

Multiple Futures? Comparing Approaches to the Future in Africa, China, and Europe: An Introduction

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ABSTRACT

Die Zukunft ist ungewiss, und sie ist nicht für alle dieselbe. Das Heft untersucht in vergleichender Perspektive zeitgenössische Zukunftserwartungen, Formen des Zukunftswissens und Strategien des Zukunftsmanagements in Afrika, China und Europa. Während je eigene soziale, politische und ökonomische Gegebenheiten Unterschiede im individuellen und kollektiven Zugang zu Zukunft bedingen, bringt die Verflechtung der Welt gleichzeitig Parallelen und Konvergenzen hervor.

“Up until the mid-20th century, the future appeared as something open, shapeable, latently positive, the past as something to be overcome,” German-American cultural theorist Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht explained in 2014, “Now, it is rather the opposite. We see the future as a threat scenario of climate catastrophe, demographic crisis, and potential new wars, whereas we pay homage to the past in the form of days of remembrance, new editions of the classics, new translations, and rediscoveries.”¹ This negative outlook on the future feeds on familiar old cultural clichés of an allegedly weary Europe, still caught in the grip of its past and lacking the confidence and creative power to shape the future. It also coincides with a diagnosis of our times, according to which the heroic spirit of the modern age has run dry, while the idea of positive progress has been thrown by the wayside, and Western civilization seems virtually obsessed with visions of the “future as catastrophe.”²

1 M. Stallknecht, Die Schönheit ist tot, es lebe die Schönheit. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht setzt den Künsten ein Ende, in: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 18 December 2014.

2 So runs the title of a study by E. Horn on Western imaginations of the future in the age of the atomic bomb,

There are many plausible reasons for this collective feeling of destabilization and vulnerability that are kept alive by continuous disaster reports and dismal predictions and which the sociologist Craig Calhoun has referred to as the “emergency imaginary.”³ The more important question, however, is why this cultural pattern of interpretation has succeeded in becoming so influential in Europe (and particularly in Germany), but not (or at least not to the same extent) in other global regions.⁴ As the following brief remarks on China, Africa, and Europe will demonstrate, approaches to the future vary greatly from a global perspective.

In China, approaches to the future are determined by the systemic particularities and historical legacies of post-colonialism, post-socialism, and authoritarianism. Although China faces challenges that are not so unlike those of other societies – in particular, declining growth and environmental degradation – the ways these challenges are tackled often bear the traces of these particularities and legacies.

China’s colonial experience in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries left a deep and enduring impact on its perceptions of the international order and China’s place therein. Statist concepts of China and worries about the future of the Chinese state in a zero-sum perception of international competition prevail.⁵ Nationalism as compensation for past humiliation can be found in broader sections of society.⁶ Also, issues of identity and notions of difference and particularity are major threads in the social science discourse.⁷ On the one hand, these are responses to a history of Western intrusion and Eurocentrism in contemporary international affairs and global discourse. On the other hand, they are fostered and instrumentalized by the authoritarian party-state, with its emphasis on sovereignty and stability as a matter of national survival. Party-defined systemic particularity (“socialism with Chinese characteristics”) and promises of China’s future power (“China’s rise,” the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,” and the “Chinese dream”) are important elements in the Party’s strategy of legitimizing its one-party rule.⁸

climate change, and large-scale technological accidents: *Zukunft als Katastrophe*, Frankfurt/M. 2014. See also A. Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen? Aufstieg und Fall des Zeitregimes der Moderne*, München 2013.

3 C. Calhoun, *A World of Emergencies. Fear, Intervention, and the Limits of Cosmopolitan Order*, in: *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 41 (2004), p. 392.

4 See also A. Kirk, *Eastern Countries Far More Optimistic than Their Western Counterparts*, in: *The Telegraph*, 6 January 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/12084401/Eastern-countries-far-more-optimistic-than-their-Western-partners.html> (accessed 18 January 2016).

5 N. Knight, *Imagining Globalisation: The World and Nation in Chinese Communist Party Ideology*, in: *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 33 (2003) 3, pp. 318–337; N. Spakowski, *National Aspirations on a Global Stage – Concepts of World/Global History in Contemporary China*, in: *Journal of Global History* 4 (2009) 3, pp. 475–495.

6 M. Leifer (ed.), *Asian Nationalism*, London 2000; P. Gries, *China’s New Nationalism. Pride, Politics and Diplomacy*, Berkeley 2005; L. Li, *China’s Rising Nationalism and Its Forefront*, in: *China Report* 51 (2015) 4, pp. 311–326.

7 A. Dirlik, *Zhongguohua. Worldling China: The Case of Sociology and Anthropology in Twentieth-Century China*, in: A. Dirlik, *Culture and History in Post-Revolutionary China. The Perspective of Global Modernity*, Hong Kong 2011, pp. 197–240; N. Spakowski, *Socialist Feminism in Post-Socialist China*, in: *positions* 2016 (in print).

8 K. Denton, *China Dreams and the “Road to Revival”*, in: *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective* 8 (2014), 3, pp 1–12, <http://origins.osu.edu/article/china-dreams-and-road-revival> (accessed 18 January 2016); J. Mahoney,

The legacy of socialism can be found in various aspects of the discourse on and management of the future. At the level of ideology, the Communist Party still claims to uphold Marxist-Leninist principles and has declared socialism as the ultimate (but very distant) goal of China's development.⁹ China's current economic system is a particular form of capitalism that follows the capitalist logic of production and distribution, but is marked by the legacies of a command economy.¹⁰ These include, first of all, a continued belief in planning and the ability to forecast and control the future. To be sure, the detailed Five Year "Plans" of the pre-reform period have turned into Five Year "Programmes" with the mere function of macro-guidance.¹¹ Nevertheless, the planning state sets the course of China's development.

Indeed, the economy is the main subject of discussions about China's future. Similar to the African case, these discussions are international in nature and are also nourished by Western hopes and anxieties regarding global business cycles and investment opportunities. Visions of an "Asian," "Chinese," or "African century" are fuelled by the potential for so-called "emerging" economies or "late developers" and their expected scope of development and growth in the process of "catching up" with advanced economies.¹² Specialists' worries about China's future economic performance notwithstanding, the very fact that it is "lagging behind" gives China space for future development – either quantitatively as measurable growth, or qualitatively as a system "transition."¹³ Given China's spectacular growth rates since the beginning of its "reform and opening" in 1978, Chinese political elites – and many Western observers – have begun to regard China as a new global power. Chinese and Western talk of "China's rise" and a "China model," or a "Beijing consensus" – i.e. a model of development independent of Western prescriptions that is suitable for imitation by other developing states – have become important elements in the reassessment of current and future global power structures.¹⁴ At the same time, increasing liberalization and the opening of its borders to the world market exposes China to the

Interpreting the Chinese Dream: An Exercise of Political Hermeneutics, in: *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 19 (2014) 1, pp. 15–34.

- 9 On the Fifteenth Party Congress in 1997, then President Jiang Zemin proclaimed that socialism would be reached within a time span of at least one century, see N. Knight, *Imagining Globalisation*, p. 332.
- 10 J. Peck and J. Zhang, *A Variety of Capitalism...with Chinese Characteristics?*, in: *Journal of Economic Geography* 13 (2013) 3, pp. 357–396; J. Osburg, *Global Capitalism in Asia: Beyond State and Market in China*, in: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72 (2013) 4, pp. 813–829; C. McNally, *Sino-Capitalism. China's Reemergence and the International Political Economy*, in: *World Politics* 64 (2012) 4, pp. 741–776.
- 11 S. Heilmann, *Making Plans for Markets: Policy for the Long Term in China*, in: *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 13 (2011) 2, pp. 33–40; S. Heilmann, *From Local Experiments to National Policy: The Origins of China's Distinctive Policy Process*, in: *The China Journal* 59 (2008), pp. 1–30.
- 12 N. Spakowski, *Asia as Future – The Claims and Rhetorics of an "Asian Century"*, in: M. Frey and N. Spakowski (eds.), *Asianisms, Regionalist Interactions, and Asian Integration*, Singapur 2015, pp. 209–236.
- 13 See the contribution by Doris Fischer in this issue.
- 14 For the China Model, Beijing Consensus and related terms, see S. Breslin: *The "China Model" and the Global Crisis. From Friedrich List to a Chinese Mode of Governance?*, in: *International Affairs* 87 (2011) 6, pp. 1323–1343; J. Fewsmith, *Debating "the China Model"*, in: *China Leadership Monitor* 35 (2011), www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/93636 (accessed 18 January 2016). For "China's rise", see N. Spakowski, *Asia as Future*.

volatilities of global business cycles, and vice versa. China's economic performance is thus increasingly seen as a decisive factor of global economic prospects, with falling Chinese stock prices sending "shock waves" around the world.¹⁵

In addition to mere prospects of growth, future potential also lies in systemic change. In contrast with discussions in the West, China does not perceive its economic and political system as settled. Terms such as "modernisation" (*xiandaihua*), "reform" (*gaige*), or "transition" (*zhuanxing*), which were slowly introduced in the late 1970s following earlier concepts of "revolution" (*geming*), indicate a constant situation of change, albeit without a clear idea of where this change is leading to. To this day, China remains incomplete in the eyes of its political and intellectual elite. In other words, completeness is a feature of the past and a hope for the future. One can only guess how rapid and open-ended change is affecting the lives and mental health of Chinese citizens.

Another factor to consider is the authoritarian nature of the Chinese state. Given its one-party rule and repressive political system, the discourse and management of the future are dominated by the state and thus centred on its techniques of survival. Generally speaking, the state is caught in a dilemma between liberalizing and opening the country up to the outside world as instruments of economic success and legitimizing the regime and the control of the pluralism and the dissident forces resulting from this very process of liberalization. The logic of how it makes accessible, manages, and instrumentalizes the Internet is just one of the many examples of this dilemma.¹⁶ Today's discourse about China's future is thus marked by the regime's anxieties about its stability as well as concerns of a global nature, such as environmental issues and terrorism, which are often framed as factors of stability or destabilization. As for the political system, the survival of the one-party state depends on its ability to constantly adapt to new challenges and to respond to citizens' concerns without giving way to Western-style democracy. Thus, top-down rule has been replaced by what experts call "consultative" or "deliberative authoritarianism."¹⁷ As for its economic policy, China's situation is no different from that of other countries in that the imperative of growth based on capitalist logic produces negative side effects, such as environmental degradation and extreme social inequality.¹⁸ With its declining growth rates in recent years, China is also now even more in line with the difficulties of Western economies. In contrast with the West, however, these problems are not simply problems as such or systemic problems of capitalism, but rather problems caused by the rule of the Communist Party that impinge on its claims of legitimacy. Finally, the social

15 H. Ersen, Börsencrash in China sendet Schockwellen um die Welt (Stock Market Crash Sends Shock Waves Around the World), Reuters Deutschland, 8 July 2015, <http://de.reuters.com/article/topNews/idDEKCN0PI0YR20150708> (accessed 18 August 2015).

16 See the contribution by Christian Göbel in this issue.

17 J. Teets, Let Many Civil Societies Bloom: The Rise of Consultative Authoritarianism in China, in: *China Quarterly* 213 (2013), pp. 19–38. B. He and E. Warren, Authoritarian Deliberation: The Deliberative Turn in Chinese Political Development, in: *Perspectives on Politics* 9 (2011) 2, pp. 269–289. T. Wright, Stable Governance and Regime Type. Contemporary China in Comparative Perspective, in: S. Guo (ed.), *State-Society Relations and Governance in China*, Lanham 2014, pp. 171–184.

18 See also the contribution by Doris Fischer in this issue.

dynamic unleashed by the country's reforming and opening itself has led to what was formerly a rather conform populace splitting into a variety of interest groups, creating potential for conflict both between groups and between the state and civil society. The concept of "social management" (*shehui guanli*) once again testifies to the state's vision of a manageable future.¹⁹ The state thus places its hope of stability on the middle class, regarding it as an ally and as the norm for consumption-oriented, politically docile, and self-disciplined citizens.²⁰ According to a recent global opinion poll, "China was the most optimistic country surveyed," with the percentage of optimists being "four times the global average of 10 per cent."²¹ However, the source of Chinese citizens' optimism and how this relates to the party state's anxieties concerning stability is a problem that has yet to be studied.

On the African continent, on the other hand, possible futures seem even more divergent and unpredictable. Most great visions of the future stem either from those who make it their business to bring about a specific future for Africa – development experts, donors, and international organizations – or from those whose business relies on selling forecasts – the global media, consultants, or think tanks. Such visions have their own conjectures. While prophets of doom dominated the early 2000s, a new narrative of "Africa rising" gained prominence ten years later, only to be called into question again.²² Such discourses are dominated by external actors and are decoupled from societal discussions within Africa to a greater extent than in Europe and China. While the experts sell visions of Africa's future, people in all regions of Africa think about and work toward their own individual and collective futures.²³

Both, future talk and future making, stand under the conditions of Africa's place in the global order. Most better-off countries in Africa are dominated by commodity exports. The financialization of commodity markets, growing price volatility, and the rhythm of commodity super cycles are strong external conditions that leave little room for independent planning. The largely informal economies in the service and distribution sectors further diminish the ability to plan. On the micro level, the unpredictability that characterizes both the formal and the informal economy often translates into diversified

- 19 F. Pieke, The Communist Party and Social Management in China, in: China Information 26 (2012) 2, pp. 149-165; J. Liu, From Social Management to Social Governance: Social Conflict Mediation in China, in: Journal of Public Affairs 14 (2014) 2, pp. 93-104; J. Fewsmith, "Social Management" as a Way of Coping With Heightened Social Tensions, China Leadership Monitor 36 (2012), pp. 1-8.
- 20 L. Tomba, Of Quality, Harmony, and Community: Civilization and the Middle Class in Urban China, in: positions 17 (2009) 3, pp. 591-616; X. Wang, Desperately Seeking Status: Political, Social and Cultural Attributes of China's Rising Middle Class, in: Modern China Studies 20 (2013) 1, pp. 1-44; A. Anagnost, From 'Class' to 'Social Strata': Grasping the Social Totality in Reform-Era China, in: Third World Quarterly 29 (2008), pp. 497-519.
- 21 A. Kirk, Eastern Countries Far More Optimistic.
- 22 T. Dietz, Silverlining Africa: From Images of Doom and Gloom to Glimmers of Hope, Leiden 2011; F. Nyamjoh, Africa, the Village Belle: From Crisis to Opportunity, in: Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies 34 (2013) 3, pp. 125-140; see also Amanda Hammar's contribution in this issue.
- 23 B. Frederiksen, Young Men and Women in Africa: Conflicts, Enterprise and Aspiration, in: Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research 18 (2010), 3, pp. 249-258; A. Mbembe, Les Jeunes et l'Ordre Politique en Afrique Noire, Paris 1985; C. Monga, Anthropologie de la Colère: Société Civile et Démocratie en Afrique Noire, Paris 1995.

household strategies in which security is sought through flexibility rather than planning. This dichotomy between grand visions and navigating everyday insecurity perhaps most clearly characterizes African relations to the future.

The one grand narrative that orders discourses as well as practices is the narrative of development. A huge sector of African economies relies on development thinking and donor money. Its rationale is clear: sometime in the future, African countries will be developed. Until then, they will remain on a path to development, and with well-designed projects, planning, and policies, and with the right priorities (now rebaptized “sustainable development goals”), a brighter future awaits the continent. The future is never about safeguarding achievements; it is always about moving to some other, better place. For more than sixty years now, this narrative has been kept alive and has informed radically opposing policies. Its lack of transformative effects has often been rationalized as a consequence of internal conditions (“bad governance,” “bad infrastructure,” “state failure,” “lack of education,” etc.), thus opening up new doors for outside intervention. The explanations of experts and the measures they propose are never independent of their conceptions of the future in Europe, the US, and (to a growing extent) China, and their relation to African realities is often questionable.

In parallel to these discourses and practices, and often influenced by them, people all over Africa plan their individual and collective futures. Young people in particular must work toward their personal futures under extremely unstable conditions.²⁴ Formal sector jobs are extremely rare and are often only to be gained through personal connections. Capital for individual enterprises is very hard to come by, and the growing income inequality is creating a new upper middle class whose ostentation is only increasing the frustration of those who do not make it. In this climate of competition, the possibility for young people to participate economically, politically, and socially in their societies is often more important to them than the direction these societies are taking. Changing the future means changing one’s own place in it, and while the importance of a dignified life as a full member of one’s society continues to increase (and is often expressed through consumption), the importance of macro politics is on the wane.²⁵

As a rule, however, the future seems to look less bleak to many than this might suggest. People are constantly busy planning for the future, or waiting for it to happen. They devise projects, look for patronage, wait for co-optation by those who have made it, or they find the initiative, energy, and funds necessary to look for greener pastures elsewhere. While global discourses about African futures are still dominated by developmen-

24 A. Honwana, *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa*, Boulder 2012; D. Mains, *Hope is Cut: Youth, Unemployment and the Future in Urban Ethiopia*, Philadelphia 2010; H. Vigh, *Motion Squared: A Second Look at the Concept of Social Navigation*, in: *Anthropological Theory* 9 (2009) 4, pp. 419–438.

25 For more careful analyses, see e.g. E. Cooper, *Students, Arson, and Protest Politics in Kenya: School Fires as Political Action*, in: *African Affairs* 113 (2014) 453, pp. 583–600; T. Förster and L. Köchlin (eds.), *The Politics of Governance. Actors and Articulations in Africa and Beyond*, New York 2015; A. Honwana, *Youth, Waithood and Protest Movements in Africa*, Lugard Lecture 2013. <http://www.internationalafricaninstitute.org/downloads/lugard/Lugard%20Lecture%20%202013.pdf>; D. Resnick and D. Casale, *Young Populations in Young Democracies: Generational Voting Behaviour in Sub-Saharan Africa*, in: *Democratization* 21 (2014) 6, pp. 1172–1194.

tal thinking, young Africans have long entered a phase of post-developmental practice. Thinking about the future and acting to bring it about have diverged as widely as have the worlds of development experts from African peasants or ordinary city dwellers.

Western European societies, in contrast, generally negotiate their relationship with the future predominantly via prevention and self-organization, and it is around these two factors that they orient their semantics and action. They thus replaced the future dispositive of planning that was prevalent up until the early 1970s. The erosion of optimistic expectations for the future and the rise of a pessimistic outlook in Western Europe can be dated fairly precisely. Whereas the first decades after the Second World War were defined by a planning boom in which the future was regarded as the responsibility and product of socio-technocratic management, these self-same planning authorities and programmes became the object of growing criticism in the 1970s, when the feasibility and desirability of future planning via policies met with more and more opposition. The publication of the report “The Limits of Growth” by the Club of Rome²⁶ in 1972 and the 1973 oil crisis are often regarded as the initial triggers of this change, which also occurred within the broader context of a slump in the global economy, the end of the economic post-war boom, the crisis of the Fordist production regime, and a growing awareness of ecological issues. As a result, promises of progress became less plausible, or they were projected onto other parts of the world in the discourse of development. The public became preoccupied with a fear of the future, which was often expressed in apocalyptic scenarios.

The future seemed not only inevitably contingent; it also seemed extremely endangered, especially by threats that “are marked by two principle features: a context of scientific uncertainty on one side, the possibility of serious and irreversible damage on the other.”²⁷

Nuclear power and genetic engineering were prominent examples of this, as were ecological issues, like the forest dieback (*Waldsterben*), anthropogenic climate change, and the threat of nuclear weapons. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster made it ultimately obvious that negative views of the future could be realistic after all. Such dangers cannot be calculated using methods of probabilistic risk assessment. They exceed all limits of what is insurable, and they hold enough catastrophic potential to make their prevention necessary for human survival. The philosopher Hans Jonas coined the term “heuristics of fear” to describe this perspective of the future.²⁸ He argued that what was needed was a new categorical imperative: “‘Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life’; or expressed negatively: ‘Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive to the future possibility of such life’; [...] or most generally: ‘In your present choices include the future wholeness of Man among the objects of

26 D. Meadows et al., *The Limits of Growth*, Washington 1972; for the genesis and reception of the book, see P. Kupper, “Weltuntergangs-Vision aus dem Computer”. Zur Geschichte der Studie ‘Die Grenzen des Wachstums’ von 1972, in: J. Hohensee and F. Uekötter (eds.), *Wird Cassandra heiser? Beiträge zu einer Geschichte der falschen Öko-Alarme*, Stuttgart 2004, pp. 98–111

27 F. Ewald, *The Return of the Crafty Genius: An Outline of a Philosophy of Precaution*, in: *Connecticut Insurance Law Journal* 6 (1999) 1, pp. 60–61.

28 H. Jonas, *Responsibility Today: The Ethics of an Endangered Future*, in: *Social Research* 43 (1976) 1, p. 87.

your will.”²⁹ As with the Kantian Imperative, this imperative remained only a normative postulate with no long-term influence on political decisions or on daily practices. Fear of the apocalypse and business as usual turned out to be compatible.

There is a bitter irony in the fact that the ecological ethics of preservation have become a guiding principle of the “war on terror” after 9/11, when they went through a decisive transformation. The call to stop all activities that could threaten the continued existence of human life has become a kind of boundless activism in the name of security. A future outlook fixated on the catastrophe that can happen any moment is what lends generalized and unrestrained security policies plausibility and political legitimation.

The collapse of Soviet-style political regimes in 1989 and the triumph of neo-liberal programmes – starting with Margaret Thatcher’s destruction of the British welfare state in the 1980s – have fundamentally changed the political rationality of Western societies and have initiated an entirely new way of dealing with the future. To key figures of neo-liberal governance, the future now seems like an emergent process that follows its own laws – one that generally cannot be influenced by setting political limits, and if so, then not for the better. Their solution has thus been market-based self-regulation instead. Generalized “competition as a discovery procedure”³⁰ and the mobilization of autonomous, flexible, and innovative “entrepreneurial selves”³¹ have guided their interventions, in which any action is interpreted as an investment in, and thus a wager on, the future. Self-organization via competition has thus acquired a status similar to planning in the 1950s and 1960s. However, competition also requires institutional protection, albeit not to correct the negative effects of the market. Quite the contrary, it is needed to pave the way for the free play of supply and demand by eliminating external interference factors. The focus of this neo-liberal safeguarding of the future has thus not been on deregulation in the sense of *laissez faire*, but on the active – i.e. planned – promotion of competition.

The agenda of radical marketization, which regards unleashing the potential of self-organization as the best of all possible futures, correlates with a social grammar of security that attempts to control catastrophic expectations of the future through pre-emptive strategies. The neo-liberal management of the future – which through its promotion of competition translates the contingency of the future into individual investment decisions, the rationality of which is bound to the economic tribunal of the market – goes hand in hand with policies of securitization³² that are essentially illiberal. The rationality of contemporary governance in Western European societies is thus based on two axioms: first, to be able to achieve the best, competition must not be inhibited; second, if we want to prevent the worst, everything must be permitted.

29 Id., Technology and Responsibility: Reflections on the New Tasks of Ethics, in: *Social Research* 40 (1973) 1, p. 44.

30 See F. A. Hayek, Competition as a Discovery Procedure, in: *ibid.*, The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek, Vol. XV: Markets and Other Orders, Chicago 2014, pp. 304–313.

31 U. Bröckling, *The Entrepreneurial Self. Fabricating a New Type of Subject*, London 2016.

32 See B. Buzan, O. Wæver and J. de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, London 1998.

Although ideas about the future and practices of future management differ greatly between the global regions of Africa, China, and Europe, it would be misleading to assume that these futures are homogenous and disconnected from the ideas and practices of the other regions. The imperative of growth and accumulation of globalized capitalism and the transnational dangers of a “world risk society”³³ leave no room for methodological regionalism. Multiple futures are entangled futures.

With this in mind, we must focus on research that does not limit itself to juxtaposing and comparing disparate notions of the future and practices of managing the future and that does not ignore the pluralism of futures and/or assume a homogenous world future. What is needed is a multi-perspective analysis of the “entanglements” of notions of the future and future-oriented practices. Such an analysis would have to treat the relationship between multiple futures and one future as an empirical problem. It would have to analyse how regional futures connect with what transregional and/or global dynamics of the future; and it would have to look at what translation processes take place in which direction, and what transformations different complex ideas about the future undergo in the process.

Its primary focus should be on the central role of capitalism as the global political and economic order that integrates markets, produces economic and financial crises of a global scale, installs transnational production chains,³⁴ and is sustained by transnational companies and a transnational capitalist class.³⁵ Globalized capitalism converges mentalities and life styles, as can be seen in the example of the middle class (as *the* fundamental societal group) and its orientation on consumption. Its inevitable logic of growth generates specific expectations for the future. These can be positive hopes of progress, or negative fears of crises, or doom and gloom scenarios. Fundamental themes of contemporary discourses on the future and future technologies – the pressure to innovate born out of international competition, climate change, terrorism, and migration – have a complex global angle, albeit with a specific regional colouring. For example, while Europe is debating the question of whether to open or close its borders and whether this could affect its future cultural identity, migration to the North is relieving the demographic pressure in many African nations, with the money migrants sending home also serving as an important factor for economic development. Very often, attempts in one global region to secure the future create insecurities in other regions. One paradigmatic example of this is the financialization of commodity markets, which is driven by the search for stable and predictable returns on capital, thereby increasing volatility and often destroying predictability at the lower end of value chains.

The discourses of future global power relations are also fundamentally relational. Themes like “China’s rise,” “US decline,” or “the West and the rest” refer not only to global en-

33 U. Beck, *World Risk Society*, London 1999.

34 J. Chan, P. Ngai and M. Selden, *The Politics of Global Production: Apple, Foxconn and China’s New Working Class*, in: *New Technology, Work & Employment* 28 (2013) 2, pp. 100–115.

35 J. Harris, *Outward Bound: Transnational Capitalism in China*, in: *Race & Class* 54 (2012) 1, pp.13–32.

tanglements, but also to debates about the supposed “neo-colonialist” relations between China and Africa. Ultimately, individual strategies for the future are often connected to transnational mobility. Studying abroad, labour migration, and the capital flight³⁶ of private investors are all individual investments in the future to which target countries react by internationalizing their universities (and often raising tuition for foreign students) or by founding campuses abroad, offering residence permits based on qualifications, recruiting qualified workers, or establishing tax havens or citizenship-by-investment models.³⁷ While historians have been writing global history as the history of global “entanglements” for some years now, research of the “entanglement” of notions of the future and future-oriented technologies is still emerging. The following articles on Africa, China and Europe will contribute to laying the foundations for this task.

36 A. MacDonald, P. Vieira and W. Connors, Kapitalflucht. Chinesen schaffen Geld kofferweise nach Kanada, in: Spiegel online, 2 January 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/kapitalflucht-chinesen-bringen-ihr-geld-aus-dem-land-a-875399.html> (accessed 18 January 2016).

37 A. Shachar and R. Hirschl, On Citizenship, States, and Markets, in: *Journal of Political Philosophy* 24 (2014) 2, pp. 231–257.