful political, economic and academic establishments, a candid and precise language should break through the monologue of powers that have been primarily accountable for our troubles.

Critical thought also requires fairness toward previous thinkers who dedicated their life in painstaking efforts to unravel the big unknowns of life. While taking their wisdom to heart, one needs to avoid the classical sin of intellectuals to let others do the thinking for them. Too often learned people inhabit the mental prison of mimicry by uncritical acceptance of ideas and by outsourcing their

reflective and creative capacity to established centers of excellence. This is a comfortable way to get to a truth without making the effort to find out whose truth it is.

While this quest will eschew the primitive delight to focus on small missteps, ambiguities and lacunae in the work of the big names and icons of philosophy and thought, it should not hesitate to be iconoclastic in its efforts to correct stubborn misconceptions that have had unacceptable consequences. We may well take US philosopher Richard Rorty's (1931–2007) advice to be “first-rate critics”, who “attack an optimal version of the philosopher’s position – one in which the holes in the arguments are plugged or politely ignored, and the unfortunate side-effects of his work, or the side-issues she discussed, are trimmed away”.²

The best solution seems to be a combination of faithfulness to the results of critical reflection, respect for others and openness to feedback. Nobody owns the truth in a quest driven by unanswered questions. This implies that statements need to take the form of well-thought ideas and proposals submitted for the perusal and scrutiny of others with an open and receptive mind, but by no means should they compromise one’s ethical commitment with the cause of humanity. Ethics, as the set of general principles required for a just, peaceful and harmonious world, reaches further than morality, which is subject to cultural differences, as illustrated by the sliding scale of acceptable dress in different locations, from bikini to burka.³

This distinction between ethics and morality clarifies how legal systems can impose a morality that violates ethical principles to the point of endangering life on Earth. How often has humanity not seen in its history how a stubborn belief in parochial moral positions that are indifferent to general ethical values has blocked our receptivity to warnings of nature and downplayed the admonitions of sages, who relentlessly urged us to step back and reconnect with creation, ethics, spirituality and the spirit of evolution? We printed

² Richard Rorty, Review of ‘Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen’ (text in German). *London Review of Books*, Vol. 9 No. 15 • 3 September 1987

³ Morality derives from the Latin word for custom, *mos*, which stands for customs and norms of a particular group, whereas ethics comes from the Greek word for distinctive character *ethos*, which stands for fundamental values.

their voices in sacred books and codified their parables in ritual tradition, without heeding the message of Krishna, Pachamama, Zoroaster, Moses, Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Baha'i 'Ulla and other reincarnations of pleas to rectify. All through history, barbaric acts of violence by believers in pursuit of power, secular glory, dehumanizing privileges and wealth have misread, adulterated and betrayed their words and examples.

Some great figures of humanity stood up to guide us away from fateful routes, including three powerful icons of the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), Martin Luther King (1929–1968) and Nelson Mandela (1918–2013). Their paths show how courageous decisions and transcendent actions can break with powerful systems that seized control with false tales that served the legitimization of injustice and appropriation of the common good.

The wisdom and warnings of all those spiritual and secular precursors have not prevented humanity from descending further on the dangerous downward slope toward the abyss. This exhorts us not to take too lightly the challenge of building a promising edifice on the ruins of the past. We should not underestimate the capacity of a powerful system to dominate by dictating dubious, universalizing truths that succeed in denying the most obvious facts. Yet, precisely therein lies the main paradox of domination, which opens the door wide for awareness processes that can transform the world, for one can dominate people only by controlling their minds. If we succeed in emancipating ourselves from mental slavery, the job is already half done.

The task in front of us is formidable. It will take a huge effort to make the required corrections, for no single mischief could have caused the extreme species-threatening dangers that we are witnessing today. While the road will be difficult and bumpy, it can be comforting at the same time, if we manage to join forces across existing lines of division in an unwavering search to rescue our future.

We will find no road to save our future unless we first analyze our current conditions in the context of a longstanding process of social evolution. Our quest will necessarily have to start with an elaborate inventory of the magnitude and urgency of our troubles.

Today, the dangers have become clear to the naked eye because *'The time that will tell' has already told* (Chapter 1). To gain a deeper

understanding of the route of humanity, we will have to reach beyond today's specific circumstances and identify the underlying forces that drive social processes and generate history. This will guide our attention to an evolutionary interplay conceived as development–envelopment dynamics, which place the core of development far beyond its confinement to economic growth or deterministic models, in the wider scope of what constitutes the core force of evolution, which is *Life looks for more life* (Chapter 2). Equipped with this powerful analytical tool of development–envelopment dynamics, we can examine how the *Globalization of a local experience* (Chapter 3) shaped our contemporary world in the last half millennium by a civilization, modernization and globalization mission. Yet, we will have to go even further back in time to identify the deeper underlying conditions that brought us to our present state. To do so, we will track the historical path of humanity from its origins, to find out where human social evolution took the wrong turn that drove our history over tortuous paths that became tantamount to the *Survival of the filthiest* (Chapter 4). Our attention can then focus on a deeper understanding of the discursive strategies used across the ages to secure domination by small elites, which culminated in *Envelopment tale in development attire* (Chapter 5), using hoaxes of development to disguise the alienation of others from their own context and social evolution.

A critical inquiry into whether the globally dominant trends, models and projects can generate a solution from within leads us to the vital question *Is modern civilization the future face of all?* (Chapter 6). The answer will determine whether the only meaningful option for all others is to follow the path set by those who claim to be the vanguard of humanity or whether it will be necessary for them to open a different, creative route.

To define the best road toward transformation, we first need to map the possible options that modern civilization can still offer to respond to the historical derailments that it helped to generate. *Did modern civilization fail as a project for humanity?* (Chapter 7). If it still possesses alternatives for repair, we should engage in correcting its errors, optimizing its potential, and creatively resort to its technological power and experience to set out an improved path to the future. But if the dominant system has failed beyond repair, we need

to explore extra-systemic avenues to create a different human project that is capable of rescuing the future of our species.

We can then turn our eyes to the future by exploring the options for the *Rehumanization of a dehumanized humanity* (Chapter 8) through concerted action by people across divides. Its success will depend on the power of coexistence in respectful diversity, as the way to deal with divergence and conflicts of interests, instead of surrendering to traditional responses of domination. That will prepare us to address the final and most important question of agency by exploring the possible roads for the moral reserves of humanity to join together in a broad *Fellowship to rescue our future* (Chapter 9).

In brief, this quest to rescue our future is the tale of the troublesome path in the evolution of a species that is so dear to us. At the same time, it is about our capacity to take action to rehumanize a dehumanized humanity that dared to oppose nature as an enemy and has now gone astray. This may well be the last opportunity to reconnect to the evolutionary process that gave us existence, before nature proceeds to remove us as an unreliable companion of life and an obstacle in evolution.

We need to realize from the outset that the task before us is not an easy one. But we have no other choice. It requires courage, perseverance, patience, compassion and commitment in a holistic enterprise that covers every realm of life. We need to overcome piecemeal, additive, fragmentary and disciplinary approaches, which are incapable of dealing with the single, interrelated problem that humanity is now facing. This quest across the ages and disciplinary boundaries, involving many spaces of life, is as necessary as it is difficult and rewarding. Cosmetic shifts within the framework of the dominant system, as proposed by many self-proclaimed gurus, will only mask the justifying tales that perpetuate domination and sink us further in dangerous quagmires.

Ours is a creative uphill task that can no longer build on the authority of the established 'wisdom' of the modern dominant system with its biased vocabulary and adulterated syntax. Something is wrong with the grammar and we need to spell out the alphabet anew for a different narrative that can outlive our children.

Fortunately, our creativity is not voiceless. In all corners of the Earth, people are rising up in pursuit of an exit strategy, to raise their

voice to awaken others for the tasks ahead. Nobody will be able to mute such a reverberating choir, because no force is capable of silencing the innate cry to live and survive. But even under the worst of circumstances that we may encounter in our quest, we will still be able to sing together with the Amerindian folk musician Atahualpa Yupanqui (1908–1992), chanting with his guitar half a millennium of denied history in one compressed verse: “I don’t need the voice. I can sing even in silence.”⁴

⁴ Atahualpa Yupanqui in the song “Ave que pasas cantando” (Bird that passes singing)

CHAPTER 1

'THE TIME THAT WILL TELL' HAS ALREADY TOLD

Start of the quest

A general diagnosis of our present state will map the key questions that we need to address in order to define the challenges and tasks ahead.

Humanity is part of life-giving evolution. Between responsibility and recklessness, the two extremes of human action, unfortunately, the historical path of our species derailed toward irresponsibility. Today, humanity has gone off-track, endangering our stay on Earth by uprooting our environment, while sacrificing peace by turning war into the supreme arbiter to settle disagreements.

With a sense of guilt, the United Nations has brought states together in many global ecological gatherings in the last decades. From the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment of Stockholm in 1972 to the 1992 Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro, from the gathering in Johannesburg (2002) to the climate change conference in Copenhagen (2009), from discussions on sustainable development in Cancun (2010) to gatherings in Durban (2011), from the return to Rio de Janeiro (2012) after twenty years of untiring efforts to the Climate Change Conference in Paris (2015), the huge pilgrimages to conference summits around the globe have still left us without a clue how to respond. Among the piles of paperwork pouring from these official summits, not one document has shown us how to get back on track toward a balanced relationship with our surroundings in respectful coexistence with each other. With all their summits, the dominating powers have been unable to offer an exit strategy.

Yes, we look for comfort zones where we try to live our lives as best as we can with our loved ones while business goes on as usual. Yet, somehow, a reality has come into place that leaves none of us alone. The shield of house, family, temple and country does not

seem to offer sufficient protection against dark shadows that are getting closer over rising seas and inundated lands.

We all know that, and we share it with our loved ones. Rulers invade the family, assault the individual, toss privacy on the public digital surveillance square, disturb the climate, militarize religion, and turn war into the grand jury. Nobody seems able to control the rattling of guns that disturbs the silence, even in remote valleys.

The survival of humanity does not top the agenda of the ruling elites of the planet who have hijacked the destiny of the species for dubious private interests. They do not listen to the pleas of the majority, and rather than care for what may happen to humanity and to its offspring, they manipulate people's desire for security to strip them of their freedom and abort their ability to respond. Unless the majority takes command of the destiny of humanity, the future of our species will remain in severe danger.

How long can life go on as usual, when one safe haven after another is falling prey to environmental crisis, growing moral degradation, ethnic clash, widespread hunger, economic catastrophe, fundamentalist war, and private and state terrorisms? Egoism has become the highest virtue in a mission marked by competition rather than solidarity. Totalitarianism, with mass surveillance and legalized assaults on freedom, has become the only option to safety that the dominant elites offer. All of this plays into the hands of the owners of an abusive system to safeguard their 'freedom' to expand their insatiable appropriation of wealth with impunity.

The planet warns us with unmistakable omens, such as global warming and extinction of species, but those who have taken hold of command positions have withdrawn in self-protective quarantine. Their monologues of power have become insensitive to the alerts of nature and unresponsive to rational arguments. They monopolize the news outlets to adulterate the message. They are deaf to the global outcries for peace of alarmed majorities and even blind to the collapse of their own support mechanisms. Human resilience has its limits, and now many fear the unthinkable.

If human extinction is already on the scroll of history, and there is no clear option to avoid disaster, one may wonder whether it is ethically right to spell out the horrors of tomorrow to the uninformed or misinformed of today. A simple rule of thumb in life

might be never to announce the terminal catastrophe if you do not have the magic to solve it. Never augur an evil that is impossible to remedy. Allow people, in the absence of a feasible rescue operation, the option to vanish in peace. Why herald children to a tomorrow that already may be gone, when their joyful cheers still rise over the fence? In the end, to refrain from fighting against fate is not evidence of cowardice, but a sign of wisdom.

There is a second possible rule of thumb. When the narrative of life is ongoing and we can still divert the oncoming crash with actions that can rescue our future, it is a moral obligation to toll the bells to awaken the crowds from lethargy and apathy, giving them the serene reminder that we can still avoid fatality.

Beyond the omens that beleaguer us, the message is already coming through. While low-lying islands and coastal areas already see the water of the ocean washing over their shores, a sigh of hope is whispering among its waves, telling us that there is still space for agency to revert the tale. Human-made problems can have human-made solutions. Nature is replete with evidence that organisms and species turn creative at the sight of death or extinction. In the end, no fatalistic tenet can suffocate the desire to live.

Today, we can sense a widespread public outcry in growing protests around the world, searching for a different route. More and more, people are speaking out to let the world know that a species is no longer willing to surrender and just walk off the cliff to its demise. This is all part of the cosmic urge to survive, which has kept evolution alive for billions of years. We are never mere spectators of our fate; we are always the architects of our future. This inspires people to raise a different voice that can bind them together across ideological and religious divides, an unambiguous token of hope that new gateways are in front of us. Today's blind alley is actually the trigger for dormant forces to awaken and open up yet unexplored paths.

What, then, can serve as guidelines for our quest? The life of human societies and the shaping of their reality revolve, at any point in time, around a series of interrogations that are crucial to the flow of history. Five questions that stand at the center of our concerns today will serve as the main thread of our quest: (1) Where do we

come from? (2) Where are we standing now? (3) Where are we heading? (4) What future do we desire? and (5) What actions do we take to rescue our future? Taken together, these questions make up a fusion of history (to understand and learn from our past), diagnosis (to know our current condition), trends (to identify what will happen, if we stick to the same course), vision (to map desirable and feasible futures), and, most importantly, agency (to take action to shape our future).

These questions will guide our endeavors to grasp history and gauge the untapped potentialities of humankind, from the promising start in pristine African lands all the way to the threshold of extinction, which we should refuse to cross over now. No shortcut or simple roadmap can bring an answer to such important interrogations of the social evolution of humanity. It is clear that today's existential challenges demand a holistic species-wide response that transcends the myopia of separate disciplines, fields of study, tribes, belief systems, states or other parochial vantage points. Ours will be a long quest, from the Indus valley to the Mediterranean, from the Bering Sea to Patagonia, from the clear waters of the Euphrates to the coastal areas inundated by global warming.

Before we proceed to answer the five key questions in the chronology of time, which will allow us to follow the vicissitudes of the human trajectory, let us glance briefly into their nature by following the different chronology of action, which needs to start with the diagnosis of the problem. If humanity is facing an existential problem, we might first want to assess its magnitude. If threats are unacceptably high and set worrying trends, we need to delve into the causes and routes that brought us here, to be able to define the outlines of the better world to which we aspire, and finally to proceed to a strategy and program for action to rescue our future.

1. Where are we standing now?

We can build a new world only on top of existing conditions. This makes a precise diagnosis of our current state the point of departure.

The record of humanity's wanderings on planet Earth looks bleak. We have failed in our best intentions and succeeded in our

worst ambitions. The scientist knows it, the Inuit sees it, and the polar bear feels it in the disturbed glacier. The writing is in the clouds, in the waters of the oceans and yellowish rivers, and on the trails of retreating forests. It reverberates in the despair of poverty-stricken people in the four corners of the Earth, in the faces of countless war refugees, as the nomads of modern civilization, and in the deep marks of anxiety around the eyes of ordinary people who seek to protect their loved ones against generalized terror. Everywhere we find anxiety and fear that end up with the same question. What world will we leave for our children?

Beyond differing assessments of the magnitude of our crisis, there is a general feeling that we have lost grip on our destiny and that we may be heading for some sort of unspeakable disaster. The many dangers and pitfalls that haunt humanity today point to four severe escalating hazards, which are taking the form of agonies that threaten to decimate or destroy our species. We need to map the precise nature, magnitude and impact of each of these existential dangers. The first is eco-cataclysm, an imminent environmental collapse provoked by humans' predatory actions against the support systems of life on the planet. The second existential danger is global envelopment, a longstanding form of domination that culminated in modern colonial subjugation through the imposition of alien, context-insensitive devices, which frustrates the mobilization of inherent potentialities. The third danger consists of polarizing fundamentalisms that swarm temples on a global scale to pray God to kill the gods of others. The fourth danger is paralyzing mental slavery, which prevents people from taking action that builds on their own context, perspective, aspirations and social evolution.

While each of these four agonies can kill, none of them stands by itself. It is this troublesome interconnection in what seems to be a fourfold agony that most threatens the continuity of humanity's evolutionary path of development. Today, the divorce from environment, the violation of development, the surge of belligerent fundamentalism, and the prison of mental slavery add up to a monumental challenge to human existence that leaves no space or time for the slightest hesitation to act.

2. Where are we heading?

Ours is one of the most illogical moments ever to occur on planet Earth. For the first time in known evolution, extinction threatens a species long before conditions in nature are generating its demise. The planet can still host us with its lavish resources. It can feed us and offer vital means to raise offspring. It sends fresh waters in the downpours of spring to irrigate fertile lands with the streams of the Amazon, the Nile, the Mississippi, the Yangtze and the Ganges, on their way back to their temporary retreats in oceans and seas.

A species that degrades its natural environment into an object of pillage and upgrades egoism into the highest of virtues can never be trusted to safeguard the long-term survival of creatures, not dolphins, not cockroaches, not bees, not humans. A minimum of cooperation is always required to secure survival. Singling out competition as the unique driving force of evolution, while worshipping extreme individualism at the expense of solidarity, is an invitation to collapse.

The longstanding fable of global transfer of progress and prosperity by conquest, colonialism, civilizing mission, westernization, modernization and globalization now lays shattered on three continents. There is hardly a landscape on the planet that does not display the staggering human and material costs of 'civilizing the barbarian' into social and cultural death. It happened in ancient times and recurred in magnified form in the colonial projects of the last half millennium, which mainstream historiography curiously depicts as the success story of modern civilization, notwithstanding its expansionism, conquest and violent subjugation of the majority of humanity.

We have failed to draw the right conclusions in time. Now, history is spelling them out for us through ecosystems' planetary warnings. Global warming is, in the first place, the global warning that opposing the powers of nature and the spirit of evolutionary continuity threatens the survival of humanity and can endanger many other life forms on the planet.

Today's trends are scary. Even when there is no unanimity among all about the severity of our troubles, there is a general feeling that we are on a downward slope, heading for some sort of disaster. We need to turn the steering wheel if we want to pilot our species

to safe ground. As our very survival is at stake, we might rather want to consider German philosopher Hans Jonas' (1903–1993) proposal of "*in dubio pro malo*" – when in doubt consider the worst prediction.⁵ Bearing in mind the looming global conflagrations, it seems wiser to look for common ground than to embark upon useless polemics.

3. Where do we come from?

One wonders how in heaven we could have gotten this far. At what point did humanity end up in a wrong turn, and what forces were accountable for that? To answer this question, we must travel all the way back to our origins and carefully map the genealogy of humanity.

The species that claims to be the most talented on Earth has made a caricature of progress and derailed its creativity into self-destructive growth at the service of the insatiable want of small elites competing for resources that do not belong to them. They simply have banned solidarity and cooperation as utopian inventions and dumped them into the dustbin of history. The model that produced centuries of global colonialism, genocide, slavery and the execution of freedom fighters in the name of civilization still claims to offer the best yardstick for our days. A road that provoked world wars and atomic blasts for the sake of 'peace', an Auschwitz in pursuit of a pure race, a Gulag for the purity of absolutist ideology, devastating fundamentalist wars to safeguard God, and an ecological disaster to serve economic growth still stands unabated as the presumed best model for progress and prosperity for all latitudes.

Reason brutally challenged the logic of cooperation, adaptation and continuity that thrusts evolution. The misuse of the magic of intellect, which many consider as the main trophy among the achievements of life forms, has turned a talented species into the gravedigger for its own kind. What we need to control now is not nature but the human being.

The merciless selfish pursuit of material wealth compromised

⁵ Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility. In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1984 (orig. 1979)

science, adulterated philosophy, corrupted religion, and subdued technology. It turned many bright minds of Academia into insensitive robots for the war machinery or into salaried recruits for a rogue project of concentration of wealth that impoverished majorities and dehumanized elites. Humanity now vividly experiences how mishandling reason backfires. The pursuit of selfish projects and an aggressive imposition of one's dogmas have transformed planet Earth into an inhospitable, hostile and dangerous place.

Beyond severe polarization and rivalry, there is, fortunately, some good news. Humanity is a single species, a kinship with a common origin, a single lineage, one single extended family. Eventually, any search for roots will end up with the same forebears, blocking the reentry to the cave and reprimanding us with their clubs for the mess we have made of a promising species on a harmonious, lush planet.

While roaming the Earth for fertile lands and comfortable places, tanned by different habitats, climates and available diets, a rainbow human community populated the planet, without affecting the color of the heart. Culture, as a creative response to the challenges of nature, generated the diversity of the human family of our day, which did not come into being to separate, but rather to adjust to the specificities of habitat needed for the enhancement of survival options. Ethnicities were not born to polarize a species but to care of its stability and wellbeing by adequately adapting culturally to challenges encountered in the surrounding context. In our roots as one species, we may glimpse a better future for all.

4. What future do we desire?

Today's scary omens challenge those who are still in denial but can no longer brush aside the hints of nature. The moment has arrived to rescue our future by restoring our command of our destiny and getting back on track as a benign partner in a holistic enterprise, instead of the passive or active destroyer that many have made of themselves. The price tag for flouting the warnings of history is unacceptably high. Turning off the thermostat of pain has triggered the fall of more than one great empire.

The search for an escape route from imminent disaster should top the human agenda, not as a thoughtless, neurotic undertaking, but as a serene stand capable of posing the key existential question. Is there still a viable development alternative or is the disappearance of humanity already on the scrolls of evolution?

Can we dream of a future where peace is not delivered by destruction, where solidarity is not dissected by market fundamentalism, where health care is a human right instead of a commercial commodity, where happiness is not destroyed by money or its absence, and where development stands for the mobilization of potentialities rather than an adaptation to alien agendas and intrigues?

The vast majority of humanity is clear about the uncomplicated world we aspire as our life space, in a future that does not resemble the spiteful version of today. Human desire is for a peaceful world where there is work and leisure, security and opportunities to realize dreams to enjoy one's own small space, to start a family and to see how a new generation populates the horizon of tomorrow. Why should a whole species succumb to the mercy of irresponsible, reckless factions that drag all into disaster and endanger the collective fate and destiny for selfish agendas?

As the work of an inherent force in nature, a species facing imminent death becomes creative. Even when there is no guarantee for survival, the drive to explore escape routes always responds in innovative ways to adversities. Indeed, the urge to survive by responding to challenges and overcoming dangers is the most powerful driving force in evolution. As evolutionary biology demonstrates, when existence is in danger, hidden capacities and rudimentary traits can resuscitate from their latent state. The amazing phenomenon of thelytoky among the Cape bees comes to mind. When the virgin queen is not duly fertilized by the drones or does not come back to the hive, to secure survival, some female bees – though unable to mate – undergo ovarian changes that temporarily allow them to regenerate their lost capacity to lay eggs. In this way, they hatch female larvae, which the bees will feed with royal jelly to 're-queen' the hive.⁶

⁶ H.M.G. Lattorff, R.F.A. Moritz and S. Fuchs, A single locus determines thelytokous parthenogenesis of laying honeybee workers (*Apis mellifera capensis*). *Nature*, March, 2005

In the light of such creativity in evolution, human-made disasters can find human-made solutions. Reason can be destructive, but, at the same time, it is capable of constructive and reasonable action, building on lessons from the past and a deeper understanding of our historical path. This opens the road for an honest diagnosis of the present to provide analytical tools to remedy today's troubles with a new architecture of the future.

5. What actions do we take to rescue our future?

The four agonies herald, but fortunately do not definitively predict death. Therein lays the required margin of hope. The tremors of today are warnings of the imminent collapse of a failed model that took hold of human history. Maybe, in the end, they just constitute a cosmic intervention, foreshadowing the agony of the tyranny over our species itself, as the last convulsions of a longstanding system of dominance and exploitation that drove us to the edge of collapse.

Spelling out actions to put in place the desired future brings us to the troublesome question of where exactly to begin. Some are convinced that more efficient organization and management of the global market can solve the crises of growth. Experts without a clue erroneously believe that in the end huge creative technological innovation will succeed in addressing the ecological problem in a satisfactory way. Many think that proliferating nongovernmental organizations can press the dominant system to the required reform needed to bring about a better world. Others resort to consciousness-raising sessions and meditation in the belief that a qualitative shift through evolutionary spirituality is near. Some opt for the synchronization of differing holy scripts to trigger ecumenical action that can bring peace among rival religions. These are ostensibly constructive proposals that can alleviate our distress and strengthen positive forces. But, instead of just assuming their validity, we need to put these considerations about an efficient market, technological solutions, pressure from nongovernmental organizations, consciousness-raising and ecumenical projects to critical scrutiny.

The poor of the world do not seem to be the victims of market failure, but of market success. They are the casualties of the triumph

of civilization, while technology has been part of the problem. This raises a number of questions that we will need to address in a candid way. Is the environmental crisis a technological problem or rather the penalty for a predatory technology pursuing a caricature of development that delivers wealth to a few? Can there be a technological solution to today's ecological problem without curtailing the wasteful madness of an ever-expanding market?

While global social movements organize brave mobilizations for a better world with wonderful achievements that benefit the dispossessed and needy in the world, the agents of the destructive system continue to be their respectful partners in dialogue. Likewise, meditation, consciousness-raising and spirituality may awaken core values that are essential for a better human being, but at some point they need to proceed to translating enlightenment and awareness into social and political action that can bring about the desired change. One wonders what ecumenical encounters can contribute, if the rigid letters of holy scripts written in ancient stone suffocate the dynamic divine messages of love, compassion, peace and harmony, which permeate all religions.

Our actions need to address the core problem of our human-centered worldview (anthropocentrism), which locates the human being at the center of the Universe to the detriment of a cosmocentric worldview of all life forms looking for self-realization as part of a harmonious whole. The claim that humans are the sole emperors of the world and that the purpose of all other forms of life is to serve humanity has come at a terrible price.

Particularly, we need to address a question that traveled unsolved through millennia of diverging religious and ideological systems, which now stands high on the human agenda. Can there be a single, binding global ethics in a world that comprises a diversity of ethnicities, cultural expressions, religions and thought systems? Rather than hastening to give the obvious response, we need to take time for some critical reflection. In the absence of any binding ethical principle, all rival systems, including different brands of fundamentalism, can claim legitimacy. Fundamentalist confrontation, then, becomes an unsolvable problem, which makes war the only remaining arbiter.

We seem to be deaf to a history that teaches us repeatedly that

imposed peace, as the price of defeat, is an open invitation to war. When the winner unilaterally decrees peace, it always delivers the arena for smoldering retribution, until the defeated recover forces for the next round of destruction. This is the reason Martin Luther King warned that true peace is not the mere absence of tension; it is the presence of justice. Success in war produces the calm of capitulation but rarely the seed for a harmonious settlement of differences. In our actions, we therefore need to opt for a different brand of peace, not one produced by war or subjugation. We need a mutually shared ethics and goal setting, which constitutes the indispensable building block for global harmony that guarantees fair living spaces to all in a synergy of divergent interests.

Fortunately, not all of our condition is bad news. The planet has not yet lost its beauty; the sun never failed its pledge of a new dawn. Raindrops sprinkle the land, creating life, promise, hope. No longer can humanity permit itself to be a terrifying and untrustworthy companion of life.

Evolution is never merely an account of fatalities. Rather, history is always the outcome of possibilities and opportunities that one may seize or squander.⁷ Instead of wasting energies in predicting a future that might not come, we could better pool energies to create the future of our liking. The best glance at the future does not lie in statistical modeling and mathematical formulas, but in dedicated agency to shape the future we desire and deserve. Action is the best prediction.

We stand before a daunting exercise that invites us to unconventional avenues of thought and action. Definitely, we need doers, but in a world full of wrongdoing, we need committed, honest doers and critical, creative thinkers. Established wisdom, dogma, ideology and science have had their say and lie exhausted in this time of troubles. They are not bringing any solution nearer, not even with alarming texts that tell part of the tale but miss the clue. Humanity now needs to proceed to a new mindset with a critical stance, in a readiness to unlearn dubious recipes that failed to stand the test of time. We should abandon tortuous lines of thought that molded so many

⁷ Sergio Bagú, *Tiempo, realidad social y conocimiento. Propuesta de interpretación*. Mexico City, Siglo XXI Editores, 1970, p. 116

of us intellectually and shaped us socially into addicts of pointless ideologies.

Although individuals can contribute to understanding reality and triggering new ways of thinking, in the end, practical knowledge and insights are always the synergetic work of communities in constant response to changing demands and new challenges. Unraveling the complex history and problematic reality that we face needs joint action and can never be the work of one person. This is a time for a response at the level of the whole species. For that reason, the task before us to rescue our future will require the concerted agency of many across existing divides. It cannot be any other way. Given the legacy of language and ideas that birth offers to the newcomers, authorship of thought is highly communitarian, turning even an isolated monologue or personal meditation into a social dialogue with their ancestors. The quest of a species to find escape routes is always a 'we' quest and never an 'I' quest. It is always the work of a fellowship, never the feat of a lone conqueror.

6. Now or never

How much hope can we have for tomorrow when the hopes of yesterday were in vain? The tenet that hope gives life is not a fabrication of superstitious optimism but a principle of human evolution. This is not the case when evangelizing hope just sits and waits for solutions to arrive. Hope can only offer a perspective when it transcends a solace and translates into a command to act. In the dire contemporary situation of humanity, hope will be futile unless it constitutes a trigger for agency in order to shape history actively through escape routes from dead-end alleys.

The journey of evolution and the path of the Universe are never sequences with fixed beacons, but always fields of operation for creative agency to mobilize potentialities. What matters most today is not a paralyzing anxiety about the statistical probability of extinction, but the creative exploration of opportunities for life through the active mobilization of dormant forces into a critical mass that is capable of overcoming existential dangers. This is what the story of

survival is always about, more so now that we face threatening hurdles to our stay on Earth. No matter how dim the prospects may be, as long as there is breath there is room for action. Life always starts small and works its way from its tininess into enhanced life chances that culminate in maturity. In the same vein, participation and agency constitute the incubation stage of ownership of our destiny.

The key difficulties that humanity faces today derive from parochial bonds that allow blind allegiance to overwhelm justice, fairness, solidarity and love. When loyalty to the state, nationality, tribe, ethnicity, clan, kinship, skin color or faith evolve into a prevalent unpremeditated and choiceless identity, borders typically constitute the meeting place of polarizing banners and clashing swords. We need to think up a new format of harmonious coexistence for humanity that can stop the reigning madness of destructive social fragmentation, which overlooks the fact that we all come from the same lair. Our differences are wonderful adaptations in the spirit of evolution. They prepare a single, original race physically and culturally for the challenge to survive and thrive in diverging geographic, environmental, climatic and historical conditions. The color of the skin, the texture of the hair, the architecture of the home, the tools with which to hunt and the language that names what the surroundings offer, all of these have been instrumental adaptations to the deep aspiration to survive and thrive.

Freedom of religion, of thought system, of ideology and of life philosophy can fulfill the individual with powerful support to deal with challenges of life and death, but when they lead to disconnection, cleavages and insurmountable barriers they transform difference into a source of polarization that turns aggression into the best defense. Rather than being foot soldiers for parochial or fundamentalist projects, people will have to cut across differences in finding workable options for joint future-oriented global action under the banner of solidarity, cooperation and ethics, without need of resigning what is dear to them.

Humanity stands before species-threatening challenges that require a huge transformation with a forward-looking perspective that does not leave space for revenge, which is an offspring of hatred and the worst compass in life. Retribution typically bestows versatility in further destruction. But it is pointless to waste time trying to

settle accounts with a foregone past, when we fail to settle accounts with an endangered future. Rescuing our future is the only meaningful redemption of the past.

Anger is a virtue as the vociferous rejection of dishonesty, injustice, oppression and humiliation inflicted against the defenseless. But what comes after anger is what really matters. Selfishness turns anger into hatred and violence; solidarity tames anger into concern and compassion. Anger about past wrongdoing can generate conditions for constructive future-oriented corrections, but only if we succeed in translating it into a deep concern for our species and adopt a forward-looking perspective. We cannot change the chapters of history, but the future is an open book with blank pages. We can pardon people for evil deeds in the past but never for evil intentions that can compromise our future.

We will find no clue for an escape route out of grave existential dangers without a colorblind, meta-racial, tribe-free, and cosmocentric stance. It does not matter if we are the offspring of victims or the descendants of perpetrators, as long as we make the right choice with committed action. In a sense, an unwavering commitment to rescue our future absolves the misfortunes of the past. The power of a synergetic force is largest when people realize that both the innocent children of historical victims and of historical perpetrators qualify for the deepest love when they are committed to remedying the horrors of the past.

If we are unwilling to learn lessons from the past and flout the omens of today, we will learn hard lessons from the future, because history never waits. We have reached the point where no alternative can offer peace, unless we find some sort of global harmony that traverses the differences and parochial interests of a diverse species. The heat of that limbo takes us to a tautological revelation of this work: If all alternatives to global harmony look bleak, then global harmony is the solution.

Civilization and globalization delivered economic growth, a gigantic growth without development, without peace, without happiness and, if we do not turn the tide, without sufficient oxygen. The digitalization of culture through technological booms, the replacement of the sailing ship by the internet, the computerization of war, and the militarization of religion have reformatted life in its most

trivial details. Many planet-dwellers possess more digital devices than fingers. Yet, instead of global understanding, intensified communication has typically fueled dangerous polarization. The quality of life is deteriorating into despair, and the survival chances of our species are growing dimmer by the day. Famine that should have belonged by now to the archaeology of humanity is still a vivid component of its future. Global warming of yesterday has already upgraded into pathological global fever, while polarizing fundamentalisms are preparing the battlefield for a grand, scourging finale.

It is clear to the untrained ear that the tale of civilization now struggles with its own contradictions. With the current worrisome trends, we humans appear to be mathematically programmed for a final farewell, unless there is an 'unless'. It is that hope-generating 'unless' that keeps afloat these reflections on our ability to confront troubling questions in trying to turn the tide. But how will we translate hope into action, instead of making the mistake of lethargically waiting for things to work out well? What is the clue for a species that has surrendered much of its ability to find workable solutions?

Given the depth of our troubles, adding piecemeal answers to the multifarious threats to our stay on Earth will be to no avail. Rather than listing an inventory of symptoms, differently mapped by a variety of scientific disciplines, fields of study and rival ideologies, we should holistically chronicle the twists and turns of a species that was able to build academies, conquer seas, globalize the planet and penetrate nuclear secrets but could not succeed in providing peace, a meager food basket for all or the minimal conditions necessary for humanity's stay on Earth. Such a persistent malinvestment and erroneous prioritization demands a comprehensive historical reflection to understand what we have to do to put it right.

To discover the fossilized past of history in the sequence of historical facts is not our mission. Rather, the aim is to look through the cellophane of facts to find the forces that thrust history forward. We need a candid diagnosis of our present reality that unveils the historical driving forces that brought us here. Beyond the narrative of events, we should search for the deeper underlying factors that shape history, in order to enhance our future life chances. Our offspring – if there will be any – will judge us on our capacity to do just that.

Our efforts should be set on seeking the clues to shaping the future in harmony within the spirit of evolution. The mission of the voyage is neither retribution nor nostalgia for a foregone past. Unearthing the vital lessons of the past may contribute in finding the clues for how to get back on the rails, but the past will not provide the solution for shaping the future, which travels at its own pace.

The magnitude of our distress requires a global gathering of humanity to rescue our future. Part of the challenge is to reassess the solidly engraved hoaxes and failed tales that made us numb to global conflagration and injustice, as if these were the necessary price of progress. In the spirit of our quest, we need to be on high alert to stick to our determination to unreservedly reflect, analyze, conclude, speak out and act, free from intellectual enslavement by sophisticated system maintenance institutions.

Our unwavering pledge to honesty and justice will prevent the bastions of power and established wisdom from intimidating or co-opting us to sacrifice our common destiny on the altar of egoism. Our firm commitment to unmask false narratives should overcome any hesitation to take a critical iconoclast stance, but at the same time, we need to honor and endorse valuable insights regardless of their origins. Blending honesty with a critical stance in the formula for action is the best way to value positive contributions from past thinkers and to benefit from their wisdom.

We need to be on our guard, though, to tendencies to pigeon-hole positions in all sorts of pure 'isms' and categorical 'anti' movements to manipulate people into endorsing a dubious ideological project as the lesser evil. Feeling allergic to a horrendous rival 'ism' may end up as a defense of a system of similar or even worse atrocities. In that sense, criticism of capitalism should not drive us to the extreme of discarding as 'bourgeois' anything that bears even a slight relation with the capitalist system. How disappointing were some leftist critiques in the 1970s of Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014), discrediting him because his novels focused too much on the 'bourgeois' theme of love. At the other extreme, while critical of the overly deterministic proposals of Marxism and censorious of the horrors committed under its banner, we should free ourselves from a categorical rejection of its social and economic analysis. Such an outright dismissal would blind us to the valuable

contribution of one of Europe's brilliant thinkers, whose insights can help us to have a better understanding of some aspects of today's deep economic crisis.

Independent thought and a critical stance should keep the reminiscences of historical injustice alive, but at the same time it should free the victims of colonialism and modern global domination from the obsession of retribution against the offspring of historical victimizers. In our effort to unravel the anatomy of global domination to locate its driving forces, we need to be aware of the danger of simple geographical, ethnical or ideological dichotomies. The domination of people happened in East and West, North and South, and Left and Right. Anti-colonialism also had powerful fighters in the center, while subjugated societies have been replete with indigenous colonial minds. Humanity should be grateful to all its righteous daughters and sons who fought for a just cause. This includes not only the oppressed people who fought their way to freedom, but also those courageous Europeans whose remarkable commitment under exceptionally adverse conditions has offered thoughtful support of ideas for the just cause of human solidarity.

When black slaves have only seen white people upholding slavery under extreme apartheid conditions, retribution may be an understandable attitude against the white race, in a primitive black and white dichotomy. But at some point those victims need to transcend such a generalizing attitude; otherwise, it will spiral down into home-bred immorality, because deep down retribution builds on the desire of the oppressed to see the day when they become the new tyrant, who can bring the victimizer to justice with even wilder ferocity, if that is possible. The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) captured such an eye for an eye well when discussing 'negritude', as proposed by Senegalese cultural theorist and politician Leopold Senghor (1906–2001) and Martinican poet and author Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), in calling attention to the danger of "antiracist racism".⁸ Not even in the appalling injustice and horrific violence of slavery can such a form of revenge constitute a constructive answer.

⁸ Antiracist racism is a qualification given to "negritude" by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Orphée Noir*, Preface to Leopold Senghor, *Nouvelle Poésie Nègre y Malgache de la Langue Française*, 1948

The choice is ours, either to be trapped in the horrors of the past and continue on a fatal route of polarization and killing, or to make the future a widely shared open project that can realize the desire of our species to thrive.

To prevent legitimate ire about historical injustice from escalating into vengeance, we need to burnish the fire of anger into a deep concern for humanity through joint actions that safeguard our common destiny. The icon of that shift is Nelson Mandela. He chose to shape a livable future, instead of avenging the past. Many people venerate him not because of his remarkable reconciliatory policy after being the longest-held political prisoner under Apartheid, but because they doubt whether they would be willing to do the same without a trace of racism.

In the contemporary blend of despair and hope that haunts us, nothing is written in stone. As our hands prepare for molding history, texts can serve as valuable companions, but hieroglyphs, discourses and blueprints do not provide the practical answers to our dire condition. Only the opus of our acts can write the chronicle of a different future. None of us is accountable for the unjust world we inherited at birth, but we lose our portion of innocence if we pass that burden to the next generations without any effort to do something about it.

The difficult problems we are facing today as a species transcend the separate realms of ideology, fundamentalism, religion, corporate policy, global policing and ethnic prejudice. This is not a time to be taken up with nasty quarrels, retribution, sectarian revolutions, counter-revolutions, or violence to sustain failed systems or replace them by potentially more dreadful ones. Ours is the historical vocation for concerted action across the divides of clans, castes, sects, classes, nations and states, as one family, now that our habitat, our life and our future are at stake.

The clue of history is history itself. We should give history the response, before history gives us the answer. It is now or never, for 'the time that will tell' has already told.

CHAPTER 2

LIFE LOOKS FOR MORE LIFE

State of the quest

Before embarking upon a search that will take us into the deep past, we need to understand the secrets of social evolution that can explain the troublesome trajectory of humanity. Our first concern is to identify the core force that shapes evolution and history.

Life always looks for more life. Wherever our sight and reminiscence are able to take us, time and space prove that life is creatively self-preserving. This is the dominant common trait in the cosmos, driven by an omnipresent and persistent urge for survival, self-realization and reproduction. This evolutionary drive prompts humanity to secure food and basic protection to keep the members of the community alive, but at the same time to ensure social and cultural reproduction to guarantee the continuity of the community.

What makes the troubles of life such a preferred option over the peace of death? What hidden force or mysterious engine keeps evolution ongoing and the future afloat, shaping history as a trail behind and a challenge ahead? What exactly is that inborn universal trait that adds life to life in an ageless, untiring, repetitive enterprise so unmistakably detectable in evolution and history?

The urge to survive is the big conspiracy of the cosmos. It is a deep-rooted drive that thrusts evolution forward in a spiraling, life-enhancing continuity. The mission of the seed is the tree; the mission of the tree is the seed. We too have come a long way as the human species, along with the rest of the organic world that surrounds us today, joining in the common goal to preserve, continue and enhance existence.

Can we identify a meaningful force that transcends the array of fashionable terms in social analysis, which, so far, have all failed to

provide convincing explanations of our social evolution and its underlying processes? Can we find a more powerful principle that goes beyond many conflicting terms, such as order, stability, growth, change, culture, structure, power, conflict, class, stratification, system, social contract, social inclusion, and many more ideas that have overpopulated the social science paradigms for two centuries from the classics to postmodernists? Is there a core underlying force that constitutes the driving power of our evolution, which crystallizes in the chronicle of history? The answer is ‘yes.’

1. Development

You can give the mango seed sunlight, water and fertilizers to let it grow into a strong and healthy mango tree, but it will never become an apple tree. While a child will enthusiastically agree with such a self-evident truth, the expert in ‘development theory’ will have a hard time coping with its implications.

Development is always from within. You cannot transfer or implant it from outside, not even as a generous gift. You can trigger, stimulate, encourage, strengthen, nourish and support development, but you can never design, blueprint, bring, buy, install, insert or impose development from outside. You simply cannot develop ‘the other’. Any society can benefit from achievements, models and input from elsewhere, but it cannot import development from another context. India may purchase plant nutrients from Siberia and digital fertilizing technology from Japan but in the end the Indian mango seed grows into a strong mango tree out of its genes and its creative interaction with surrounding conditions.

The reason is obvious. Any seed, any embryo, any community will illustrate exactly the same story. One cannot grow out of the genetic code of another, not as an organism, not as a plant, not as a species, not as a community. It is fine to create favorable conditions for the pineapple to grow. Yet, when it comes to producing the fruit, the instinct of the plant trumps human intelligence. Development, as an inherent process driven by an inner clock, stems from within. In that sense, you cannot grow potatoes. Potatoes grow themselves.

Both in everyday usage and in grandiose theorizing, the term

‘development’ has suffered such terrible distortions and abuse as to reach the extreme of representing its exact opposite. A first mandatory step, therefore, is to define development in a clear and unambiguous way.

In nature as well as in history, there is a cosmic push to survive, to grow, to flourish, to bear fruit, and to defeat death by reproduction. This omnipresent force constitutes the basis of development in all fauna and flora, as a life-seeking force, driven from within by an inner clock out of genetic codes and potentialities. This leads to a precise definition. *Development is the mobilization of inherent potentialities in interactive response to challenges posed by nature, habitat and history to realize a sustainable project with an internal locus of command.*

The realization of the promise in the genes has to work its way through contextual conditions and environmental adversities that show up on the road toward maturity. This intimate interaction between reality and the urge to thrive keeps life afloat. Development is creative, adaptive self-realization that mobilizes overt and hidden faculties. It is seasoned in the heat and cold of each day on the playing field of external conditions, in order to turn an inner blueprint into printed life. This inherent dialogical, life-seeking interaction with the surrounding context is the straightforward story that nature and history are telling us all the time. The deepest mystery of evolution originates from adaptation as a life-enhancing linking of text and context. Text that does not live through context disconnects from reality and amounts to metaphysics.

History never takes place in a void, but always under specific contextual conditions. Karl Marx (1818–1883) clarified this in one of his widely quoted phrases. “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”⁹ This interplay of human agency and the surrounding conditions shapes history on the canvass of development, as the underlying force of evolution accountable for life and self-realization.

Development even goes beyond respect for life, as it stands for

⁹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852

devotion to life enhancement, which constitutes the driving force that mobilizes inherent potentialities in the dynamic process of bringing life into movement and keeping it afloat. The triggering point is the awakening of dormant inner forces and inherent energies, when the required conditions fall in place. “Leaves open themselves green to the sun, when hunger for growth tears the seed coat apart.”¹⁰ Even the sturdiest coconut shell is incapable of withstanding that minute cosmic push. Implacable to the outside world to protect its kernel against premature contact, the seed lets go swiftly when life is ready for the journey of self-realization and reproduction, driven by the inner force.

Development is context-bound, context-seasoned and context-responsive. To live is the resilient adaptive action to survive in a particular habitat, climate and environment. This intriguing, context-driven process that merges instinct, desire and choice actually shapes and constitutes the process of development. Failure to adapt adequately and to respond effectively to critical hurdles can have dire consequences in evolution: for the individual unit, it is premature death, and for the species, it is extinction.

From the perspective of context-based devotion to life enhancement, the core underlying forces that constitute development are: (1) situatedness based on context-relatedness; (2) sovereignty based on an internal locus of command; (3) sustainability as the guarantee for continuity; and (4) participation as a prerequisite for self-realization.

This clear-cut, unequivocal understanding of development that connects to the larger evolutionary process enables us to take a closer look at the social evolution of humanity and the perspectives for the future. In doing so, we will have to confront the longstanding tradition of ‘development’ theories, paradigms and models that did not live up to their claims and promises.

Before we can do so, we need to bring some order into the reigning ambiguity and confusion in the use of terms, given the diverging and contradictory meanings of development that have been a prolific source of misunderstandings, invalid reasoning, erroneous

¹⁰ Translated from the poem *Wai* by the Surinamese poet Trefossa, *Ala Poenema foe Trefossa*. Compiled by Jan Voorhoeve, Paramaribo, Bureau Volkslectuur, 1977

conclusions and manipulation, even among experts with high prestige in Academia.

In common usage, 'recent developments in Asia' refer to important events, including earthquakes and epidemics, while 'future developments' point to possible scenarios, including wars. The 'development' of a model, law, project, program, city, recipe or idea is about designing, planning, thinking up, drafting, drawing, inventing or modeling. Development of new expertise or skills is about training and education, while the development of a child stands for balanced physical, mental or emotional growth into maturity. In the realm of science, technology and production, development hints at innovation, invention and new achievements. In the social sciences, economists and sociologists often equate development to economic growth, so much that growth without development has become the norm.

Such a wide array of accepted meanings of the term 'development' allows us to utter the following cryptic but legitimate phrase. In developing countries, there is a need to develop highly qualified expertise that is capable of developing new strategies in order to reach a higher level of development, since contemporary developments in education are harmful for national development and for the goal to develop the country from an underdeveloped into a developed society. Now we know for sure why the 'development' of the Tower of Babel failed.

Development is not the mimicry of a successful experience of another, not even a nostalgic reinstatement of a cherished foregone past, but forward-looking birth and rebirth that give existence to new creation, whether on fertile ground or on the ruins of the past. Development is not an invention of humans, but a precondition of life, based on the inherent capacity of nature to shape itself continuously. It is in this unambiguous sense of mobilization of potentialities in interaction with surrounding conditions and resources that we will use the word 'development' throughout this quest to rescue our future. If development is a context-related force from within, under one's own agency, then the social sciences, dominant powers and mainstream international institutions have been offering something different with a caricature of development. Such a hoax of development begs for a name.

2. Envelopment

What powerful colonial, imperial and modern countries have widely acclaimed as development in numerous variants and tastes, in the last half millennium, was its exact opposite, namely *envelopment*, a process of enclosing, of wrapping up, of molding from outside through transfer and mimicry. A unidirectional process of transformation by incorporating the other into an alien destiny marked a 'development' era that stretches from the civilizing mission to modern, homogenizing globalization. Annexation, subjugation, capture, colonization, occupation, encapsulation and structural adjustment have been effective envelopment instruments for molding communities around the world from outside. A process of globalization imposed the parochial ritual of modernity as the universal liturgy of humanity.

What we actually had was envelopment like what you do with an envelope. This is the exact opposite of 'to develop', which stands for 'to unroll', 'to uncover' and 'to unfold'. Many languages share the similar etymological root of development of 'unwrapping', such as 'développement' in French, 'Entwicklung' in German, 'desarrollo' is Spanish, 'desenvolvimento' in Portuguese, and 'ontwikkeling' in Dutch. The intrusive project of envelopment was the orchestration of life from outside through intervention by external agents who disrupted many communities and caused havoc in the ongoing processes of social evolution on a global scale.

Envelopment is the paternalistic, disempowering control of an entity by an external locus of command at the expense of its internal life processes and ongoing evolution. It typically boils down to overruling the creative search of others for genuine responses to challenges through the imposition of context-free models and yardsticks that claim universal validity. The direct impact of envelopment is alienation and disruption by frustrating, blocking and aborting ongoing and potential life processes.

Historically, envelopment has taken many forms in a wide gamut of domination schemes at different levels through paternalistic, hierarchical, hegemonic, colonial and imperial relationships. Particularly in the realms of politics, class, caste, religion, state for-

mation, production relations, tribe, gender, generation conflict, geography, ecology and the rural–urban divide, humanity has long suffered from dehumanizing forms of envelopment that disregarded an inherent striving for self-realization.

Context is always the main casualty of envelopment, which paternalistically orchestrates a project from outside, based on transfer, imitation and mimicry. The core of envelopment is to structure another under dominance, which always amounts to a form of restructuring of an existing social body. The outcome is the disruption of harmony through an intrusion that distorts, deregulates and disorders a subjugated social entity. Envelopment is much in line with Aimé Césaire’s characterization of the colonial project: “I am talking about millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life – from life – from the dance, from wisdom.”¹¹ Gabriel García Márquez imaged the dire consequence of envelopment’s marginalization of context, history and embedment in the environment graphically, from the perspective of magical realism. “The interpretation of our reality through patterns not of our own, serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary.”¹²

From the perspective of development, an envelopment system is highly disruptive, since it prevents a community from responding in a natural way to contextual conditions and environmental challenges. It sacrifices internal dynamism, participation, self-realization and sustainability to an alien expansionist agenda that takes control of core social processes. Dynamism in a society ceases to flow naturally from within, and, in its place, persuasion, coercion and repression from outside generate and control core social realms.

Indigenous culture and people’s embedment in their local context are powerful expressions of development that constitute a formidable enemy of envelopers. The dominant historical strategy to

¹¹ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*. Originally published as *Discours sur le colonialisme* by Editions Presence Africaine, 1955

¹² Gabriel García Márquez, Nobel Lecture, December 8, 1982. From *Nobel Lectures. Literature 1981–1990*. Editor in Charge Tore Frängsmyr, Editor Sture Allén, World Scientific Publishing Co., Singapore, 1993

target these realms in the last five hundred years has been a combination of the 'civilizing mission', westernization and modernization, driven by the universalist policy of declaring the home location of the dominating power the general depository of universal human civilization and its achievements and ways of life as readily applicable models in other destinies.

Bearing in mind the critical role of context and self-realization, we can point to specific characteristics that distinguish development from envelopment. A first point is that 'to develop' is an intransitive verb, which means it cannot have an object, because you cannot develop another. When turned into a transitive verb by trying to 'develop' someone else, what we get is envelopment by intrusion into the social realm of another. A second characteristic is that development is incompatible with domination, subjugation or asymmetrical relations, which are instruments of envelopment that, in one form or another, take control and command of other destinies. A third characteristic is that paternalistic claims to know what is better for the other are alien to development.

The idea of transfer of 'development', based on imitation, amounts to a counterproductive abortion of self-realization and, therefore, negates development into a form of envelopment. In recent centuries, the tenet that no road was open to progress, development or prosperity other than the path of modernity delivered by Western civilization had a severe, disruptive effect in subjugated societies. It destroyed the organic existence of communities, tribes and social settings through an expansionist project that turned social life into an appendix of the life processes of distant locations.

If the shorthand for development is the mobilization of potentialities in response to context, the key feature of envelopment is alienation by outsourcing destiny. Envelopment demobilizes potentialities and hijacks social spaces by changing the locus of command from within to the outside. This is tantamount to dis-embedding, since it marginalizes people from their natural surroundings and, at the same time, submits them to external domination. The master strategy of envelopment has been inclusion by exclusion and integration by alienation.

The historical record is appalling. Social and physical genocide

have excluded people from their social evolution, culture, life experience and social embedment. Foreign powers erected enclaves of conquest as the channels for economic, cultural, religious and institutional inclusion of conquered territories and their interiors. Peoples existing there, when not eliminated altogether, were alienated from their context and integrated into an allegedly better and superior space. The civilizing mission was the ‘generosity’ of offering others a new destiny by rerouting their indigenous social evolution toward an unknown and unanticipated future in the realm of an alien teleology that eliminated their past and interrupted the chronology of their history.

That, in a nutshell, is the story of the last half millennium, where envelopment has been a powerful instrument and prominent strategy in the economic, cultural and political field to relegate societies and their members to positions of subordination through a long string of asymmetric relationships. The envelopment process hijacked the active historical subject and reduced it to an object of exploitation. Conditions of dominance turned vivid communities into invertebrate societies, kept together by coercion and violence that confined them to the expansionist logic of an imperial scheme. Instead of being the architects of their own future, communities became remote-controlled societies, following in the wake of another destiny.

Over centuries, colonialism, imperialism and expansionism have systematically undermined the development of the communities they have targeted, which did not go unnoticed among the victims. Already during the early days of conquest, in 1500, Maya prophet Chilam Balam recognized how such foreign intrusion epitomized envelopment. “The colonizers came to wither the flowers. To nourish their own flower, they harmed and sucked the flower of others.”¹³

More than five hundred years later, expansionist domination is doing just that, and it remains the main culprit by drowning development on a planet that is sinking into collapse. Little has changed in the tale over the years. Economic globalization is now

¹³ Fernando Marrufo, *El Libro de los Libros de Chilam Balam*. Mérida (Yucatán, México), Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, 1987 (translation from Spanish)

the ‘modern’ face of colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism. Envelopment on a global scale is still the supposed magic solution for all latitudes.

Breaking human beings’ innate will power with envelopment carries the huge price tag of devitalizing natural forces, frustrating aspirations for self-realization and disrupting organic links with the environment and context. A message of the African Union to the Security Council of the United Nations tellingly records this disruptive impact of envelopment. “If foreign invasions, meddlings, interventions, etc., were a source of prosperity, then, Africa should be the richest continent in the world because we have had all versions of all that: slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Yet, Africa has been the most wretched on account of that foreign meddling.”¹⁴

Development and envelopment are opposing factors that turn evolution into a constant struggle between the urge to thrive on one’s own terms and the assault on dignity from outside. Yet, they do not constitute a dichotomy, not even a continuum from positive to negative. We must look more deeply into the peculiar interactive tension between development and envelopment to understand the dynamic processes that shape history. While envelopment mutes people into silence, development mobilizes their silence into a historical transforming voice.

To understand how the interplay of development and envelopment shapes history, we can take a close look at the Caribbean, which for global expansionism constituted the front door to the Americas. It is a region that colonialism created by implantation after depopulation, where almost everything except geography and nature arrived from distant places. This particular history turns the Caribbean into an emblematic historical case for understanding the interplay of development and envelopment.

¹⁴ African Union Statement on the NATO Invasion of Libya, June 22, 2011

3. Development–envelopment dynamics

Against the reddish-orange sunset horizon of the Caribbean Sea, the crowd gathers around the silhouette of the limbo dancer, watching how far his contorted movements will manage to slip under the lowering bar. It is quite unclear who the actual performer is. Is it the dancer, the holders of the bar, the hysterical crowd, or the very message in the dance? In one joint act, crowd and dancer fuse into a single rhythmic choreography that reminds us of the past. A deep mystery surrounds the dancer's agitated movement in a single spot followed by an exultant jump in the air after slipping under the bar, which seems to connect with the quest for freedom at the intersection of the axes of birth and death. One wonders what could have triggered the imagination for this act and where such an expressive and fascinating dance could have been born.

The limbo dance did not emerge on a Caribbean island or in one of the mainland territories bordering the Sea of the Antilles, nor was it a gift from Africa. The limbo dance was born on slave ships where space was small and chains were short.¹⁵ Under the most dehumanizing of lived experience, shackled people created the joy of limbo on their way to centuries of slavery. This is the force of development. A dominant system can oppress people to the brink of death and deprive them from tools to survive, but life and culture always find a way. Envelopment always triggers development.

In the staccato of the drumbeat of limbo, the chained slave danced her way into the freedom of her soul, regardless of the pains. Testimonies in written accounts of the so-called 'slave ship dance' have chronicled that when "they jump into their irons for exercise the parts on which the shackles are fastened are often excoriated".¹⁶ It was the sublime moment of the slave forgetting the memories of the past, the prospects of the future and the physical pains of the

¹⁵ See Wilson Harris, Fable and myth in the Caribbean and the Guianas. *Caribbean Quarterly*, 16 (2), 1970 (also in A.J.M. Bundy, *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris. The Unfunded Genesis of the Imagination*. New York, Routledge, 1999)

¹⁶ Geneviève Fabre, The Slave Ship Dance. In: Maria Diedrich et al., *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage*. London, Oxford University Press, 1999

present.¹⁷

The limbo dance is not just jumping to the beat of a drum. That would hardly surpass the ritualized rhythm of the monotony of slave labor. The magic of the slave drum is not in the resonance of the beat but in the silences stretched between the sounds. For people muted into the silence of slavery, it becomes a most powerful tool of communication. For the careful observer, the drum is an instrument of significant silence. Different from the violin or the saxophone, the staccato of its notes quickly fades away, leaving emptiness pregnant with new sound. The dexterity of drumming is not the bombardment with sound but the careful demarcation of silences by acoustically pressing them into meaning, like an inverse Morse code. The art of limbo is to revive those absences of sound with body language commanded by the voice of the soul. Limbo dances the beats together. While the penetrating sound of the drum mesmerizes the distant observer, it is in the silence where the limbo dancer takes refuge to vibrate the coded message into the swinging crowd. This is where limbo finds the niche for development. The rattling chains in the act of limbo on the slave ship were the birth pangs of new creation and development in the fusion of drum, melody, dance and the eloquent silence of the unspoken word. The music of enveloping chains was the voice of slavery; the dance from the soul was the song of liberation. It is to the credit of the realm of development that a colonialism that could dominate the body still missed the soul.

Limbo has no other origin than the slave ship on the Middle Passage. In Africa, you may find part of the alphabet and some of the grammar, but the syntax is newly born. Limbo is the symbol of evolution that dances its way into the future, never into the past. The moment the enslaved saw the horizon fade away between tears and distance, they knew that Africa had passed to memory forever. No horror of the present would be able to reopen the gateway to

¹⁷ Some scholars reject the term 'slave' and, instead, use 'enslaved'. It seems to be a linguistic matter that has little to do with slavery as a social phenomenon or the social position of a slave as a person forcefully deprived from liberty. According to the same logic, there are no 'prisoners' but 'imprisoned persons', no 'victims' but 'victimised persons', no 'colonies' but 'colonized regions', and one may end up uprooting language itself.

the past. The only alternative left was to build a new invented future in the heat of each next day. It is there, in its focus on the future, where limbo would fuse with the steel drum barrel.

The Caribbean as a factory for lucre attracted giant oil companies to explore its wealth-generating capacity. External, profit-driven interventions could disrupt the local context. Foreign interests would manage to dominate the economy but never to silence the inner clock. The oil barrel, used at daytime as a storage facility would transmute at night into a musical instrument for self-expression.

Not content with a replica of the monotonous rattling sound on the pier, the people of Trinidad carefully reshaped the barrel into the steel pan, capable of producing the finest notes of one of the most remarkable musical instruments created in the twentieth century. At the sound of their triumphant steel band, the laborers could dance deep into the night around the pan that broke their shoulders during the day. Development overcame envelopment. They did not throw away the empty oil container in the Sea of the Antilles to protest its colonial origin, but carefully shaped it into the exuberant bowl of shivering music for men and women alike.

More to the north, cotton fields provided another telling example of creative responses triggered by the doom of slavery. The cries of slaves toiling in harsh conditions in fields fashioned from malaria-infested fertile lands evolved into the Mississippi Delta blues. Slave music may have been associated with nature, with Africa, with the Bible, with other slavery, but in its first instance it connected to the suffering induced by the hardships of forced labor. Christianization would eventually mix with African traditions in the cadence of new musical expressions, merging in a fusion of blues and spirituals to add hope to pain. "Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land. Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go."¹⁸

This legacy of the musical and lyrical components of blues and spirituals had a lasting effect on the later celebration of popular music across race, class and ideological lines in many parts of the Americas. "The origins of the blues in the Mississippi Delta are as deep,

¹⁸ From the classical American negro spiritual *Go Down Moses*

wide, and muddy as the river that gives the area its name. These origins are the culmination of hundreds of years of slavery, pain, prosperity, and revolution, and dealing with many races and creeds.”¹⁹

The slave would chant his sorrow in field hollers, inviting the toiler in the next field to chant back his grief in an ongoing dialogue of sharing fate and pains. At night, the sole singer would echo the hollers with improvised tools. The slave system in the USA reacted by outlawing the drum, the main instrument that the slaves carried with them from Africa, and in response they crafted new instruments from local woods strung with the gut of animals.²⁰

The blues were born when the chant and response came together in a single musical arrangement. The challenge of the singer was to eliminate the distance of the field by collapsing field holler and response into a musical dialogue. The interaction of voice and strings could bring the chants in the cotton field back on stage in a single arrangement using unique blues notes, blues scales and, particularly, the flat fifth note that urges a resolution toward the root note. Whenever a response was required, as during the old cotton days, the singer could proceed to bring field and distance back in one act.

The blues reflect the roots of musical traditions that conquered the Western hemisphere across language barriers in many genres of music, from New Orleans to Havana, from jazz and son to reggae. The horrors of slavery triggered the liberation of the soul through a narrative in the blues. What had started as envelopment in deep colonialism evolved into emancipating development. Eventually, this creative search for liberating options would reach the level of transformative dreams by Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and many others.

Limbo, blues and the steel band tell us in drama and sound how the muzzle of slavery shifts into a zone of creation. They are exemplary cases of what time and space have endlessly corroborated on every spot of the globe, that development is the persistent answer

¹⁹ James Miller, *The Origins of the Mississippi Delta Blues*, 2002, <http://historicaltextarchive.com/sections.php?op=viewarticle&artid=410>

²⁰ Ibid.

to envelopment, shaping history in a creative, constructive response. Development and envelopment connect as an interactive process between opposing forces that gives shape to the social, cultural, political and economic realm. This perennial interplay of forces points to a new explanatory concept for understanding the social evolution of human societies: *development–envelopment dynamics*.

Social reality is always the starting point for any future-oriented action, since no feasible road can exist unless it starts from the here-and-now. Whether the product of crime or virtue, and no matter whether people love or detest its underlying history, the existing reality constitutes the only universe and context from where to move on or to succumb.

This is the reason why the aspiration to take command of destiny always faces the challenge of getting rid of a reigning system of envelopment. When envelopment blocks the road forward, the natural tendency in history is a shift into the different gear of development by transformative change and actions that can open new avenues to continuity. Development–envelopment dynamics give insight in this close interplay between the universal force of creation, rooted in the inner clock, and outside forces reshaping a social setting through intervention and imitation.

It is important to note here that both development and nostalgia constitute a protest against envelopment but differ in direction and outlook. The history of anti-colonialism, decolonization and liberation abounds with regressive instances of nostalgia in a pointless effort to restore the forgone, imagined or invented beauty of the past. In contrast, development propels us toward rescuing our future, for which the past can offer valuable lessons but never the model or yardstick. Much like the spontaneous new response by the body to an unknown strain of intruding bacteria, development is a creative response to overcome existential threats and to secure continuity. Against envelopment as the pursuit of social death, development proves that death recycles life; omega is another alpha. This is the reason why the response to envelopment is always a new episode of development in a fight for life to overcome the challenges and adversities that beleaguer it. Nature is full of examples that corroborate this. Pruning the tree triggers new sprouts. We may mow our lawn for thirty years, but when returning from a hundred days of travel,

flowers and seeds will lie in wait for us. The plant did not forget its potentialities, just as life never will.

Envelopment is the more comprehensive, generic term for many specific expressions of domination as they manifested themselves in history, in the form of colonialism, patriarchy, sexism, racism, nationalism, bondage, feudalism, capitalism, communism, ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism, homogenizing globalization, neoliberalism and fundamentalism. Unawareness of such a common denominator led to an unnecessary proliferation of many segmental approaches addressing the specific manifestations of envelopment separately, with different models and theories, sometimes even giving rise to new scientific disciplines or sub-disciplines.

Development–envelopment dynamics transcend such an unnecessary and confusing fragmentation in fields of study, disciplines and divergent theoretical approaches that has hardly ever produced useful results, as it undermined a holistic understanding of social evolution. Whenever envelopment appears, in whatever realm or sphere, we see the same natural tendency of inner forces working their way toward a resolution in the invaded setting, triggering new limbo responses of development.

Development–envelopment dynamics give rise to a feedback process between life-enhancing development and alienating envelopment, in an alternating sequence from self-realization to alienation to restoration of self-realization on a different plane. But it is not at all clear beforehand in which direction the balance will shift. Envelopment can overwhelm development, as has been the case in the dark age of colonialism, when an expansionist global project managed to suppress development during an extended period of total domination and forced it to spiral down in a negative feedback process. Likewise, the balance can shift to development taking the upper hand, as has been the case in the processes of liberation and social revolutions, where people have enhanced their command of their own destiny. In contemporary times, we are living another cycle of the heydays of envelopment, but one that is entering into a deep crisis. It has now come under heavy attack at a time of multiple existential crises.

There is no doubt that colonialism has been the classic expression of envelopment, but a peculiar case of the relationship between

appropriation and development in colonial times needs some clarification. While it is obvious that the colonial project was a showcase of envelopment, what may remain unclear is how to deal with the use of appropriated wealth in overseas possessions that the colonial power used to jumpstart processes in the metropolis. More generally speaking, are theft, piracy and the appropriation of alien assets part of development when the envelopers use them as an input for internal processes in their homeland?

It is obvious, in this case, that the appropriation of alien assets is tantamount to envelopment. It does not mobilize the inherent potentialities and it does not comprise a sustainable practice. The main target of the long dark era of colonialism was the appropriation of alien wealth to dynamize the home economy, but, in the end, it backfired when the processes of emancipation jumpstarted development in the enveloped societies. This clarifies why the pillage and appropriation of alien wealth needs to be excluded from the realm of development, regardless of their multiplier effect elsewhere.

Development–envelopment dynamics shed new light on debates about colonialism, post-colonialism, nationalism, sexism and fundamentalism. A warning is in place here for those who immediately think they recognize the dialectical process in this new approach, as understood by the mainstream philosophers and experts on social evolution. Development–envelopment dynamics take a different approach than the classical tradition of dialectics, which understands evolution from the perspectives of contradictions that rise and disappear as history transcends to a higher plane. This understanding of dialectics can be traced all the way back to Heraclitus and Socrates in Ancient Greece, and it reached Marx' dialectic materialism through Hegel's idealism.

Briefly, Georg W.F. Hegel (1770–1831), as the modern, classical writer on dialectics, maintains that any reality carries within it a contradiction between opposites, which leads to a negation that produces a new reality, engendering its own opposites. This is the case of the master and the slave, who constitute opposite but interdependent poles, as one cannot exist without the other. Dialectics explains how this tension disappears with time, as relations move to a higher plane when both masters and slaves cease to exist and become citizens in the state, which gives rise to new contradictions. In

the dialectical process, a statement (thesis) provokes its negation (antithesis) and then they fuse together in a new reality (synthesis). This led to the typical representation of Hegelian dialectics as the triad ‘thesis–antithesis–synthesis’, although this is a characterization of Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s (1762–1814) that is wrongly attributed to Hegel.

In the dialectical process, a new reality takes hold by the mechanism of ‘sublation’, which, according to Hegel’s original term in German, ‘Aufhebung’, simultaneously points to elimination of both opposite poles and an elevation to a higher order. One can compare it with the term ‘lifting’, both in the meaning of ‘to lift a ban’ and ‘to lift to a higher level’.

What distinguishes development–envelopment dynamics from dialectics is the absence of an ‘Aufhebung’ in the sense of elimination. When development overcomes envelopment, it does not disappear like the master or the slave, but it produces development at a higher plane. It overcomes but does not eliminate the traces of envelopment, which the scar metaphorically represents as the outcome of a process of healing. Therein lays the big difference between development–envelopment dynamics and Hegelian ‘dialectics’. Rather than disappearing in the process, development remains the constant, omnipresent, underlying force that shapes social evolution with a forward-driven perspective. Development is the elixir of life and the driving force of evolution.

Development–envelopment dynamics is a different approach that does not fall prey to the deterministic bias that has accompanied Hegelian and Marxian dialectics, which postulated the genealogy of the West as the teleology of the rest. Hegel was adamant in this view. “The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning.”²¹ In the same vein, Marx considered “the natural laws of capitalist production” as “tendencies working with iron necessity toward inevitable results”.²² Development–envelopment dynamics offer a powerful instrument

²¹ Georg W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*. Kitchener, Ontario, 2001 (orig. 1837, published posthumously)

²² Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, Preface to the First German Edition, 1867, p. 19

to overcome this Hegelian–Marxian fallacy of dialectics, which culminated in the parochial universalism of depicting Europe as the future face of all.

Dialectics rejected dualism, but, in a sense, it still had trouble dealing satisfactorily with the divide between interior and exterior, Europe and the rest, authentic and transferred, endogenous and exogenous, and genuine and alien culture. In social processes, the ‘exterior’ never mechanically opposes the ‘interior’. The moment an external element establishes its roots in a different context, it has already become an internal factor. Development–envelopment dynamics deal with this process by invalidating the idea that authenticity is exclusively of local origin and resides only in one’s own past.

It is a principle of evolution that life always sprouts from a connection of the interior and the exterior. Life, whether biological or social, can never exist in a void, since it necessarily evolves in close interaction of the inner clock with the outer world. This is the case of an organism depending on food supply. The desire to survive, grow and self-realize, inherent in all life processes, always takes the form of a continuous adaptive response to the conditions of the outer world. Likewise, social evolution always takes shape through the interaction between internal drives and external conditions, as individuals, groups and societies respond to external constraints in order to adapt, survive and thrive.

This understanding of the connection between the interior and exterior is important for a deeper insight in the process of social evolution. The guiding criteria for our analytical framework should not be the foreign or local origin of a device, but its degree of insertion in development. While the European bicycle benefitted China, where it eventually became hugely popular, the Inuit would have hung it on the wall as an adornment, after being stuck with it in the snow. Not the origin or nature of a device counts for development, but its contextual relevance. It is a sign of wisdom not to discard a device just for its external origin. At the same time, one needs to be reluctant to accept any tenet unless tested positively in the local context.

An inability to grasp the full interplay of the exterior and the interior gave rise in some people to an urge to search for authenticity, identity and roots among deeply buried indigenous traits. We

can see the manifestation of this mechanical opposition of the interior and the exterior in the nationalist narrow-mindedness of many of the decolonization processes in the second half of the twentieth century. There was an urge to expel everything of foreign origin, a demand paradoxically expressed in a colonial language. The indescribable horrors that people had suffered under colonialism make such a defensive reaction understandable, but for a future-oriented project, such a categorical rejection of everything from outside is a pointless and counterproductive response amounting to anti-ethnocentric ethnocentrism.

Imitation without due attention for the context is not only the problem of an exogenous bias of the geographic transplantation of an alien cultural reality, but it can also derive from a policy to restore a foregone past. Nativist attempts to redeem the past easily become entangled in alienating nostalgia, because a replica of the authentic culture of ancestors can also carry the seeds of envelopment. Naturally, the cultural expressions of ancestors provide a valuable inspiration as a frame of reference for a creative connection to evolution. But any revivalist idea of rehabilitating authenticity from a distant past disregards the fact that even in the absence of colonial intrusion 'authentic' culture itself would have changed significantly over the course of half a millennium. This is the reason why transplantation both in space and in time – from another geography or from a distant past – hampers development when it disregards the existing context.

Unable to cope adequately with the interior–exterior interaction, social science disciplines and self-nominated 'development thinkers' got stuck in their inability to address the overall impact of domination, colonialism, modernization, dependency, decolonization and globalization. Lack of an efficient tool to understand the metabolism of social evolution has been the main reason why social science theories and models have been incapable of dealing with ongoing social processes, let alone of conceiving feasible or valid responses for the majority of destinies on Earth. The difficulty of mainstream social sciences to grasp the nature of social evolution in societies structured under dominance undermined their capacity to comprehend processes of domination in a meaningful way, as is possible using development–envelopment dynamics

In part, that was the reason why, over time, many scholars were unwilling to reject colonialism and its envelopment impact categorically, raising the objection that however bad colonialism has been, it had its bright spots, merits and positive contributions as well. After all, without colonialism, most of today's states would be non-existent. There would have been no Gandhi or Mandela, let alone the many ordinary people who educated themselves and managed to thrive with colonial languages, scientific knowledge, technological skills and modern institutions. In the same line of reasoning, thanks to slavery there has been a Martin Luther King Jr. By this legitimizing logic, the 'gift' of civilization counterbalanced the many felonies of conquest and subjugation or, at least, civilization would merit a 'nuanced' judgment.

Indeed, since the early days of conquest all the way to contemporary globalization, the core legitimizing discourse has been to depict the colonial project as a civilizing mission and a development initiative, driven by humanitarianism and philanthropy. Its prime goal was to elevate other destinies from backwardness. This line of reasoning led to the position of some social scientists seeing colonialism as a coin of two sides, with civilization as its better face.

Development–envelopment dynamics solve this grave misreading of the historical record that downplays barbarous acts. Far from any merit of an enveloping system, such as colonialism, the response capacity of development has always been accountable for shaping new futures that went against the intentions of domination. Even under an alienating colonial rule, indigenous forces could create paths to the future that escaped the logic of the colonial enterprise. This explains how the plantation in the Americas, which was established exclusively for economic gain, derailed into a society where indigenous people, enslaved Africans and indentured workers had created a new living space in the Americas. Colonialism triggered the limbo experience, but no colonial enterprise can derive any merit from that. In the anatomy of colonialism, there were simply no 'heads and tails', for colonialism was of a single-headed coinage and not Janus-faced. In many attempts to impose 'civilization' in order to secure hegemony, the envelopers may have preferred persuasion and colonial education for tactical reasons, but they never stopped using extreme forms of violence to remove indigenous obstacles to

advance their project. Out of colonialism's destructiveness, the victims managed to shape new life. This is how to read and write history from the vantage point of development–envelopment dynamics.

We have identified 'Life looking for more life' as the driving force of evolution, which equips us with the analytical tool of development–envelopment dynamics. It enhances the understanding of how social evolution crystallizes in history and sheds new light on the path of humanity. Development's quintessentially indigenous locus of command, instead of adopting acquired, taught, learned, transferred, or donated envelopment devices from outside, offers us a powerful framework to address the first of the series of five questions that we need to answer to understand the social evolution of humanity: "Where do we come from?" We can now proceed to an in-depth analysis of the expansionist project of the last half millennium, which has directly generated our dangerous contemporary world.