

The Role of Crises in Social Evolution: Lessons from History

(WAAS Web Seminar, May 13, 2013)

Ljudmila Mila Popović

Break Downs and Break Throughs: Empires through Crises and Transformations

1. Introduction

As we attempt to assess the scope and the short and long-term consequences of today's multifaceted crisis, one quality point of entry into its problematics and convoluted paradoxes can be by taking a look into the historical rear-view mirror. Examining formative forces of history, this paper finds in looking back a powerful and necessary means to navigating of the present. The metaphor, of course, is modern but the concept of reflection and of orienting oneself in relation to and with regards to the past is quite old. In this sketching reference to some critical periods of human history, such as the decline of Rome or WW II, which saw the rise and fall of Nazi Germany and rise of the U.S., the objective is to observe a set of critical issues, tensions, and tendencies that have culminated in socio-cultural and econo-political raptures these historical events brought about, even as the research about these events and crises remain inconclusive. The intent here is to identify patterns of beliefs, principles, and actions that have informed, driven, and catapulted today's sense of the catastrophic. Rather than enumerate the losses and lay out the statistics of these devastating events, I look into the staging of the crises through the build up of multiple pressures and tensions and then look at the effects in the aftermath of the events in terms of restructuring and rebuilding.

Identifying key factors that threw societies over the critical threshold and brought on cumulative turmoil, I point to the decline of Rome and World War I and II. The historical events here chosen are most immediately dramatic with grand-scale scope and long-term influences that both caused devastating effects and spurred dramatic social changes. Moreover, I am interested in the fall of Rome and the staging of the two World Wars, as far apart they may be chronologically, for their decisive effects on the formation of the European West founded on the institutional structures of Rome; as well as for their respectively formative effect on the 20th and 21st century. The developments of the 20th and 21st century are only showing the intensification of the traumatic on a grander and more frequent scale. The temporal proximity of the two World Wars and their spatial spread confirm that technological advances coupled with aggressive military expansion and economic growth only magnified and sped up destruction. While a glance at the most evident historical crisis is an obvious choice, what continually needs to be tracked and accounted for is the steady undercurrent of the slower and gradual, but continual, persistent and inerasably long term accumulation of damages done over time. These kinds of harms done to the environment and animal species, to predominantly underdeveloped countries and poor people, Rob Nixon calls slow violence.¹

This research is guided by an evolutionary idea of social transformation, whereby evolution is understood as a learning process of development. Examining the advancement of the global economy in correlation with global politics, George Modelski applies the evolutionary approach and explains:

The features of the evolutionary approach might be seen more clearly when contrasted with the standard "rational choice" paradigm of neoclassical economics. . . . [S]uch an approach naturally inclines toward a long-term perspective; it focuses on structural transformations rather than on equilibrium states; it does not require the postulate of rationality and it sees collective choice processes as resulting from trial and error search and selection procedures. Best of all, it gets away from a purely instrumental rationality and allows for ends to be seen to be changeable, and for constraints to be altered as the result of evolutionary processes.²

The challenge to and the danger of the evolutionary approach taken this way is that, while it recognizes trials and errors as part of the evolutionary process of development, it might see traumatic events as necessary part of such trials and, potentially, get away with relieving us individually and collectively of responsibility and accountability for a more conscious and conscientious development. Nonetheless, it is a less paralyzing and more dynamically positive approach that allows for the recovery of spirit necessary for steering, initiating, and realizing changes.

Observing the correlation of these macro events to the micro scale of individual evolution at its deeply psycho-emotional level, I point to the psychological work of Kazimierz Dąbrowski developed in his "theory of positive disintegration," which resonates closely with such evolutionary approach to general human development.³ Dąbrowski, considered the founder of gifted education, understands personal crises as necessary disintegrative processes, productive and ultimately positive. Personal developmental potential stages crises marked by intense anxieties and depressions. Those con-

ditions trigger questioning of all values and former basis of identification, resulting in productive self-examination and self-reflection. Personal transformations are possible, of course, only if the most immediate and vital personal concerns, such as basic physical survival, are protected. Viewed through this lens, historical self-reflection of our social evolution is a necessary step in the re-definition and re-vitalization of our humanity. Analogies with Dąbrowski's theory issue a critical warning to us as we address the global crisis. The bare minimum of our social transformation rests on the vital precondition that our physical survival cannot be threatened by devastation of natural resources and the nuclear or biological wars.

2. Historical Overview

2.1 The Decline of Rome

Looking back at the decline of the Roman superpower and the fall of the Western part of its Empire, we find that it has been viewed through the historical prism of many different socio-historical theories. They typically differ in the amount of stress they put on a particular cause. Taken together, these historical theories add up to a series of such causes, whose cumulative effect is our best estimate of the reason of the Roman fall. The issue and example of Rome is, of course, enormous. However, the correlation between that empire and today's Empire, military-corporate complex of the U.S. led Western imperium, is dramatic. Besides the fact that socio-cultural structures of Rome served as the foundational basis of the modern Western institutional system, the parallels are there in terms of the dominant culture, technology, military force, and civilizational project. I do not prophesy the doom of our modern empire but bring out historical examples in order to point to the necessity of the modern empire's transformation and to call for its re-definition and the re-directing of its multiple resources for the greater humanity's well-being.

During its peak in the 1st and 2nd century CE and decline in the 4th and 5th century, Rome overextended itself into Europe, North Africa, and deep into western Asia. It got progressively more complex, rigid in control, less creative, requiring more bureaucracy to run the system, extracting more energy and enforcing increased taxation. The last two centuries brought disintegration of Rome's political, economic, military, and social institutions; ever-increasing need for massive energy to sustain the empire; and barbarian invasions coupled with internal usurpations. Crisis of the Third Century led into the centuries of decline and included the convergence of invasion, civil war, plague, and economic depression. Romans solved the problem of the shortage of energy, such as labor force, grains, and metals by conquering their neighbors to appropriate their energy resources. That is, however, only a short term solution that worsens overall conditions overtime and creates more complicated problems of maintaining ever-greater structures of military, judicial, and communication control. Added to these came the problems of environmental degradation by excessive grazing, decline of the overall agricultural output, deforestation, increased irrigation and salinization, and farmer's migrations to the bulging Roman cities.

The Crisis of the Third Century brought about a greater decentralization of the imperial rule. In its aftermath, two emperors usually ruled over different regions resulting in the administrative division between East and West part. In those terms, the Roman Empire underwent a re-structuring and a transformation into a smaller Byzantine part, which, nonetheless, continued for many centuries and experienced its own recovery and a period of remarkable creativity and thriving.

2.2 World War I

For the West, the inheritors of Roman institutional structures and expansionist mindset, on the wings of the Enlightenment, the end of 19th century was marked by the optimistic faith in the progress of humankind and relative time of peace. That can be stated only conditionally, however, on the basis of the fact that particular colonialist power structure has been established and in order by then. The period of colonial expansion, armed by the advents of the Industrial Revolution, from roughly 1500-1800 led to establishing the conquered foreign territories into full fledged European colonies. By the end of 19th century, the West had instituted its economic, political, and cultural dominion over most of the world. The British spearheaded West energized its empire and fed its exorbitant accumulation by dramatic resource extraction of human labor and raw materials and by creation of markets for the placement of its products devised by and from those same resources. The Empire's expansionist desires were strengthened by the notions of social Darwinism and sanctified by the self-appointed civilizing mission, whose elevated summery we can find in Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem, "The White Man's Burden." The spirit of the poem, originally dedicated to the United States to praise its annexation of the Philippines that year, found its motivational and legitimizing counterpart in the U.S. notion of "manifest destiny."

Underneath the elevated spirit of the times, what marks this peak period leading into early 20th century and into the combustion of WW I is the cresting of multiple socio-econo-political tensions. There ensued a great polarization among nations into the technologically advanced and the disadvantaged. Moreover, industrialization in general changed the nature and character of human work, affected the natural environment, and further divided the industrialized nations internally between the rich and the poor. Growing numbers of people were migrating to the urban areas only to become a mass of working class. They lost the security of owning land and became increasingly vulnerable and at the mercy of the industrialists. Lower class protests and revolts were happening both in the urban and the rural areas. Between 1855 and

1861, there were almost 500 peasant uprisings across Europe.⁴ Their acute conditions and destitute grievances turned the peasant and workers' desperate call for some social reform into a full-scale revolution in Russia.

What exacerbated and sped up these cumulative conditions of unrest was the vicious competition among European powers, whose mindsets were framed by the coupling of nationalism and industrialism, for obtaining and securing colonies throughout the world. Austro-Hungarian and German claim to domination in Eastern Europe, triggered the liberatory impulse in the Austro-Hungarian dominion of Bosnia and resulted in a young Serb assassinating the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Francis Ferdinand. Accusing neighboring Serbia of its implication in the assassination, Austro-Hungary declared war on it. Clashes along a particular line of geo-political interests created the alliances among Austro-Hungary, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire on one side as the Central Powers, and the Allied forces with Serbia, Belgium, France, Great Britain, and Russia on the other side. The unprecedented losses of this grand scale human-produced disaster seemed to be irresolvable and unstoppable. What tipped the scale in favor of the Allied forces is the decision of the United States to get involved once German submarines started sinking unarmed passenger ships in 1917. The truce in November of 1918 marked not only the cease fire and territorial resolution but also the rise of the United States as the world power and the humiliation of Germany, which will propel mobilization of the Teutonic spirit into the next total war.

Devastation of the spirit, populations, and economies of Europe, both of the Central Powers and the Allied nations, made the U.S. into a great creditor nation. However, the Pyrrhic victory also highlighted the interconnectedness of the U.S. economy to those of the world conditions. Upon the inevitable crash of inflated stock prices in 1929, the U.S. economy came to a devastating standstill, which marked the beginning of the Great Depression to last till the 1940s.

2.3 World War II

Only twenty years after WWI, even more devastating war erupted. WW II can be seen as a second wave of the same power struggle that only got amplified over time. Multiple nations got involved along the same lines of division. Un-fathomable number of people were killed with decimated populations in concentration camps fueled by discriminatory ideology of purification. All methods of destruction were utilized culminating in the U.S. dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In the aftermath of WW I and humiliating peace terms, the bankrupt Germany with unbearable unemployment was gripped out of paralysis by the commanding spirit of Hitler and the full militarization of the nation through the building of the Nazi party. To mobilize the national spirit for change and to create a unified focus, they used the method of finding a particular culprit for their misfortunes and, through national propaganda, of producing a national enemy. Production of threat for the mobilization of masses has been a known method taken up by the Nazi's to the highest level of ideological sanctification, which backfired and resulted in positing the Nazi party and their leader as the arch epitomes of humanity's enemy. Armed with the self-righteous and highly-charged ideological motivation that dedicated itself to the creation of enormous military power, Germany swiftly ran over numerous countries by sea, air, and land. Such power only provoked über measures of countering and overpowering by the launch of the U.S. atomic bombs on Japan. This mind-boggling display of power generated the spread of the universal fear of the suicidal capacity of humanity.

This period of upheaval and devastation of the two world wars produced an emergence of radical social transformation and the rise of the centralized regime of totalitarianism. Parallel to the rise of totalitarianism in Germany, communist revolutions in Russia post WW I and in China post WW II brought on a massive socio-cultural and econo-political transformation of re-distribution of power and wealth and terms and means of production but with eventually centralized governing grip and at tremendous costs. Additionally, post WW II period ushered in the anticolonial movement sweeping along multiple locales, bringing in the liberatory sentiment along with the establishment of new conglomerate nations and countries founded on the imperial institutional scaffolding.

3. Summary of Factors

What emerges here is a pattern of unbridled expansions, aggressive military development, and several repeated factors that create societal tensions, eruptions, and break downs. Among them the most prominent are: uneven population growth and their demands between the rich and the poor; rapid development of urban centers; ever-increasing energy demands; environmental damage and depletion done in the process; economic instabilities and the widening wealth accumulation gap; disenfranchising of certain population groups; overextending of complex bureaucratic institutions.

While our observations of the decline and fall of Rome tend to focus on the most immediately dramatic historical facts such as political intrigue and dissention, unbridled power drives and usurpations, Thomas Homer-Dixon focuses rather on what he calls the thermodynamics of empire.⁵ Examining the relationship between the/an empire's complexity and its resilience to crisis, Homer-Dixon points out that larger input of high-quality energy required to maintain complexity reduces resilience. To several stresses such as: population growth, energy, environmental damage, climate change, eco-

conomic gap between the rich and the poor, he adds two catastrophe multipliers: rising speed and global connectivity of activities, technologies, societies; and an escalating power of small groups to destroy massively. Convergence of stresses creates a synergistic effect and results in synchronous failure.

4. Aftermaths and Outcomes

As we look over the general historical periods: ancient, classical, and modern; and the development of empires through the econo-political revolutions: agricultural, industrial, and modern global communication, we see the increase in the speed and the scale of development, as well as the increase of the connectivity among systems and people. Connectivity can be both beneficial and detrimental however. It can help educate, engage, and mobilize people with unprecedented speed; and yet, it can facilitate the panic-inducing spread of fear and disease.

Most obviously, empires have the greatest unifying and the greatest destructive capacities. While, post World War II, we saw a greater atomization of the imperial territories and the stunning fear of potential human erasure, we also envisioned a greater unification through the formation of the United Nations. The Great Depression brought the reform of American capitalism by Roosevelt. Military-driven inventions spurred by the power competition during the world wars and the Cold War Era spread into everyday consumption and usage by the greater number of civilians. The period engendered a greater integration of the other half of humanity, women, into the public sphere as econo-political subjects.

It appears that our challenge is to re-claim, appropriate, and transform the imperial power structures already in place and to un hinge the relationship between the militaristic motivation for invention and their general benefits; that is, to de-militarize our inventions. In other words, our challenge is to envision types and modes of expansion and human unification without the detrimental effects and the damage control in the aftermath of crises those advancements cause. Informing people about and engaging them around the environmental crisis today provides the most unifying platform. The environmental crisis, unfortunately, is itself a product of neglect and abuse of the earlier critical times and governing mentality that guided them and still pervades today. Moreover, consideration of the environmental issues is inherently intertwined with other aspects of human activity (economic, political, scientific), which will require a thorough transformation of the same.

What these critical times addressed earlier direct us to re-evaluate is the place and effects of evolution versus revolution, as well as the question of the roles and responsibilities of leadership – the charismatic figures of great leaders as well as the power of the greater public. Noam Chomsky repeatedly points out that after the Cold War the only counterbalancing force to the Western Empire is the Public. Furthermore, we are realizing that the problem of man-made disasters and natural disasters are increasingly overlapping and entangled. As a bare minimum, the coalescing of multiple stresses needs to be diffused so that their cumulative eroding effect is alleviated. If we want to look for ways of such diffusion, we may have to start by recognizing that this may not actually be a world economic crisis – there are economies that are doing well overall, as well as economies whose underdevelopment may not be a point of pride but has, paradoxically, protected them from collapse. At this stage in which those economies find themselves, it is critical that we choose the course of their development by taking into account that the developed countries do not seem the best models in many ways. However, because unemployment is actually the greatest component of the crisis and most intensely felt in the U.S. and some European countries, it is exactly because of the scope of the U.S. econo-political influence combined with environmental issues that amplifies this historical moment to its critical tipping point. While the power of the modern empire is at its critical point, it is also positioned to recognize the need for its transformation. As Slavoj Žižek points out “We used to say the world needed United States. Today we say, the United States needs the world.”⁶

5. Today

These are not only lessons in history but inherited problems that carry over from a historical event and period onto the next with a cumulative sweep. As inheritors of previous socio-econo-political patterns and the agents of current set of near-sighted decisions, we find ourselves today precariously overextended between warding off imminent harm and alleviating the undercurrent of the long-term accumulated damages. Addressing both currents at the same time will require acting with a set of immediate measures as well as setting in place a set of rules and regulations that would slow down and alter the behaviors and practices that add to the cumulative degrading of peoples and environments.

David Harvey addresses a grave paradox that we are today in a position to have to help the rich and the econo-political decision-makers of the global U.S. led power to preserve the capitalist system and econo-political governing systems from the capitalist themselves running it into the ground in order to be able to evolve through organized transition beyond the capitalist dynamic into an organization more fair to all.⁷ This is an acute issue especially in relation to the land-grabbing in Africa and Latin America. Accumulation and advancement of technological progress are unsustainable exactly because of the paradoxical nature of the capitalist tenets and free market mentality as we have it – affluence is fueled by a self-perpetuating lack; sense of lack and insecurity propels consumption and militarization; ever-increased need for raw material propels expansion and resource grabbing.

6. Systemic Patterns

Multiple and increasing modern pressures involving issues with energy, space, population (especially poor, migrant, young, and urban) have engendered the new discipline of Human Ecology. The discipline focuses on interrelated world conditions and human systems and creates an interdisciplinary field and perspectives for the study of the same. Roy E. Allen points out that its structural components are four quadrants or building blocks of human ecology: a) human populations; b) belief systems; c) social agreements; d) physical environments and resources.⁸ Any institutions and organizations find themselves at the intersection of these quadrants and for any solution all four will have to be taken into account with careful consideration of each as well as their interrelationship. Outlining a new framework for global sustainability through Human Ecology Economics, Allen enumerates that such an approach includes:

- a) long-run time perspective
- b) use of Humanities
- c) the notion that everything varies and is interdependent
- d) the emphasis on global systems
- e) the juxtaposition of sustainability issues with economic issues

The notion of sustainability should be compared to and evaluated with the notion of resilience, as seen in Homer-Dixon. Dennis Meadows issues a warning again by distinguishing between sustainability and resilience as different consequences of the phases of advancement in our growth. Pointing out that we have gone past the possibility of sustainability since the warning publication of *The Limits to Growth*, Meadows asserts that now we have to focus on resilience of what we are left with; that is, damage control rather than proactive initiative.⁹

I find that the key systemic features that need to be taken into account as we address critical issues are: correlations/correspondences, relationships, paradoxes, and continuum. Addressing any critical issue today, we need to take into account its multifaceted relationship to other aspects of our human condition. We will have to see the correlations between the inside/outside and macro/micro aspects of it. In terms of paradoxes, we need to be perceptive and proactive about the counter effects of our inventions, solutions, and initiatives. In their coalescence, we are ultimately and unavoidably lead to the question of the mindsets, motivations and interests, principles and values that inform and guide our historical actions.

6.1 Correlations/Correspondences

In terms of correspondences, the polarization of inside/outside needs to be rethought and transformed. Both distinction aspects of inside/outside and macro/micro are within themselves interrelated. One of the most daunting examples is the problem of trash and it cannot hold the distinction inside/outside. Whether it is trash dumped at the drinking waters of the village of Beranselo in Montenegro, dumped in an underdeveloped country, or thrown out of a car - whichever scope it may be, it boils down to the same problem that the notions of “outside not inside,” and “there and not here” is a matter of mere shuttling. Consciousness and conscientiousness about trash there being a problem here (or vice versa) is of the highest and most urgent order as the new problem of “space junk” is alarmingly reminding us.

From the correspondence between macro and micro scales of human condition, we recognize the connection between personal crisis and greater societal crisis. The depletion of natural resources is correlated to the energy and spiritual depletion of humans and the epidemics of depression. Additionally, there needs to be a renewed respect for and learning from the micro perspectives of smaller countries, marginalized ethnicities, as well as re-incorporation and adaptation of the traditional ways of being into the modern context. In the increasingly interconnected world, there are no “small” perspectives.

6.2 Paradoxes

As for the paradoxes, the very liberatory promises of capitalism and democracy, and especially their relationship of embeddedness need to be reevaluated. The tenets of capitalism, such as progress, productivity, and competition create opposite tension pulls. Within the notion of prosperity, they create a paradox of the self-perpetuating of lack and scarcity; thus, preempting prosperity promises only to be re-asserted as mere promises on the ever-receding horizon of fulfillment. We are seeing today a tremendous anxiety over the future and personal security coupled with excessive industry of insurance on everything. While we are alerted to start saving for college before our children’s birth, the funds can disappear in a swiping, momentous financial crash. Mega insurance industry is nested within the aleatory environment of finance market set up. The paradox of connectivity has already been pointed out earlier. In the face of multiple systemic paradoxes (obesity through access to more food; greater food productivity through GMO food; greater interdependence though connectivity for example), the self-preservation impulses of many people make them turn to the extremes of indifference or fundamentalism.¹⁰ On the heels of a socio-political and environmental awareness, we see a paradox of more bureaucratic offices opened, which only adds to the overextending complexity of the system.

6.3 Relationships

Relationships among issues as well as methods of addressing them need to be taken into account. There is an immediate relationship with a beneficial long-term effect between population (self)management and women's capacity to have control over their own body through the education of women and introduction of self-regulated birth control. Moreover, relationships among agents of change need to be invested into. Who else can be brought into this collective discussion and on what converging terms? How can we appeal to and gather techno-digital wizards, military establishment, spiritual leadership, and corporate philanthropists, for example, at the same table? The appeal to sectorial leadership needs to be on personal terms. At a 2011 economic conference in Budva, Montenegro, the president of a well-known local bank reacted to the call for the re-distribution of wealth by exclaiming smugly: "I'm a banker; I am not an altruist!" Granted that they are relationship managers, bankers will have to take into consideration multiple relatedness of running finances as relationships. Negating altruism as a way one relates to others, the banker negated aspects, roles, and responsibilities as well as benefits of being a son, a father, a partner, a member of a community. That way is not a sustainable way of existing as a human – it is impossible to exist in the isolation of one individual function.

If the greatest systemic threat is the convergence of pressures and stresses, than partnerships and coalescing of positive actions and re-vitalizing energies of many activist organization with the existing institutions should be its counterbalance and remedy, through which we do not only alleviate the damaging causes but will certainly experience collective transformation.

6.4 Continuum

Relating all of the above, we have to pay attention to the time / space continuum of problems and solutions, such as the continuum and interrelatedness of the long and short term measures as well as interconnectedness of regions through climate, economic relations, and distance reduction by transportation and information technology. A paradox of green development demonstrates that we need to take into account time value in the relationship between product and process. While having cars run on electricity may seem to be an alternative to gas, the long-term problem of the disposability of batteries has to be considered as well.

All of the systemic features of correspondence, relationship, paradox, and continuum are themselves interrelated. They need to be taken into account simultaneously and turned into informative factors to engage public around their decisive roles. To address any issue, we have to address it from the interrelated aspects of that issue's correlations, continuum, relationships, and paradoxical counterpoints in mind and in action. From these perspectives our priorities change so that, for example, the issue of gay marriage would not be taking so much collective energy when considered from the perspective of relationships needed for collective sustainability. In fact, paradoxically to many who base their argument on the reproductive foundation of marriage, gay relationships might be an alleviation to the population growth problem. As our priorities are re-set under the pressures of multifaceted crisis, we realize that solutions will have to start with greater inclusivity, collaboration, and collective movements in mind.

7. Prompting Questions

In summation and response to the historical looking back and futuristic looking forward, a set of productive questions should be opened. Whose crisis is this? Who and what will manage; and can we do without it? What and who has to change first?

Who is the Public? As we take into consideration the distinctions of inside/outside and macro/micro aspects, we will increasingly come to conclusion that there cannot be outsiders and small perspectives in relationship to critical issues.

Who leads and will lead the change?

What beliefs, principles, and motives lead us to such change? What are the universal needs and desires to which we can appeal? What kind of values will be renewed and/or invented?

What is the nature of today's power? What can and will constitute collective power in the future?

What kind of beliefs does today's econo-political power relies on and is energized by?

What kind of economy? What kind of governance?

Granted that as stated earlier, empires have the greatest unifying capacities and the greatest destructive capacities as well, how can we use the institutions in place and forces in power to re-direct their resources to serve not the few but all? Rather than call for the break town of the empire, it seems that a less traumatic and more long-term productive way to go would be to transform from within.

There is no lack of initiative; rather, the question is of how to channel the initiatives toward the change in a more frontal, co-creative, and comprehensive manner. The collective energies and collective intelligence produced by the Occupy

movement, for example, (movement whose wave can be traced in a continuum from the Arabic Spring, to the streets of Spain and Italy, to Wall Street) should be coupled with the legislative capacities of international institutions. How can they be engaged not as antagonistic forces but as co-creative energies, and not for the sake of co-option and protection against social unrest, but rather for social transformation?

To whom can we reach out? Change requires big change in economic and political order, which is met with opposition from powerful and entrenched interest groups. How do we mobilize those groups for change – financial investors, military, corporatocracy? How can we bring in international organization; corporate philanthropists; disillusioned veterans and military leaders; academic organization keen on serving with socially applied academics; NGO's; digital tech wizards; women, migrants, the young?

If the public is mediatized through social networks and the marketing of consumerism, then that position can be turned around and used for what Gayatri Spivak called “the rearranging of desires” and for the paradoxical reversal of that position into the empowered sense of a consumer’s buying power and its negotiation capacity. What is crucial here is individual education on the capacity to self-initiate, however small. That way we are capitalizing on the very premises of entrepreneurial mindset. That way we will be “growing people from reactive consumer to pro-active members.”¹¹ The change in attitudes is a key factor that can actualize the motto of “small is beautiful” of E. F. Schumacher to counter the consumerist “bigger is better.”¹² Some small economies, such as Montenegro, can be seen as paradoxically “protected” from the collapsing effect of the crisis exactly by its underdevelopment.

The increasing rift between the rich and the poor; the developed and the developing playing the catching up game should be re-evaluated for its potentially positive aspects in the light of the current crisis. As we take into account the paradox of a developing country with growing economy but with population growth experiencing growing poverty, the question of the direction the developed will take is of the utmost importance. Should they go through the same growing pains and mistakes they are set on by following, or enforced to follow, the developed countries’ example? It seems that they should not follow the example of developed countries, at least not in everything for sure. Is there a possibility of alleviation of conditions from the position of lagging behind? How can uneven industrialization and uneven globalization be used to steer the course rather than to get others to “pick up the speed?”

Can we move beyond continual human re-staging of the human socio-econo-political crises? Can we develop a model of evolution that does not involve grand crises even as it may involve contrasts and struggles but not on a continual and catastrophic scale. Nature itself, inflamed by our own influences, provides a critical reference nudging our organization, preparation, securing, and preserving.

While we recognize that we transform ourselves and develop ourselves through our artifacts and ways we invent of producing them, we will also have to see that it is possible to have no limits to growth not through accumulation but, rather, through consciousness and creativity.

Notes

1. Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2011.
2. Modelski, George. “Innovation and Evolution in the World Economy.” *Human Ecology Economics: A New Framework for Global Sustainability*. Roy E. Allen Ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2008, 28.
3. Dąbrowski’s, a founding figure in gifted education, laid out his keen observations in several major works of developmental psychology. *Positive Disintegration*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964. *Personality-shaping through Positive Disintegration*. London: J. & A. Churchill Ltd., 1967. *Mental Growth through Positive Disintegration*. London: GRYF Publications Ltd., 1970.
4. Fiero, Gloria K. *The Humanistic Tradition: The Early Modern World to the Present*. 6th edition. New York: McGraw Hill, 2011.
5. Homer-Dixon, Thomas. *The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization*. Washington, Covelo, London: Island Press, 2006. Homer-Dixon refers to and builds on two key scholarly works. The first one is Joseph Tainter’s work in his *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (1988), which relates the increase in a system’s complexity to the decrease in its resilience. And the second one is the “panarchy theory” of Crawford Holling, the founder of ecological economics, which examines relationships of complexity, potential, and resilience in a system and stresses the importance of creating and maintaining adaptive cycles of the system’s subsystems at different points so as to diffuse the convergence of stresses.
6. From the lecture “Signs from the Future,” Subversive Forum: The Future of Europe, Zagreb, May 17, 2012. Online <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOTufvP9-6U>. Also see Žižek, Slavoj. *Living in the End Times*. London and New York: Verso, 2011.
7. Harvey, David. *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. & *The Limits to Capital*. London and New York: Verso, 2007.
8. Allen, Roy E., Ed. *Human Ecology Economics: A New Framework for Global Sustainability*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. Allen points out that as early as 1937 H.G. Wells called for the foundation of Human Ecology in his paper “Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind” published in *Harper’s Magazine*.
9. Dennis Meadows’s address at the Club of Rome conference “Think Globally, Act Locally,” Bucharest, 2012.
10. See Angus, Ian. *Identity and Justice*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2008.
11. Popović, Saša and Ljudmila Mila Popovich. “Economics of Dignity: Growing People from Consumers to Members.” *Eruditio*, Electronic Journal of the World Academy of Art and Science, Issue 1, Part 4, September 2012.
12. Schumacher, E. F. *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.