

Tilana's Turn

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On the 1st of March this year Tilana was born, to join over 6.5 billion neighbours – a lively bunch of neighbours that indeed account for one-sixth of the time that humans have collectively spent on earth. On all accounts it's been a memorable journey that she will share. Descending from a mitochondrial Eve, it was a journey that started some 200,000 years ago in Africa, later spreading across the globe.

When it does become Tilana's turn to take over this planet from the likes of me, around 2036, when I am at retiring age and she is around 30, she will be even more tightly squeezed, learning to live with around 8 billion fellow residents. But, what would the world look like then, interestingly, at the 100 year anniversary of the computer? Whether optimists or pessimists, we must wonder what globalisation holds – global markets, global communications, but perhaps even global environmental and social issues.

Would the rift between the commercial West and Islamic worlds grow? Other acute social issues in her hands may include refugees, famine, bio-hazards and public health. In a world where another 3 planets like Earth would be needed to satisfy the appetite if all consumed like the rich nations do (and this looks well and truly in the making with both India and China developing at a rapid rate), there will be significant opportunity to dematerialize. Perhaps also opportunities for genetically engineering food – or would this form an ethical dilemma that the world finds hard to debate like the nuclear debate? Where growing cotton for a single shirt requires around 500 liters of water, and with the world's thirst growing six fold in the 20th century, would water wars erupt, would we find a way to harness water from the sea more efficiently, or being optimistic learn to live and innovate with what's available? Then there is climate change. Living in Melbourne, Tilana may well not need a coat in winter, but will have to learn to fight the fury of summer, and shelter environmental refugees from parts of the world that need to be abandoned as a consequence.

In a world where her children would learn about tens of thousands of lost species at museums, the Internet and books, and she will be working furiously as one of only two people supporting every pensioner (as opposed to four for each today), I hope we would have made a difference to the planet by then that makes her load easier to bear when it's her turn. Tilana is our daughter, one of 130 million other daughters and sons that join her in 2006, to whom we hope to entrust a more sustainable planet before the end of our time.

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