

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION^{Review}

20th Anniversary Essays
**Using Radical Re-Imagination to Create a Vision
for Our Future**

By Ana Marie Argilagos & Hilda Vega

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established ones. The article “Microfinance Misses Its Mark,” which examined the shortcomings of microfinance, was published in 2007, just one year after Grameen Bank and its founder Muhammad Yunus had received the Nobel Peace Prize for helping popularize microfinance. More recently, *SSIR* has published articles that take a critical look at socially responsible practices in business, such as “Sustainability Assurance as Greenwashing,” published in 2022.

I could add many more examples of articles that have had an impact on the field of social innovation, but I’ll conclude with a personal note. As an academic who prides himself on his writing, I have always submitted articles to *SSIR* that were as close to finished as I could get them. They were inevitably returned to me with editorial suggestions that made them much better, and especially that made them more accessible to the journal’s many different audiences.

The unusual care and craft that *SSIR*’s editors put into every article is only one of the reasons for the journal’s preeminence. And as a reader, I look forward to the publication of each new issue of *SSIR* with excitement, knowing that I will deepen my knowledge of areas that I have studied and inform me about ideas and even fields that were totally unknown to me. Over the next 20 years *SSIR* will continue to grow and expand in ways that I can’t predict. But I am confident that as it does so it will remain true to its mission of being a place where people engaged in social innovation from around the world and across all parts of society come to exchange new ideas, practices, and lessons learned. ●

USING RADICAL RE-IMAGINATION TO CREATE A VISION FOR OUR FUTURE

BY ANA MARIE ARGILAGOS & HILDA VEGA

Close your eyes, breathe, and imagine the world 10, 20, or even 30 years from now. What do you see? Admittedly, when we did this, it was hard not to imagine a dystopian planet ruined by our lack of care for our ecosystems and for each other. It’s easy to get trapped into this vision of the future after reading one too many novels or seeing one too many movies showing a community of multiracial folk scrambling to find their place in a world of scarcity and competition.

We had to give ourselves some grace to move past the obvious limitations of that vision, and we invite you to do so as well. Instead, let’s take *un pasito pa'lante* (a little step forward) and dream of a remarkable, multi-racial world where all people’s needs are met, and think of this not as a utopian vision, but as an acceptable and very real possibility.

Consider the world portrayed in the movie *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, where director Ryan Coogler presents us with a vision of

what is possible when we decenter our narratives from white-, male-, hetero-centric viewpoints and stop looking at each other as villains in our own stories but rather as accomplices committed to preserving and protecting each other and the power we hold as individual communities and collectively.

Stories like *Wakanda Forever* demonstrate the level of violence that colonization, conquest, and genocide have caused throughout generations—and how we can overcome them. It challenges us to see Talokan, the underwater kingdom rooted in Indigenous Mayan and Aztec cultures, as a possibility despite the barriers the fictional community faced to survive.

When we think about the future of technology and social innovation, we need to do so through an alternative lens, just like in *Wakanda Forever*, and believe in a future where everyone has the talent, vision, and access to build projects that are sustainable and beneficial to all. We need to visualize a world rooted in abundance that rejects the idea that Blackness and Indigeneity must continue to be considered nonexistent in the Americas.

This shift in vision is as much about understanding the role power and class play in shaping society as it is about understanding the role structural discrimination has played in creating our racialized or ethnic identities. Because in the end, as many dystopian narratives point out, our challenges are about who controls resources and how that power is contested by organized communities.

Creating a new vision is just the start. We also must ask ourselves what this fictional speculation about our futures means for

us today, especially those of us in positions to influence philanthropic resources for communities of color. To start, it means that we must seize the opportunity to intentionally build spaces in our communities and the organizations we serve to define a future that is by, for, and about all of us, one in which the progress and liberation of one community is inextricably linked to the rights, safety, and well-being of others, but especially those of Black and Indigenous communities.

It is our responsibility to be proactive about centering those intersecting narratives and debunk the myth that innovation and creativity come only from those who can access or understand the latest technology or benefit from proximity to centers of innovation and power. Our *vibranium*, the shared energy held by Wakan-dans and Talokanils, is in how we go about creating the interconnected world we are trying



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to secure. We must ground our approaches in the wise words of Octavia E. Butler: “There’s no single answer that will solve all of our future problems. There’s no magic bullet. Instead, there are thousands of answers—at least. You can be one of them if you choose to be.”¹

EMBRACE A DECOLONIZATION MINDSET AND APPROACH

To begin, we must deepen our understanding of what decolonization means—first within our mind, then within our work. As the Kenyan-American writer Mukoma Wa Ngugi explained, “The work of decolonization is as personal as it is political.”² In the field of literature, Ngugi argues that we should translate African literature into other African languages, rather than colonial languages like English, as a tool to challenge the status quo.

In the field of philanthropy, there are also ways we can use language to challenge the colonial mindset and hierarchical power structures, and scarcity mindset that move us away from the collective good. For example, after the outbreak of COVID-19 our HIPGive Tierras Mayas campaign focused on building resilience and boosting the development of rural communities in the Yucatan peninsula. Our team created outreach and promotional material in Maya and Tzotzil, two Mayan languages, and not just in Spanish. This included website translation as well as radio commercials throughout the peninsula promoting the platform and the opportunity to raise funds for local programs via HIPGive. We’ve also spent time in Chiapas and other parts of the Yucatan to better understand the needs of Indigenous communities. This year we will expand our language outreach to include Tzetzal and Es Chol.

Another example of how philanthropy can be more inclusive is a program that helps the Indigenous communities of the Amazon learn to code, build, repair, and fly their own drones to combat deforestation and violence in the region.³ Six Amazonian tribes took part in a drone-operating training course run by the World Wildlife Fund and a Brazilian NGO, the Kanindé Ethno-Environmental Defense Association, that was conducted in their native languages.

GROW OUR COMMUNITIES’ COLLECTIVE WEALTH

Unlike Wakanda and Talokan which had unlimited resources, many communities of color don’t have the resources to stop and dream—to reimagine and redefine a world that works for us all. There are about 60 million Latinx in the United States, close to 20 percent of the population, yet on average we live in households with a median net worth of roughly \$53,000, almost one-quarter that of non-Latinx households.⁴

As our population continues to grow, so should our collective wealth. It starts with creating more opportunities for Latinx communities to participate and succeed in the startup economy. HIP developed Inicio Ventures with this in mind, to provide Latinx entrepreneurs with funding and support and to demonstrate that innovation accelerates when everyone has an opportunity to express their genius.

We also believe there is an urgency to engage more people from the Latinx community in philanthropy so that it is seen as something that everyone can participate in, not just the wealthy few. Led by our all-femme HIPGive team in Mexico City, we built the Digital Giving Circles platform that provides analytics, customer service,

capacity-building workshops, and dashboards that are available in English and Spanish, and where we own our own data.

LIFT UP INNOVATION FROM OUR OWN COMMUNITIES

It is important that we lean into our shared values of family, collectivism, and history to bring our communities together and guide our giving. Doing this helps inform how we go about crafting innovative solutions to our most pressing challenges. One area we could do this in is our approach to climate and environmental justice.

Across the Americas groups have been advocating for what they call “regenerative agriculture.” But these practices predate those movements and are rooted in knowledge passed down by generations of people who have cared for land, flora, and fauna as a more holistic, connected, and loving approach to community well-being.

These agroecological practices embrace cultural and social dimensions of what it means to be responsible for the Earth and each other and better reflect the ideas of *buen vivir* (good living) that cultures across Central and South America have respected for millennia.

To secure this vision of our future—a multiracial democracy for generations to come—we need to work collectively, rather than against each other. What we’re calling for as innovations in the Latinx community is not necessarily rooted in new technology or tools, but in finding inspiration for solutions

in our ancestral wisdom. As Adrienne Maree Brown reminds us, “It is imperative to regenerate our curiosity, our genuine interest in different opinions, and in people we don’t know yet—can we see them as part of ourselves ... ?”⁵

Wakanda Forever centers that curiosity so that they can understand that the survival of their culture is rooted in a love for their people. We must center this curiosity, love, and ancestral wisdom to shift our perspectives about what kind of communities we want to see 10, 20, and 50 years from now. Once we’re given the space to reimagine what we want, we can truly ideate and dismantle the frameworks, policies, and systems that are barriers to achieving that reality.

So now, once again close your eyes, take a breath, and dream with us about that future. Then open your eyes and examine what role you can play and how you can align your resources to help make this vision possible. ●

Notes

- 1 Octavia E. Butler, “A Few Rules for Predicting the Future,” *Essence*, October 2000.
- 2 Mukoma Wa Ngugi, “What Decolonizing the Mind Means Today,” *Literary Hub*, March 23, 2018.
- 3 Hazel Pfeifer, “Amazon Tribes are Using Drones to Track Deforestation in the Brazilian Rainforest,” *CNN*, September 1, 2020.
- 4 Zachary Sherer & Yeris Mayol-Garcia, “Half of People of Dominican and Salvadoran Origin Experienced Material Hardship in 2020,” *America Counts: Stories Behind the Numbers*, US Census Bureau, September 28, 2022.
- 5 Adrienne Maree Brown, “Let it Breathe,” Adrienne Maree Brown blog, October 11, 2011.

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