Chan, Stephen. 2021. **African Political Thought: An Intellectual History of the Quest for Freedom.** London: Hurst and Compagny. Ix + 262 pp. ISBN 978-1-78738-550-4

African political thought is known to have a lower publication rate. Stephen Chan's book helps to fill this gap. This book is a real dive into the labyrinths of African political thought, since Stephen Chan highlights its major constellations, and explores its multiple theoretical filiations.

According to Chan, African political thought does not emerge ex nihilo, because Africa has inherited various foreign influences. Prior to Western invasion, for instance, Islamic dynamic had initiated a process of exchange of ideas and cultures between Africa and the Islamic world from the eastern coast of the continent. Western occupation contributed, through slave trade, slavery and colonisation, to the dispersal of African people in the new world. This process relied on the idea that Africa was above all a place of exoticism and a living illustration of the primitive state of humankind.

The abolition of slavery, the prohibition of racial discrimination, and inherent violence allowed the emergence of the idea of returning to Africa, on behalf of former black slaves. This premise was based on the belief that Africa was the land of predestination of black people. African-Americans could live in freedom and prosper without hindrance in this continent. The American Colonial Society supported such a belief. At some point, countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone can be viewed as an offshoot of this utopia.

Personalities like Edward W. Blyden and Marcus Garvey, for example, were great protagonists of returning African-Americans to Africa. Blyden believed that this return was a way to avoid racial discrimination, domination, and the exploitation of black people by white people (p. 17). For this brilliant intellectual, Islam would be the most suitable religion for African people, as it would embody a unifying force and a source of spiritual renewal that black people needed so much. Blyden pioneered the postulate that black freedom and black pride could be achieved only through black authenticity, in a black continent with, if not a black religion, a less white one (p. 18).

Nicknamed the black Moses, Marcus Garvey dreamed of building a great black nation. He exhorted black people in the United States to return to Africa, where they would be the majority population and have real political power. Following this way of thinking, he created and sold shares in the

Black Star Line, a fleet of ships designed to transport black people from the United States to Africa. Despite political and financial setbacks, his ideas were echoed by some pan-Africanist leaders including Kwame Nkrumah. Most of Garvey's ideas served as a spiritual guide for activists and members of the Rastafari mystic movement.

W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the pioneers of the struggle for African American rights. He believed that the African-American community should be guided and pushed forward by the African-American elite. Du Bois was opposed to measures proposing a gradual integration of black Americans, such as the "Atlanta Compromise" which was endorsed by Booker T. Washington. In this perspective, he supported the idea to give black people full access to classical education, and he rejected the idea of confining them to vocational training. For Du Bois, a full access to civil rights was essential for the advancement of the African-American community. He opposed the discrimination and lynching of black people. Du Bois played a leading role in the development of Pan-Africanism, forging its theoretical foundations and organising its congresses for about four decades, that is to say from 1900 to 1945. According to Stephen Chan, both evoked personalities played a prominent role in the development of African political thought by inspiring generations of African activists, leaders, and independence fighters.

The awakening of national consciousness and solidarity in the struggle for emancipation counts among major topics of African political thought. Leaders such as Amilcar Cabral and Kenneth Kaunda, for example, relied on these ideas to fight White minority rule in Portuguese colonies in Africa, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. In the framework of the Cold War, Kaunda struggled to reconcile his pacifist ideology with his support for armed struggle waged by freedom fighters in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and South Africa. Amilcar Cabral belonged to a generation of highly educated African leaders. He believed in the capacity of armed struggle to overcome imperialism. For him, national liberation consists of regaining human rights usurped by imperialism. In other words, liberation refers to freeing the process of development of the national productive forces. For lack of such an ideal, a liberation movement may be anti-colonial and anti-imperialist, but it will not be struggling for national liberation. In addition to that, it is worth noting that Cabral's political thought spread beyond Africa as it resonated in Latin America (Cuba), and Portugal where it fuelled the uprising of young Portuguese officers against the pro-facist government of Salazar.

The end of colonial rule was marked by the emergence of the idea of a new man. This concept refers to a human being freed from the constraints and restrictions of colonialism, that means a being emancipated from Eurocentrism to the benefit of African values including, for instance, a sense of community and solidarity. However, according to Stephen Chan, this project hardly took into consideration the issue of women. It was intrinsically unequal. Its achievements in countries such as Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia, for example, attested to this want of equality. These countries respectively claimed three different ideologies including Consciencism, Ujamaa, and African humanism.

Relying on W.E.B. Dubois and Marcus Garvey concerning both the ideas of "African personality" and "Africa as home," Nkrumah in Ghana sketched his political project as an echo of the African-American struggles for civil rights. The paradigm of Negritude inaugurated by Aimé Césaire and developed by Léopold S. Senghor served as theoretical background.

For Julius Nyerere (Mwalimu) in Tanzania, the state had to manage its citizens in a socialist way. To him, this was more important than theories on authenticity and ideological rhetoric. He shared Cabral's perception of authenticity as a way to promote cultural organisation and production. Unlike Cabral, he was ready to enforce it rather than using mere rhetorical encouragement. Like Nkrumah, Nyerere did not seek to go through traditional modes of social organisation. Standing on modern structures of the state, he developed a compulsory national project named *Ujamaa* (the familyhood). This project aimed at setting a socialist and egalitarian rule, as laid out in the Arusha Declaration (1967), which embodied main orientations Nyerere wanted for his country. This document focused on the search for equal dignity, the respect for individual rights, the political participation of every citizen, the promotion of freedom of expression and of movement, as well as of religion. The political life was circumscribed within the framework of the one party state.

Kenneth Kaunda was the first president of Zambia, and a big defender of the struggle of liberation in Southern Africa. He promoted nationalism and national unity. To him, the fight against white rebellion in neighbour countries was a unifying factor to keep together multiple ethnic groups integrating the country (p.72). He launched the idea of African humanism as a political project. Paradoxically to this project, he trampled on the very principles of democracy and human rights, repressing youth protests and ending freedom of expression. His concept of humanism consisted of considering the new man as rooted in African traditions, Christian faith, and committed to equality.

According to Chan, these three evoked paradigms of society have been noble and pioneering. Unfortunately, they resulted unsuccessful as they relied on a process of enforcement, whereby philosophy and one-party state coercion and restrictiveness became uneasy bedfellows.

Mobutu Sese Seko (Zaire) and Hastings Kamuzu Banda (Malawi) embodied the myth of the "Big Man." They were a kind of illustration of necro-power, i.e. the sovereignty of authority to decide who can live and who can die. The repression and physical elimination of their political opponents characterised their respective regimes. Mobutu came to power thanks to a military putsch in 1965. He presented himself as a peacemaker and advocated African authenticity as a project for political and cultural emancipation. The achievement of this project turned into a carnivalesque form, that focused on the rejection of first names of Western origin, the de-naming of the country, of towns and the main institutions of the state. Regardless of the expanding corruption of his regime, Mobutu himself, his family, and the barons of his regime turned the state into their own legacy, making it their individual patrimony. Mobutu let war and anarchy overtake the country. He hardly took care of the state's economy since he allowed its bankruptcy. It can be noted that Mobutu's political project remained obsolete and ossified in speeches.

Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi participated in the historical Pan-African Congress at Manchester in 1945. He led his country to independence (1964) and made of it a one-party state soon after (1966). Kamuzu Banda maintained diplomatic relations with the apartheid regime of South Africa, mainly to obtain economic support from this country. The necro-politics and the assassination of political opponents characterised his rule. He assumed the title of Chief of Chiefs (Ngwazi), the great lion, the mighty conqueror.

Military coups have always been a common fact in ancient and modern states. That also happened in Africa. Power was seized in various countries including, for instance, Nigeria, Ghana, DRC, Uganda, Central African Republic, to mention only a few. The military dictatorship was viewed as ruthless, incompetent, manipulative, as family and ethnically anchored. In this context, two young officers, Jerry Rawlings (Ghana) and Thomas Sankara (Upper Volta/Burkina Faso), came to power in the 1980s. They wanted political stability and economic recovery for their respective countries. To make this possible, the former chose the technocratic path of adopting the structural adjustment plan recommended by the IMF, while

the latter engaged in a revolutionary process, criticising the stranglehold of imperialist powers on Africa and advocating the autonomy of African countries. He made the struggle for women's emancipation his priority. In sum, Rawlings' economic record remained a subject of much controversy. Despite being ousted from power by his comrade Blaise Compaoré, Sankara remained the idol of African youth because of his revolutionary ideas.

For Stephen Chan, Frantz Fanon is a complex and contradictory thinker who, despite being of Martinique origin, he became the hero of African political thought on freedom. Viewed as the apostle of violence, Fanon had great impact on black diaspora movements including the Black Panthers in the USA, who adopted him as their intellectual mentor. People like Eldride Cleaver and Stokely Carmichael considered Fanon's thought a source of inspiration for their own struggle for rights of black people. It can be observed that Fanon's thought also served as a hyphen between African-American demands and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. In addition to Miriam Makeba's musical talent and personal charm, the student and activist Steve Biko can be viewed as one of the heirs of Fanon. He drew from Fanon the idea of Black Consciousness, echoing Nkrumah's Consciencism. For Biko, being black and fighting for black emancipation and equality meant the inclusion of all those not white. He developed a kind of ambivalence on the issue, as the struggle against apartheid did involve various white partners.

Robert Mugabe was a liberationist who considered the black people liberation, particularly the Zimbabwean emancipation, as a critical stage in the progression of African history. His repeated creed about the redistribution of land from white farmers to black majority was the basis of his populism. For Chan, no intellectual legacy nor substantial evidences of technocratic thought can be found concerning Mugabe's rule. For him, Mugabe can be viewed as a liberation leader but not as a liberation fighter because he never carried a gun in the battlefield. His un-callused hands betrayed the fact that he had not spent years hoeing fields either.

Two personalities dominated the South African political arena at the turn of the last century: Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. They were both members of the ANC and frontline activists against apartheid. They both assumed the highest duty of the state. Mandela promoted the dream of a new South African society, freed from the wounds of apartheid and subsequent hatred. This dream relied on the postulate of a multi-racial (rainbow) society, structured and anchored in the ethico-political values

contained in the Ubuntu paradigm. The notion of Ubuntu is, according to Stephen Chan, deeply problematic because it comes from traditional ethical philosophy, which has no written body of texts to enable its explication, and philosophical problematisation (p.177). Otherwise, this term is South African cultural heritage, particularly Nguni language. It can be viewed as rather normative thought emphasising the idea of a humanism based on interdependence, existential reciprocity (I am because we are), and forgiveness as an expression of community values and transitional justice.

Three trends of thought can be considered as characterising Mbeki's rule: the search for balance between ANC policy for equity and the predominance of neo-liberalism in South Africa; the promotion of the ethics of Ubuntu as a paradigm for conflicts resolution; and the claim for African renaissance. Searching for economic equity, Mbeki focused on a range of programmes including, for instance, the Black Economic Empowerment (BBE) and the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). Both programmes relied on the idea of affirmative action. The former aimed at increasing black participation in the economy through the stimulation and creation of black owned firms. The latter encouraged larger corporations to create wealth as well as to offer senior positions to black people. Otherwise, the success of both projects remained rather modest.

Mbeki tried to turn Ubuntu into a political paradigm for conflicts resolution in Africa. He intervened as mediator with very little success in the Zimbabwean post electoral conflict (2008), in Sudan (2009), and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2005). Despite Mbeki's good will, the ethical principles of Ubuntu as conceived in South Africa were not strong enough to match political antagonism and bring sustainable peace.

Mbeki came to use the concept of African Renaissance in the framework of Western hegemony towards African countries and the triumph of neo-liberalism. Without claiming any affiliation with other African thinkers, such as Cheik Anta Diop who already in 1946 postulated this project in Senegal, Mbeki developed the idea of African Renaissance along two lines, whose implementation proved to be complex and a long-term process: the call for political and economic solidarity among Black people as well as the worry to make of Africa part of a free world, a world undistorted by the vicissitudes and exploitation of both capitalism and imperialism.

The African heirs of Pan-Africanism set both African unity and emancipation as their main goal. The idea of African unity underwent a somehow contradictory interpretation: on the one hand, it referred

to a purely political unity, while on the other, this notion included the liberal idea of a common market characterised by the free circulation of goods. The compromise between these trends allowed for the creation of the Organisation for African Unity (1963), which was replaced by the African Union in 2001. Both institutions struggled (and still work) to ensure real unity of Africa, as conflicts are multiplying on the continent, and the advocated solutions yield meagre results. The subterfuges used to put an end to conflicts in various regions of the continent, as diplomacy, UN missions, regional military forces, economic sanctions do not reveal themselves as very efficient. In this respect, Chan observes that the "Africa that is in turmoil is not an Africa that is in unity. Turmoil is not a basis for unity" (p. 217). There is an urgent need to rethink new ways, including the quest for justice and the fight against impunity, listening to the voice of women, and pluralism, in order to re-launch the pan-Africanist dream of unity and freedom.

While rooted in the past, African political thought remains forward-looking. Africa's current rise and its insertion into the globalising world reveal new challenges for African thinkers and leaders, including the rise of feminism and demands for gender equality and women's empowerment. Regardless of their individual trajectories, few political leaders and leading female figures such as Thomas Sankara, Graca Machel, Johnson Searlif, Joyce Banda contributed to disproving the idea that Africa is a bastion of conservatism, or the land of machismo full of contempt for women's rights.

Nowadays, the issue of homosexuality is a hot topic in Africa, both socially and politically. Despite the increasing number of self-revelations by African homosexuals and lesbians, the general opinion remains rather hostile to such a sexual orientation. Many Africans are hesitant about the criminalisation and legalisation of this lifestyle. The debate remains open despite the fact that some African states including Senegal, Ghana, Zambia and Tanzania consider same-sex relations illegal.

The topic of vernacular literature also remains crucial in Africa (p. 239). Beyond the proven subjection of vernacular languages by colonial authority, the question arises as to the relevance of local languages in a continent under the influence of globalisation. Such a framework evokes not only the war of languages, that is to say, the question related to the co-existence of multiple languages in the same area, it also raises the issue concerning the encounters of different cultures that are constitutive of humanity's ways of life.

African political thought benefits from the creativity and intellectual dynamism of African thinkers and political activists including Samir Amin, Valentin Y. Mudimbe, Thandika Mkandawire, and Achille Mbembe, to name but a few. Through their critique of the colonial paradigm, most of these thinkers invite African intelligentsia to shed light on issues such as the integration of Africa into the global economy, the production and constellation of knowledge in Africa (the colonial library and subsequent gnosis), the epistemologies of the South, necro-political thinking about the representation and management of power, climate emergency, and the empowerment of women.

This book constitutes a journey into the heart of African political thought. It offers a panoramic view by analysing and connecting various great figures of the African political scene. In addition, it connects the African trajectory to global political developments. In other words, this book illustrates the idea that African political thought does not develop in a vacuum, nor as an isolate monad. Africa is part of and interacts with the world. Relying on personal anecdotes, Chan shows how closer he is concerning a range of African leaders and thinkers. This personal touch gives his book a rich dimension of being not only an academic work, but a personal testimony and commitment toward the continent. However, the book pays more attention to the English- and Portuguese-speaking world than to the experience of French-speaking African countries. This deficit seems to be compensated by the mention of some French-speaking leaders including Thomas Sankara, and Mobutu Sese Seko. This is a remarkable book on African political thought, since it provides a great deal of information, and its style is enjoyable to read. Stephen Chan wrote a book to be read without moderation.

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