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Clemens Greiner, Steven van Wolputte, and Michael Bollig(eds.). *African Futures*. Publisher: Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2022. Pages: 387. ISBN: 978-90-04-47164-1.

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African Futures is a pithy but loaded title. It raises the important matter of the future from philosophical (ethical, epistemological, metaphysical), developmental, historical and existential perspectives. Pertinent questions are raised such as, what futures are, if they can be determined, by who, when, and how they can be perceived, understood, presented and represented and how not

Africa has not been discussed and defined enough. By the time this review is published, a “future” would have historicized in a FIFA World Cup semi-final football match between France and Morocco which has been dubbed a “Confederation of African Football (CAF) cup final.” When Morocco played Portugal somebody, who did not know the teams, would have mistaken the latter for the former because of how they define Africa. When President Barak Obama visited Kenya, the question that may have been posed: was he just a foreign head of state or a son of Africa coming to meet his ancestors and relatives? African futures are, therefore, complex needing intensive reasoning and appreciation, which is what this book is confronting.

The book has been called an “ethics of possibility” complimenting African stories of suffering and pain. They problematize the word “future” pointing out how together with “Africa” are among the most abused. It is problematic even if used in a plural sense because those futures are not guaranteed since they do not capture the heterogeneity expressed in African life. So, they settle for “futuring” which is a “subjectivation” or naming the activity of a subject.

To the question “what are African futures? “disease, war, savagery, famine, poverty and widespread corruption” (p.20). The other is that Africa, just like other places, has no single past and future; reality is contestation, negotiation, and consideration. All human beings have different future makings since imagination, aspiration, and anticipation are elements of the future and should not be essentialized.

Covid-19 showed the need to think with—not about or for—Africa.. Vaccine nationalism would disadvantage Africa once more but provide a moment of truth with regard to the future—an opportunity for innovation and plurality. Futures must be decolonized from hegemony and determinism—“inferiorization”

or “intellectual marginalization of Africa” (p.32). Hence, alterity is created by essentialization of African practices like pastoralism rather than seeing people as complex, differentiated, unpredictable identities engaged in different strategies of life.

‘Futurity’ and ‘future making’ presented as “a cultural form or horizon” open-ended futures replete with possibilities have neglected religion. Scholars must distinguish between immediate, current future, and eschatology to judge how these affect religious practitioners and how these futures align, depart from, and become enriched by the past and present.

Rudolf Pöch’s 1908 Kalahari recordings, for example, might appear to be museum items preserved for posterity and world heritage, but they were illegally collected in the context of genocide. There is a need for epistemological restitution, rethinking museums and coloniality. There has to be new approaches that take cognisance of new ethics of item collection and preservation.

The idea of education as liberation is compliant with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Education helps girls escape the shackles of culture to become entrepreneurial. This idea has become a universal song expressed thus: an educated girl buys a cow from a loan - parents encouraged to take loans for educating the girl-child, the cow creates a herd, she becomes a cattle baroness and gets invited to male dominated boards, she creates water for her community. This is what is called “philanthro-capitalism” (p.311), which one author interrogates and concludes that poor girls are nothing but lucrative investments whereby interventions are less about their empowerment and more about western values. Meritocracy is a cruelly deceptive promise that education will eradicate poverty and protect a female child. In the case of Niger early marriage, rape, and sexual harassment have not been reduced. Beliefs about spirit possession highlight the importance of religion and lived experiences “built around the premise that schools are engines of development, the story hints at the ways the future is *girlled* and girls are *futured* in Niger” (p.317).

Homosexuals using the kanga, a dress that symbolises heterosexual marriage worn by celebrities of Kenya and Tanzania, is a different representation of futures. It is a subversion of traditional culture into a homosexual tale. This becomes a queerness that the new futuring is engaging in that is also evident in the use of the kanga by sex workers who attempt to mask their activities and use the kanga to assume acceptability. This shows how the marginalized create a future for themselves, destabilizing normativity in the process.

Conjuality, intimacy, and parenthood are a form of futuring together taking place outside marriage in modern Namibia. Marriage no longer creates legitimacy and communality but individualism and class identity where the poor cannot afford it and the rich use it for excluding family. On the other hand, femifocal households consider their family more important than a relationship with men - boyfriend is less important than child or kin. Fathers are unreliable even when they occasionally contribute towards their children’s upkeep. The women

support each other. Unmarried women are not “singles”, they are “withs” their kin. Unmarried women have socially satisfying lives outside marriage. “Polyandrous motherhood leads to complex social networks based on co-parenthood. Women gain flexibility and can claim support from multiple men in times of need” (p.335). Married and unmarried Namibians are moving more and more apart—the former —being rich and the latter poor.

There is an increase in the medicalization of female genital cutting (FGC) because of the demand by educated, wealthy women, and families from FGC practising communities in Kenya and abroad. Healthcare providers are attracted by this lucrative market. FGC is seen as violence to women, and medicalization will reverse the gains on getting rid of it. Some women are said to want the procedure either because of social pressure or because of their belief. The UN calls it an unjustifiable assault on the integrity of the woman and it, therefore, has zero tolerance for the practice when traditional methods are used (non-medicalized). This means the rich can practice their culture whilst the poor suffer the double jeopardy of social stigma and unsafe procedure.

Africa has imported cholera, tuberculosis, syphilis, HIV, and Covid-19. The majority of animal infectious diseases are in Africa whilst it will soon be home to most deaths from noncommunicable diseases. Vaccine nationalism, where “well-funded NGOs and foreign governments siphon the local health workforce, leading to Africa’s great brain drain, and hamstringing health infrastructure across the continent” (p.83), and neo-colonial policies are serious hindrances to progress. Africa must find its own solutions.

Africa’s current situation is characterised by uncertainty in the face of multi-faceted problems including Afro-pessimism. The suggested solution is “convivial development’, one that fulsomely embraces uncertainty, ambiguity, and even ignorance. [...] an approach that engages with context, facilitates inclusion of multiple knowledges and skills, fosters a caring approach to people and environments centred on social justice and, as a result, necessarily embraces complexity and uncertainty” (p.101).

Zimbabwe has survived in the face of food insecurity, political turmoil, drought, and infectious disease outbreaks by peculiarly engaging in agriculture whilst pastoralists in East Africa have demonstrated their ability to develop - in their own way - by group formations and adaptation without rigid methods and systems in the face of drought. Ebola response in West Africa, where only the local knowledges and traditions helped the situation, is another example. Technical knowledge imposed from outside generated rumours, confusion, and mistrust that worsened the situation. Those affected should lead the way for solutions Covid-19 also proved this.

The world is neglecting the rape of Africa’s flora that is bigger than the pillaging of its fauna. Tanzania, DRC, Mozambique, Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Namibia are at the receiving end of organized international criminal syndicates who smuggle and steal timber, bribe officials, and traffic valuable trees

that are recklessly uprooted. China, Vietnam, Germany, Saudi Arabia, and Greece are the markets, and this plunder happens at a huge cost to the continent. There is a lack of national and international strategy for tackling forest crimes. Now, CITIES wants to control elephants against the states while neglecting the forests that are largely under the control of criminal gangs.

A comparison of Namibia and Germany shows that national parks are more the feature of African traditional conservation efforts than in the north. Even though Namibian national parks were formed during the colonial era for political/military reasons, they -at independence- were converted into government environmental conservation projects for the benefit of all citizens. They constitute 20% and up to half of the country's land mass. Contrast that with Germany where attempts to conserve the forest in order to meet 5% of the country in conformity to the international standards still struggle. Yet, reserving land for this purpose marginalized forest-dwelling peasants. Problematizing the issue of zoning land for preservation purposes raises the prospect of excluding local communities when the national parks turn into international and world heritage sites that are accessible only to the elites.

Namibia is an example of the new scramble for Africa where investors under the guise of market sustainability and job creation are grabbing the remaining rural territory which was the poor's safety net for mineral exploration, commercial farming, and illegal logging. The beneficiaries are the same old colonialists who have roped in a few local elites. This problem is also found in Kenya and Zimbabwe. Decolonizing and liberative programmes for local populations are required.

The Sahel region is historically borderless and has provided rich oligarchs trade opportunities including the slave trade with Muslims being central to the developments. Community-based militia groups opposing Islamists have been formed and supported by locals, accordingly making governance illusive. They have used these routes for survival through different methods of communication—caravans, now trucks, MTN and Orange networks. The ideologists are using the media to connect the past to the present and capture the future. The hopeless are given hope and taught the desirability of past greatness and the dangers of neo-colonialism as well as suspicion of western ideology. This is a complexity that needs to be understood in dealing with the region's issues.

Governments use the past and present to prepare for the future, which is uncertain, in different ways. International warning systems are used by states to prepare for the unexpected. In the case of Covid-19, possible scenarios are normally used to prepare for the unknown. It is, therefore, safe to assume that there should have been a level of preparedness for Covid-19. It is a grey swan which African leaders ignored.

Covid-19 gave rise to the perception that the world will never be the same again when Cuban doctors arrived in Italy to help a desperate Italian community—a moment of African pride when the black perform the role of

saviour formerly played by the West. This was fuelled more by the Madagascan Rajoelina who promised to give the whole country a traditional herb to cure Covid-19 and the Congolese Tshisekedi ordered some of the herbal concoction ignoring WHO and the rest of the world. Moral panic resulted when it did not work, and the West wanted to carry out medical trials in Africa. The cry was that the West wanted to wipe the population out. The fears were allayed when trials were carried out in China and the USA. This shows the power of the media in encouraging people to participate and determine their futures. It is evidence of resistance and yearning for epistemological independence and respect. The media provided a commentary/critique of the status quo and created awareness about exploitation by the West.

English has been introduced in DRC, Rwanda, and Morocco. Mandarin and Confucius institutes are making their presence felt in Africa. This raises the importance of language. A related debate ensued as to whether African literature should be written in colonial languages with Ngugi wa Thiong'o disagreeing and Chinua Achebe agreeing. Language enables communication and negotiation. Linguistic purity is also good for preservation. So language, like other issues, has complex implications.

There is an "entanglement of predetermination by negative scenarios for Africa and an inability to imagine a better future for it" which is being encountered by "Afrofuturism" expressed in film and art. Painting is thinking through which a new future can be brought into being, a generation of ideas whereby local heroes in comics should be used to create a desirable future, solve problems as well as linking the past, present, and future. Designers research textile as well as unpack hidden social beliefs and institutions. So, design is social commentary and critique. It can also help express womanhood to disrupt social conventions. For example, writings and paintings on clothes such as "buysexual" commentate on masculinity as well as unravelling time and imagining "possible futures" (p.261).

The future world is predetermined and dominated by normativity, which is a limitation. A more robust future is likely to result from relaxation, music, reflection, and conversation. It is, therefore, a mistake to think that the future stands for anything determinate and definable. Language, time, and meaning are complex.

Some monuments defy traditional building ideas in African cities. They have no building permit, defy gravity, and force themselves upon the authorities. Ordinary people's "city they have in mind differs radically from the official urban propositions envisaged by politicians, urban planners or real estate investors" (p.277) physically, conceptually and in what it means to them. For example, they constructed a big printer with remains of printers, which shows African problem-solving ability. According to this view, people should not "talk of how technology is changing Africa instead of how Africa is changing technology."

Many African youth have technological innovation showing that they are not just its consumers but creators as well. The same trend is found in music where Cameroon and Nigerian youth are global trendsetters. In Burkina Faso, artists' strong campaigns led to political changes in 2014. They are working to give hope to the nation by creating cooperative projects—"art without sharing ends in sclerosis, and meeting others allows you to challenge yourself and move forward" (p.299). They are countering tensions and turbulences of the modern world through Hèremakono, "a vision of the future inspired by the idea that happiness does not await us—it requires effort, self-confidence, and creativity; we need to provoke it, construct it, create it" (p.301). Africa's rich cultural heritage that is expressed in music and art is part of its invaluable decolonization effort when it rids itself of stumbling blocks to its development and embraces cooperative efforts based on local epistemologies. This cooperation includes humanities and social sciences through which cross-cutting scholastic conversations normalize African scholars' study of Europeans.

This book is an important resource for scholars in development, ethics, African studies, and philosophy. I would also recommend it for history students. One can only hope for a similar project for the whole continent.

Research Africa

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