

Narratives About the Future, the End of Times, and the Colonization of the Future

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Abstract

This article aims to argue about the colonization of the future and its narratives. Historically, the future has been determined by a linear Jewish-Christian timeline with a beginning, and an end. Beyond Apocalypse (Armageddon), and Utopia (the dream of Paradise on Earth), the turn of the millennium (the year 2.000) introduced new narratives to these. Technology, the bug of the millennium, and data science become predominant aspects to which the future relates to. This paper argues that the colonization of the future is the act of producing a future in which dominance is still in the power of some, and not available to all. Unless equality and equal distribution of forces win the battle, humanity will continue being a prisoner of the organizations that control and discourse about the future. The colonization of the future, likewise the Church and its final days, or Utopia's discoveries of Lost Paradise, is being set to determine the future using technology and predictability. It is concluded that the turn of the millennium posts a new time to society, but again, it does not seem that all individuals have been invited. The colonization of the future is a key concept to discuss the forces that are creating the future, and it highlights the necessity to decolonize it.

Keywords: millennium, apocalypse, colonization of the future, future narratives

1. Introduction

During the turn of the millennium, the years 1999-2000-2001, there has been a proliferation of fears, future narratives, and techno explanations that were socially important to understand the narratives of the future and how humanity was creating them. Leite and Winter (1999) state that the end of the millennium and the Apocalypse are constant and recurrent themes in humanity's discourse and history. Despite civilization progress, fear and expectation remain present, as well as the number of predictions and prophecies preaching the end of times kept increasing (LEITE, WINTER, 1999:100).

The terminologies and meanings associated with that event were numerous and diverse: *Last Judgment, Apocalypse, End Times, Armageddon, Second Advent, Coming of the Messiah, New Heavens, Chiliasm, New Lands, Day of the Lord, Day of Rapture, the arrival of UFOs*, among others. The logic that everything that begins will end, which is the basis of the Jewish-Christian linear time, is easily attached to catastrophic apocalyptic narratives. According to Weber (2000:245), if history begins with an arbitrary creation, it is bound to end with arbitrary destruction. For DUBY (1998:140), "The fear of the end of the world, so present in the Middle Ages, has crossed the centuries... It is something that endures". If in the past, any unforeseen observable change in nature was something, which one could relate to signs or harbingers of the end, nowadays, climate change seems to be occupying this space – to the point that natural phenomenon provide enough reason that the fear of the end is again reinforced (McBRIDE, 1998).

In addition to natural disasters or other unpredictable factors, humanity is already capable of producing the end and exterminating all nature. According to Schwartz (1992:23), "If the terrors of the year 1000 are not a certainty for historians today, those of the year 2000 will certainly be for future historians... On the threshold of a new millennium, man has the proud conviction that perhaps he is not far away the day he will be able to blow up the planet."

However, today's fear of the end is mostly related to the consequences of humanity's actions: climate change and beyond.

Wulf, Baudrillard (1989:62) explains, "Today, for the first time, men have the possibility of achieving the end of the world simultaneously with their end. These ghosts exert a peculiar fascination...the possibility that man has, today, himself, if given the chance, to be able to end the world, has brought new perspectives for re-evaluating human history that we are only now getting an idea of. One of these is the need to break the world, worldviews, and self-images, demonstrating the temporal element in these and replacing them with the surprise of radical questioning."

When announcing the end of history, Fukuyama (1992) argues that our history continues to being determined by catastrophes. However, the end of history is also the end of humanity itself, since it is impossible to have a history beyond ourselves. For Eco (1999, 2000), this notion of the end is fundamental in a society that even without thinking about the end awaits for it while watching television, reading science fiction, or looking for comets that will strike Earth. It was not in vain that the 2021 –movie of the year was “Don’t Look Above,” when a meteor could hit Earth. Gasparini (1995:30) describes this as a waiting, which, “can be considered both a space and a link between past and future.”

2. Millennialism, Messianism, and Apocalypse

Eastern civilization tradition of narrating ends, new beginnings, and seeking salvation seem to continue to accompany us since the prophetic visions of Zarathustra (circa 2000 BC) who lived in Central Asia, probably around 1400 BC, and whose teachings of good and evil formed the ancient religion of the Persian Empire (COHN, 1970a, 1970b; FERRAROTTI, 1990). Thereafter, attempts to date the end of the world would already be legacies of ancient religions that were interested in beginnings and ends, such as Zoroastrianism, which would have influenced Judaism and Christianity (LEITE, WINTER, 1999:14, WESSINGER, 1997:48). In Zarathustra's final judgment, for example, ethical improvement would determine the salvation of the soul. Thus, everyone would be gathered in a great assembly and confronted with their good and bad deeds, and that was what helped them to keep the faith even when persecuted.

The Jewish-Christian tradition continues with some of these aspects, but it also creates other versions of when, how, and where such an end and salvation would take place (CLOUSE, 1977). According to Cuomo (2000), apocalyptic visions were already present in the book of Daniel and Enoch, since pre-Christianity and Judaism. This apocalyptic hope then seems to resist and persist for more than two thousand years in Western religion and, despite not being able to fulfil its promises, "...continues speaking eloquently to the hearts of those who otherwise would have no hope at all" (COLLINS, 1999:41).

According to Leite, Winter (1999:91), books such as Daniel, Enoch were excluded from the Christian Bible because they sought to interpret history, telling what would happen after the end, revealing secrets that should only be known in heaven. However, the book of Revelation, present even in the most summarized and simplified versions of Christian Bibles, is no less controversial and continues to generate endless stories and debates about ends, and new beginnings (BERNARDES, 2002). Apocalypse from the Greek means revelation, unveiling, discovery, and its reading can vary from a more catastrophic approach to an end or a more hopeful approach to a promise. According to Delumeau (1997), the dominant theme of the Apocalypse is the flight from the present to find refuge in the future, aiming to revolutionize current structures in the world and installing a new order of values. One of the excerpts that give rise to many of these placements is from Saint John (BIBLE, 2000:1000, coincidence or not, is on page one thousand),

“...I saw an angel come down from heaven, carrying in his hand the key to the Abyss and a great chain. He seized the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil, Satan, and chained him for a thousand years; he cast him into the Abyss, shut him up, and put a seal over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations, until the thousand years were over. After that, it needs to be released for a little while”.

The demarcation of time has been in the power of The Catholic Church, as well as its interpretation. It is in the Scriptures that reads, “a thousand years for the Lord can be like a year for men and the opposite is also true, a day before the Lord is like a thousand years and a thousand years as a day, and the day of the Lord will come as a thief.”

Consequently, humanity must be ready and prepared, as nobody knows when time will come! Augustine (IV-V century, 2000) had also stated that time can be stretched or shrunk according to individuality. This relativization of time is an ongoing process based on ‘the keep waiting for an end’ that shall never come, and meanwhile, doing activities that dignify humanity.

According to Schwartz (1992), the dominant theme of the Apocalypse is the shift from the present to find refugees in the future, aiming to install a new order of values. An article about the Apocalypse in a local magazine, says that in “...times of crisis and serious international tensions, the belief that the end of the world is near gains strength. In the US, 170 million people believe this (BERNARDES, 2002). Therefore, it seems that both the apocalyptic and the millennial discourse can bring a deterministic finite view of history, setting its end. “...We are approaching the end of the second millennium, and I hope that it is still politically correct, in Europe, to count the years that count from an event that certainly influenced – even including believers of other religions, or none at all – deeply in the history of our planet. The approach of this deadline can only evoke an image that has dominated the thought of twenty centuries: the Apocalypse,” Eco's (2000:13).

In Christian apocalyptic and eschatological movements, there is also the belief that the end of times (eschatology) will be followed by a divine judgment of humanity (BERNARDINI, 1999). For Weber (2000:36), the apocalypse would be

related to judgments, accountability, and final things while millenarianism would concern new beginnings, restoration and regeneration. Some of the movements that use millennium counting to predict catastrophes, and final events, go attached with salvation practices. Even though these movements and predictions may have received different names and classifications in theology, social sciences, and religions (see TROMPF, 2000, NASH, 2000), they still influence society and the way the future is portrayed (DUBY, 1998). In this sense then, millenarianism also called chiliasm (from the Greek Khilivi, 1000) would be the belief in the arrival of the millennium, and millenarian - the individual who has this belief (WEBER, 2000:153).

For Gould (1999a:36), millenarian thinking arises from the connection of the general belief in the Apocalypse and a numerical theory of the approaching end. However, according to Kleinhenz & LeMoine (1999), millenarianism is a vast subject because it brings a long tradition of millenary predictions. According to them, three main themes are present in the western tradition, "...a pre-ordained time, the rhetoric of crisis, and expectations of radical change" (KLEINHENZ & LeMOINE, 1999:03). Thus, any period that alludes to the end, in our history and society, would raise questions like these, and for Baudrillard (2003, humanity has continuously hysterized about it.

Desroche (2000:40) explains that when such a tradition is used in a messianic and millenarian vision of the end, it can be the inaugurator of a new era. According to Lamy (1997), messianic and millenarian phenomena, although they can be understood in different ways, are based on the structure of waiting, whether through the prism of character (messianic), kingdom (religious), religious society (church or any other religious body) or political society (the nation, state or union of nations). Such senses would end up serving as matrices in a society that is used to waiting. Waiting would be in this case a condition of being, and this does seem to explain the amount of anxiety that is unbearable nowadays. Some other psychological modalities arise, such as expectation, supuration, extrapolation, prospective, hope, revolt, patience, impatience, resistance, frustration, dissatisfaction, taste for the exodus and big games, dream and nostalgia, desire, aspiration, refusal, claim, hunger for evolution or incisive character of revolutions.

Robinson (1985) classifies into five the ways to understand and make sense of the millennium as an end. These are a) the biblical - when the final judgment is followed by the continuation of paradise, b) the annihilator - when the apocalypse is followed by the end of everything, c) the continuous - when there is no end, secular history continues, d) ethical - when conflict is internalized by the individual and following their personal growth, and e) romantic - when the fallen world is internalized by the imagination, and the lost paradise is restored.

On the other hand, we find several authors who justify millenarian movements as being the result of oppressed groups that went through religious, social, and political suffering and, seeing no way out in immediate action, await the arrival of a time when everything will be resolved. According to Cohn (1970a, 1970b), these movements are related to deprivation, protest, and the search for radical changes. Bromley (1997:34) states, "Apocalypse is a radical form of organization that is more likely to be found in groups in social places that experience crisis." Lee (1997:120,121) mentions, "The origins of millenarian movements are thus typically found among the poor and the oppressed who often suffer multiple and relative deprivations...millenarian beliefs provide an alternative possibility of meaning and identity". Delumeau (1997:17) relates millenarian fevers with social groups in crisis, living marginalized, uprooted or colonized, aspiring to a world of equality and community, while Franco Junior (1999:42) says that the association of apocalyptic expectations with social demands is not uncommon. Now, were these present again at the turn of the millennium? (FRASER, 1990).

On the other hand, we also have authors who argue that apocalyptic perspectives are not exclusive to oppressed or wronged groups and can be present at any time, group or place. Weber (2000) explains that apocalyptic ideas are not only present in those who live in a situation of despair or oppression, but they can be found in different people, times, and places.

According to Davis (2001), there may not have been an apocalyptic movement or obsessed leaders in the year one thousand, but there may have been a millenarian spirit that came from earlier times. For Duby (2002), the fear of the year one thousand constitutes a romantic legend. Historians imagined that the approach of the first millennium would have aroused a kind of collective panic, with people dying of fear and liquidating everything, they owned (SEGRELLES, 1996, RESTON, 1998). Nevertheless, Duby (1998) explains that the fear of the end was one among many fears present in the daily life of the European population in the year one thousand, such as hunger, the other or foreign, epidemics, violence, the Beyond, the Last Judgment and the hell. Therefore, the fear of the end, as well as other fears, as they are social and historical constructions, only depend on us to continue to exist.

For Franco Junior (1999), at the end of the first millennium, there was a permanent and restless waiting for the coming of Christ, as the Gospel announced that Christ would return one day, the dead will be resurrected and he will choose between good and bad (LIEB, 1991). However, it is uncertain to assume that this was necessary because of the year one thousand. On the other hand, Landes (2003a, 2003b), says that one cannot ignore a certain fear in the passage of the first millennium. Furthermore, after the passage, there would even have been a general feeling of sadness, disappointment, and relief that

the world had not ended, which he considered important for the further development of Europe. Lacey, Danziger (1999:155), making use of records left by Glaber around the year 1000 in England, illustrate such fear and apprehension, "Dear friends...this world is in a hurry and is drawing ever closer to its end. It always happens that the longer it lasts, the worse it becomes".

Therefore, it may even be that, in some places, for some people and at some point: the passing of the first millennium was accompanied by some anxiety about the end times, as apocalyptic movements already existed in medieval Europe. However, it seems rash to conclude that such anxiety was necessary due to the year one thousand when it was not even known that it was the year thousand. Further, on, Thompson (1996) explains that, as calendars had not yet been standardized, people may not even have known when the year one thousand was. Leite, Winter (1999:96) argue that fears of the year 1000 do not seem to have been greater than when a comet, eclipse, or other natural phenomenon terrified humanity.

One of the differences between the year one thousand and two thousand, according to Franco Junior (1999:80) is that, "if the solar eclipses of 989, 1009, 1023, 1033, 1037, and 1039 took many people to the main pilgrimage centres of the time, the 1999 one stimulated tourism in places where it was visible and had two billion viewers. If faced with the possibility of the End of Times, the men of the year 1000 sought to prepare for the Other World, those of the year 2000 seeks to enjoy this world more intensely".

Gruzinski (1999:28) explains this is the product of an imperialist vision that, guided by a metaphysical and eschatological language, continues to explore old beliefs of world domination at the end of time. Therefore, if fears and ends did not always go together, they are not exclusive to the first or second millennium, of peoples more or less oppressed: we cannot deny that these, like any other aspect, can always arouse them.

For instance, Albumasar, an Arab astronomer had announced that the conjunction of Jupiter with Saturn in the year 1484 would bring extraordinary events and spectacular innovations that would affect the whole world. The Franciscan monk Joaquim de Flore was killed in 1202 for claiming that the world would end and a New Age would precede the convulsions of the end of time (GRUZINSKI, 1999:39). Hermann (2000:24) reports that it was in this same climate of waiting and unrest that Sebastianism developed and became a movement that crossed centuries and oceans and made the hope of a Messiah's return (end of the 16th century) history of struggle and resistance to the difficulties imposed by the loss of Portuguese sovereignty.

3. The Future as a Threat, Narratives of Colonization

The biggest problem seems to be when this end is seen as inevitable, generating hopelessness and despair. According to Levine (1997), every society has rituals and finds ways to reproduce its times. However, the end of time only happens when it becomes incapable of reproducing it (FENN, 1997, 2003). In this case, time becomes a tyrannical threat and no longer a component of social life. The consequence is a feeling of exhaustion of time, capable of generating panic because social forms of temporal organization are being threatened (HALL, 1989). Thus, societies end up losing their ability to spot problems, plan, reproduce. Jackson (2000) states, "Every society will have a shortage of time if it cannot transform its young people into adults...The older generations must find successors". Therefore, what Warneken (1998) is calling the end of time would be our inability to keep in touch with the past, with its traditions and histories.

For Lash, Quick, Roberts (1998:01) when end-time stories surfaced again at the turn of this millennium, they thought they would be looking at something new, unique, or original, but soon the idea that time was running out was not very new. Thompson (1996:111) brings a copy of The London Chronicle from 1799 showing time was being accelerated, "...Never before has the three-quarters of the world seen at once and in such a short space of time so many events of all kinds succeeding each other: never, perhaps, was the fate of its inhabitants subject to so many changes, so many demons, and so many vicissitudes ...".

For Grosso (1999:23), all the rhetoric of the turn of the millennium works as a kind of myth that deals not only with "...individual salvation, but collective salvation, and refers to the future of the species and the fate of Earth". This myth would be the result of a long history of shaping human experience, whose role is to interpret the signs of the times and bring hope to the future. Thus, the hope of a new heaven and new earth can arise and appease hostile, inhuman, and unjust forces that continue to exist. According to Robinson (1985), the myth of the millennium is guided by a linear and optimistic view of history that continues to influence us because it is put in a new package, transforming itself from a shabby and well-known myth into a new and exotic one.

Thatcher (1998), Stille (2002) thinks the apocalyptic rhetoric is dynamic and capable of infiltrating our narratives in such a way that they are intertwined with how we understand the world. In addition, why do people buy millennium rhetoric? Because it offers a place within a coherent story of salvation, as well as explaining the world where other means have failed. That is "...the rhetoric of the millennium engages with its audience's worldview at its deepest mythological level

and consequently reformulates the criterion by which we script our future" (THATCHER, 1998:02). Thatcher (1998) states that the metaphors used in apocalyptic rhetoric are meaningless to generate countless associations and connections with our life experiences, which makes it easier for different people to find meaning in this discourse. Any sense is possible as long as you have an explanation for the end and that explanation guides us into the future. A future that is ready and awaits us (MELUCCI, 1998). Perhaps the ideological function of a colonized future is in the concept that it must be measured, planned, calculated?

For Gramsci (1981), the dominant ideology makes use of mass media as instruments of mystification and legitimization of domination through news selection based on political and economic interests, use of labels, adjectives, and definitions according to such interests. According to Bakhtin (1999a:41), the word is the most evident and sensitive mode of social relationship, as well as change, "...the word will always be the most sensitive indicator of all social transformations...The word is capable to register more intimate and more ephemeral transitional phases of social change". Thus, we understand words as social and historical action guided by a constructionist perspective that meanings and uses of words are under constant construction and negotiation. Thus, the turn of the millennium in printed newspapers seemed to be useful for discussing the processes of encounters and confrontations of different meanings that we were currently encountering.

Newman (1996) reflects that in certain historical periods (such as, for example, the end of centuries), both the historicization of the narrative and the narrativization of history end up being more emphasized. If so, these might explain the constant interest in the passage of time, change, the millennium, the future, and its multiple uses and meanings.

Therefore, it is understood that each way of narrating the future is also a way of positioning ourselves in front of it. After all, the future, as well as other times and histories, are part of a narrative logic that can be understood as fate, necessity, enigma, mystery (ADAM, 1990). The future as the millennium and the beginning of the run to colonize the future seems to be one of these inventions.

Adam (1990:140) writes, "Our contemporary approach to the future seems to have shifted from colonization to something resembling elimination. 'I want the future now' is the slogan of one of the top-selling t-shirts on London's Carnaby Street. The one by musical group The Temptations says 'Hurry up tomorrow, I need you now, 'while a Graffiti in Berlin says, 'The future is not what we imagined.'"

Therefore, futures are also largely changeable and circumstantial discursive constructions and practices. From a future as a turn to a turn as the future, are they being used as change, discontinuity, or both? Would there be no longer a future as a consequence of the past? Could humanity free itself from the determinations of the past and the future? This way, the future as a turning point can relate to individuals as inactive and passive spectators of time. Will this future diminish our prospects for actions, once change and time is seen as independent from people?

Now, if the future as a threat brings a future, which is predictable, controlled, and planned, it is not only the future that changes, but also the ways people relate to the present, the past, and towards change. Therefore, "...forgetting guarantees the need to acquire the new...politicians live in the present and the future. The past is for poets and historians...Destroying the past is the program of our era...programmed destruction of our ability to sustain the past and recognize ourselves in it..." Following this argument, Alvin and Heidi Toffler (2003) also explain that the deluge of changes society currently live in alters our ideas of past and future times.

According to Adam (1995:118), "...the belief in continuity, in the existence of the future as we know it, is an erroneous assumption given the lack of certainty about the future, to which the lack must be added of certainty of a future". That is, there are no guarantees, even of having a future. Tolkien (1998) argues that all preoccupations with the future dates back to the 50s and 60s. At that time, viewers could choose the ending in a movie. This is perhaps the postmodern futuristic ideology: that the future is in persons' hands, that they can control it. As Mumford (1956:236) describes it, "The human person is, in a position of responsibility to interpret and direct the course of his life, so the now rests incredibly in his hands."

Nowotny (1994:15) analyses that "Today, the future has caught up with the present, but time, individually and collectively, has remained limited. New time features are needed. They are opening through the extension of time in the present and through the availability of all times that, technologies make possible. Nevertheless, the latter, on the other hand, demands the availability of human beings. So where can the future be found?"

This narrative about the future has become a disciplinary force (FOUCALT, 1982), and thematic axis beyond human control. Fortunately, not all is lost, as there are still unpredictable futures. Seymour Martin Lipset demonstrates that at least two-thirds of the predictions made by American social scientists between 1945 and 1980 were wrong (WILSON 2002:19, 20). That brings hope.

Furthermore, time, as well as futures and changes, are not neutral elements in our society. On the contrary, time, like the future, is power! As described by Hörning, Ahrens, Gerhard (1999), "Time is neither an abstract entity nor a neutral

medium, but the result of human engagement with the world. We cannot understand time by looking at it alone, but by looking at how people are involved with it in their everyday life.”

For Adam (1990), these practices and narratives seek to produce security for future situations. An example that can help us understand how this happens is the proliferation of insurance plans, which are nothing more than the selling of a future security. “Saving and investing money makes us think we are securing our future financially. Insuring my life, home, car, car insurance bonus, all of these seem to potentially turn the risks of an unmanageable future into manageable portions of the present. In other words, all insurance is about eliminating consequences of dangerously unpredictable elements of the future,” (ADAM 1990:139).

This article calls this and other constructions that seek to eliminate and control future uncertainties as the *colonization of the future* – actually, quite a run towards it. H ägerstrand (1985) explains that there are similarities between constructions that give us protection in a coming period, and institutional practices that can be located as future promises. Both ways “have the effect of extending our present to include and ensure the future as a current resource. Security, security and certainty seem to be motivating forces for the colonization of the future”, reflects Adam (1990:139).

Saphiro (1992), Yourdon (1998), Wisnick, Carboncini (1987) also write that the capital and the market dictate humanity’s future, which require new approaches if humanity is set to create a new and sustainable future.

4. Conclusion

Lewis (1992: 115) summarizes the narratives about the future as having, “no special meaning. We crossed the year 2000 and in that great span of time, that means nothing. It is an artificial construct. No doubt, historians will look back and try to give the year 2000 some special meaning, simply because it is a date that seems so important, but does not make much sense. Still, in a second moment, I think it has some meaning and that is the meaning. I believe this is a time when we in the modern world are starting to discover that ideas and attitudes and activities that have seemed to serve us so well over the past five hundred years are not working so well anymore...I certainly think this is a time of promise, of great hope for renewal...”

Finally, it is hoped that humanity can finally create new futures. *Carbon-free, sustainable, Earth-friendly....* First, lots of decolonizing needs to take place. Prigogine & Stengers (1992:29) write that, the question of time, what it preserves, what it creates, what it destroys, its passage, have always been at the centre of human concerns. Once more, time is the crucial factor, and it is ticking.

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