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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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This volume brings together thirty chapters and a strong team of scholars from the Social Sciences and Humanities. The diversity of contributors provides for an intellectually stimulating and rich volume which takes as its departure point the subject of African Futures. Conceptualised as a conference in 2018, the conference could not take place in 2021 due to the global travel disruption and lockdowns associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. The project finally came to fruition as a volume which is available on open access. From the editors' notes, the book was already a live project ahead of the conference so continued as a co-production of knowledge exercise even as the conference had to be postponed.

The book is arranged in six parts each with parts one to five arranged in about six chapters with introductory sections giving highlights of the set of chapters in the respective section. Each part also has a provocative tag line which summarises the section and the chapters therein. The last part which is part six provides the concluding reflections of the book. One of the first things one appreciates from this volume is the intellectual strength of the contributors. Many are established scholars with deep ties and field research experience on the continent. They are complemented by a crop of emerging scholars who are either based on the continent or have undertaken field research on the continent.

Throughout the volume, the scholars have taken an inter-disciplinary approach that has enabled them to cover a diverse range of issues from identity and gender, public health, ecology, and land studies to name a few. What caught my attention about the volume was its deliberate tackling of the subject of futures. Futures Research has seen an appreciable rise especially through the support of UNESCO and the Futures Literacy Lab programmes which facilitated the establishment of several academic Chairs in Futures studies and hosted a Summit in December 2019.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, global attention focused on the issue of preparedness and the subject of futures came into the mainstream as organisations and governments considered how to enhance their future preparedness for pandemics. Foresight studies and related tools were used to explore post-pandemic scenarios and inspired many practitioners to expand their online

education and meetings activities focusing on Futures Studies. While very few institutions and scholars had devoted their attention to the subject of futures, it became a critical area of academic discourse especially through the few institutions and organisations that had been actively engaged in futures research. With respect to African Futures, limited attention had been paid to futures research (see for example Sall 2003) and it was thus a very pleasant surprise to see this robust volume dedicated to African Futures.

When reflecting on 2022, one can say that futures research and African futures have come to the forefront of scholarly interests and one can only hope that the conference foreseen for 2023 will take place and will attract more practitioners of future studies. As a researcher who has been actively involved in futures research in 2022, it is pleasing to see a book dedicated to the subject of Africa's futures in a post-covid world which has experienced public health, conflict, and climate crises all under twenty-four months. The book's greatest strength is the very detailed bibliography and syntheses of literature on African futures.

Changing global geo-political dynamics have also reshaped discourses on African studies. Futuring Africa can no longer be approached through simplistic narratives which have characterised writing on Africa. The desire to decolonise Africa's futures is intentional and has been echoed across various disciplines over the last few years. In the wake of social movements which called out the pervasiveness of racism and social injustice towards Black people and people of colour, more voices have been added to critiquing the silencing of knowledge systems that are not Western.

African scholars such as Professors Falola, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Yacob-Haliso are deliberate about ensuring Africa's history and relate disciplines are given the necessary attention in the literature. In the making of Africa's futures, we have the opportunity to bring into the conversation Africa's diverse knowledge systems which have not been tapped in the study of the past and the present. The future presents a good opportunity to explore methodologies and practices from within Africa's rich and deep time histories and cultures. The rich tapestry of storytelling, complex cosmologies, and worldviews of African societies provide a wealth of knowledge from which different futuring, and anticipation studies can be done. This review explores how scholars have used the futures studies lens to explore the different facets of African studies in this volume.

Part one of the book is titled "*Re/Thinking*" which suggests a reflective posture for the section. The editors start their introduction with the provocative and often quoted headline from *The Economist* which set the tone for Afro-pessimism in 2000 (13.5.2000) which presented Africa as a continent doomed to failure. The same publication would recant on the prognosis a decade later to posit the continent as a continent rising (*The Economist* 3.12.2011) and more recently as a continent hard to ignore due to its rapid change (*The Economist* 26.5.2020)*.

The messaging by *The Economist* became the cliché opener for many essays on the continent and remains relevant today. It highlights the ambivalence of even the most trusted of sources in respect to prognosis on Africa's development.

Rethinking Africa's development has been an integral part of African studies since the 1960s. Many models for the continent's development have been advanced and some have fallen short of delivering the desired results. The introduction chapter aptly titled "Futuring Africa" (p.1) explores some of the narratives about Africa which promoted Afro-pessimistic stories about Africa. It provides a good summary of the current state of discourses on African studies as introduced above giving insights on the contribution of scholars of the global South on issues such as decoloniality. The chapter draws attention to the concepts which have informed and influenced scholarship and practice on African studies including those which shaped policy making (pp.6-10). This chapter and others in the section highlight the dynamic nature of Africa and the lived experience of Africans (Horáková pp.19-25).

The chapters have extensive bibliographies highlighting the vibrant scholarship of Africanists. Rassool, for example, draws attention to the ambivalence of the ethnographic museum in the cultural landscape of African institutions. Rassool highlights how colonial intellectual practice and legacies of imperialism still manifest themselves in contemporary museum practice which if left unchallenged perpetuate injustices on African citizenry at home and in the diaspora.

"When it comes to Africa, it is arguable that there is no single future for the continent, just in the same way as there was no single past, and there is no single present. One cannot tell a single story of Africa and its future" (Horáková p.20).

The above statement is amplified in the chapter by Greiner which highlights how anthropological discourse around modes of production such as pastoralism have been presented as fixed identities of people which has often at the detriment of critical understanding of communities, livelihoods and their changing contexts through time and space. The section also highlights the dangers of colonisation of Africa's futures by organisations who self-appoint as experts on Africa. Muller-Mahn & Kioko (pp.28-34) highlight some of the challenges experienced by communities during the Covid-19 pandemic. They correctly conclude that "decolonizing the future starts with a critique of dominant development discourses and the search for alternative visions" (p.32).

A similar cautionary note is presented in the chapter by Schulz who advocates for a multi-lens approach in contemporary studies on religion in Africa especially of Christianity. Wamai and Shirley highlight the intersecting challenges of public health and development agendas on the continent. They point out that the "high burden of disease, poor population health outcomes and inequities are due to high levels of poverty, weak health systems, poor governance,

historical colonialism, and foreign aid policies. (p.76). Interestingly, concerns about Africa's population growth have been part of the futures-making narratives invariably highlighting the "dangers" of uncontrolled population growth on the continent. The authors present a wealth of data backed discussions to highlight the "entanglement of Africa's future well-being with the rest of the world especially in respect to infectious diseases as indicated by the Covid-19 pandemic. They conclude that Africa's futures are "precarious yet promising" (p.83) especially if development partners and the global funding agencies address the financing gaps in public health Africa and globally.

Part two of the book is sub-titled "*Living*" and draws critical attention to the intertwined nature of human life and ecology. Focusing on the dynamics of development, economics and ecosystems, the chapters highlight how policies on Africa's ecologies have contributed to some of the complex problems experienced in governing resources and access in African states. Two chapters focus on Namibia, a country with one of the highest levels of inequality in the world.

Despite an abundance of resources, Namibia experiences high levels of inequality, poverty, and social injustice which are traceable to colonial era policies. Nghitevelekwa highlights how failure to address colonial land tenure injustices which were premised on racial injustice has left the current Namibian legal system ill-equipped to address land access issues. As a result, Namibians are unable to compete as land prices remain high and foreign companies scramble for lucrative resources (p.160, see also Chipenda & Tom pp.185-193). Widlok and Nakanyete's chapter (pp.141- 154) highlights how Namibia's conservation policies have ensured good conservation practices. They note that Namibia's conservation policies provide good lessons which Germany, as a former coloniser can emulate (p.141). However, they have not addressed historic injustices. These include land loss by indigenous communities and youth who have lodged legal bids to reclaim their ancestral lands as is the case in Zimbabwe and other countries where youth landlessness is at crisis levels. Bollig's chapter also noted that changing conservation policies from "fortress conservation" (p.114) to community based natural resources management (CBNRM) have alleviated some of the contestations on land issues cross the continent. New models of management of protected areas including parks and conservancies have become more inclusive. However, the inordinate influence of international funding agencies and NGOs with vested interests in conservation continue to marginalise local communities (pp.116-119). Africa's ecological systems remain one of the terrains where coloniality is rife. The romanticisation and/or demonisation of the continent compete at the detriment of communities who live close to such protected areas and parks (see also Agade pp.197-205). Unfortunately, short term development solutions often lead to conflicts between local communities and other competing parties as has been well articulated by Agade in the conflict over resources in northern Kenya (pp.204-205).

Recent climate debates especially post-COP 26 have brought to the fore the polarised and sometimes irreconcilable views on conservation best practices and development needs for the African continent. One of the challenges remains the illegal trade in protected species of African flora and fauna (Kioko pp.125-138). Criminal activities in respect to African biodiversity products often take advantage of weak governance systems in countries across the continent to illegally harvest and endanger export species. Kioko concludes by observing the importance of addressing the complex and intertwined issues of community needs, local context and the demand and supply factors to address the illicit trade in African biodiversity products (pp.137-138). Failure to address the demand side of such trade often feeds the illicit trade networks which discussions at international level to address legal trade issues are at an impasse.

Scoones presents a pragmatic perspective in the section which provides some useful options on the governance of resources. Using the concept of “convivial development”, Scoones (p.101) proposes embracing of concepts of ambiguity and uncertainty in development practice. He cites case studies from Zimbabwe, Kenya, and the Ebola outbreak in West Africa to explore how locally rooted and context dependent solutions can be inclusive and respectful of local people. This section highlights how life and living can be approached in ways which respect and include knowledge systems of African citizenry without the dehumanisation and plunder which was the cornerstone of colonialism. If African livelihoods are to be secured in the future, addressing the complexities of human-ecology relations in a world riddled with crises is important and scholars can contribute to finding solutions.

The third part of the book titled “*Confronting*” brings together a series of chapters which are threaded together by themes like those noted above. De Bruijn’s chapter on the conflict in the Sahel-Sahara regions highlights the role of the past in the present. Historic crises including colonial conflicts and climate change have brought to fore deep connections and deep divides which have intensified with the interplay of new technologies and dynamics which have spawned new movements claiming religion as their calling. The author notes how histories have been conflated into the glorification of imagined pasts and creation of imagined futures which at present hold no promise of peace nor prosperity.

To understand the future, we have to delve deep into how new connectivities relate to the connectivities and ruptures of the past, and we also have to understand how far they follow old lines of reasoning and sociology. (de Bruijn p.175).

The chapters by Pype on the responses to Covid-19 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Brinkman on the role of language in literature highlight some of the quandaries of self-assertion and affirmations which have troubled African identities. In the case of the DRC, short-lived technology

inspired moments during the pandemic were tempered by the realisations that real solutions need long term investment, evidence-based decision making and most importantly knowledge which is reliable and verifiable. The allure of social media remains a key challenge for development on the continent as it presents both an opportunity and threat for content creators and users. The chapter on language highlights how the ambivalences of coloniality, identity, and belonging continue to plague the continent especially the quest for a united Pan-African identity as envisioned by the continental body the African Union.

Clearly, policies are not aligning well to personal and national desires and the future of education will continue to reflect fractured colonial and imperial privileges more than local and affirmed realities. One can only hope that ICT and other new technologies can provide avenues for liberatory and decolonised identity making if Africa's youth are to locate themselves in the hybridised and globalised world in which they must negotiate other identities (see chapter by Ngeh & Pelican). The two chapters weave into the next section titled "*Imagining*" which explores the more creative and innovative character of African identities.

Modern technologies and media have enabled the emergence of new, positive, and creative images of Africa which include delving into futuristic worlds which appeal not only to the youth but to many who have an appetite for African creative ideas. The success of films such as *Black Panther* and *Wakanda Forever*, *The Woman King* and others which have emerged on other film networks have inspired African themed media. While these new films have also received their fair share of negative reviews from critics, the outflow of positive reviews has inspired interest in African cultures and heritage including histories. *The Woman King* was even more appealing for its valorisation of positive women in historic settings and has inspired Afro-centric beauty and fashion interest which has also been visible in other artistic circles such as music (Ngeh & Pelican pp.285-292).

Fendler's chapter focuses on how positive superheroes drawn from African cultural milieu have been inspirational and showcased talent across the continent (pp.237-249). Pinther's chapter on fashion across the continent also highlights how young designers subverted ideas of Africa and fashion which innovations which were grounded in local cultural realms (pp.250-260). These chapters highlight the vibrant and cosmopolitan nature of Africa's past, present, and futures as young people own these temporalities and affirm their identities positively.

In a continuation of the artistic, Storch presents an almost poetic chapter titled "Future Tense" which reads like a performed piece, and it would be wonderful to someday see it on stage! It invokes imagination as an exercise in futures making and one can only read it as a call to communing and imagining. This is also expressed in the essay by Ndakalako titled "Visitations" (pp.356-363). Art, in its diverse manifestations, invites us to go beyond the constrictions

of our everyday imaginaries. Storytelling is a core component of futures studies and is an important lens for futuring.

The idea of cities as places of creative imaginaries which open possibilities for co-creation is a theme explored in the chapter by Wolputte, Cassiman & De Boeck. Presenting research from a project on African cities and hubs, the essay highlights how binaries between artistic/creative and designer/engineer among others are blurred when one factors in people as positive actors with agency. The essay poses several “what ifs” which among others invite the reader to explore the boundaries often created in ways of thinking, doing, and learning. They posit futures-making which are inclusive across class, gender and knowledge making (pp.278-281) which can hopefully create habitats which are more inclusive and decolonised (see also chapter by Meiu pp.320-328). This possibility is echoed by Ngeh & Pelican when noting that:

young Africans, [use] their youthful driving force and networking across cultural and geographical boundaries ... [they] succeed in placing Africa on the global map of technical innovation, in setting global musical trends, and in shaping African futures (p.291).

This section concludes with a chapter celebrating artists who chose to see hope over despair in Africa. Kibora’s exploration of artistic works in West Africa highlights how art triumphs over war and hopelessness giving meaning to life and everyday life in cities on the continent (pp.296-305). As has been echoed elsewhere, Africa’s futures are youthful, creative and less encumbered with the weight of the past but are driven by rich and vibrant imaginations of alternative futures which are leveraging technology and an entrepreneurial spirit to overcome multiple barriers including geography, identity and gender.

This section also builds a good bridge to the next section titled “*Relating*” which focuses on more intimate issues of relationship and choice making in respect to the female body. The chapters draw on the human emotion and desires for love which become political or politicised when normative beliefs converge to regulate the places and spaces in which females can exist and be secure. The chapter by Esho raises the red flag on the challenges of law and regulation when individual agency subverts social and community actions to protect.

Focusing on self-chosen female genital cutting in Kenya, the chapter draws attention to the angst of advocacy and policy activism to see through legal reforms for the protection of women and girls which are then countered in very specific personal contexts (Esho pp.338-344). What the author succeeds in highlighting is the predicament of human choices whether located in Africa or elsewhere where respect for individual choice and therefore human rights is sacrosanct. This dilemma is especially critical as we hurtle into a more human-machine future which does not have all the “tools in the tool-kit” and or manuals in respect to norms and ethics for technologically infused futures.

The concluding chapter brings in what one can only call the voice of the wise. The chapter summarises some of the key observations in the book especially the contradictions and contestations which have been highlighted in the book. The authors underscore the importance of collaboration and cooperation in the production of knowledge to address the current asymmetries in global knowledge production and inequalities. Such inequalities are inherent in scholarship between and within the global South and the North. Drawing on the concept of conviviality, they plead for humanistic futures which accentuate partnerships and collaboration in scholarly endeavours against competition and fence-building.

One would have liked to see more examples cited in their chapter of boundaries breaking and bridges building projects. Sadly, these are few examples to draw upon to highlight that this indeed is the future of scholarship especially as it relates to African studies. With the conference still foreseen for 2023, we can only hope that there will be concerted efforts to ensure the presence and equal participation of young African scholars from the continent and beyond invited to the conference. It should be further mentioned that real commitment for funding research and projects with young African scholars as principal or co-principal investigators are delivered by leading institutions so that we can see a true paradigm shift from dominant narratives of the global North to more inclusive knowledge making partnerships which can translate to a true decolonial turn in African studies.

As the book foregrounded itself so visibly in “the future” – we also need to see more support across the global North to solidarity and advocacy in research and practice in the processes of restorative and reparative justice for Africans and all people of African descent as countries address the twin pledges of climate and heritage justice. The journey of return for African cultural heritage should be centrepiece of the “futures we have been waiting” for in the decolonising journeys. This book has been a great companion throughout the months of reading and re-reading. It was a great companion when I was preparing lectures on African futures. I strongly recommend its wider readership especially as it is available on open access which takes away one of the critical barriers of access for many continent-based researchers. I commend the authors, editors, and indeed series convenors and conference committees for delivering on a truly informative project. The conference will be much anticipated by all those who have enjoyed this volume and those still to read it.

References:

Sall, A. (Ed.). 2003. *Africa 2025: What possible futures for sub-Saharan Africa?* Pretoria: Unisa Press.

*The three articles from *The Economist* from 2000, 2011 and 2020 are widely available and well cited in this volume.

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