



African Social and Political Thinking and Its Search for Human Emancipation and Global Justice

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Kasanda, A. 2018. *Contemporary African Social and Political Philosophy. Trends, Debates and Challenges*. London and New York: Routledge.

Albert Kasanda's book is one of the few endeavours to systematise African political and social thought. What differentiates his approach is that he explores contemporary African political and social philosophy through a broader range of sources beyond conventional philosophical texts while stressing the embeddedness of political and social theorising in the lived experiences of African people and aiming for progressive and emancipatory social arrangements. Kasanda defines African social and political philosophy 'as a rational search for the clarification of social and political concepts, better management of political power, and the achievement of better modes of governance' (p. 9). His book also holds a critical mirror up to many political and social scientists who often either overlook African political and social theorising or limit it to a nativist search for African identity or post-colonial critique. For Kasanda, these issues are part of the African intellectual legacy, but they need to be situated in the broader frame of the social and political challenges of today. It is also worth mentioning that the English edition was published in 2018 and the Czech translation followed the same year from the Philosophia publishing house of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague, where Albert Kasanda is a research fellow at the Centre of Global Studies.

The book is structured into eight chapters and an epilogue on Nelson Mandela and his understanding of democracy. The first chapter opens the book with a specification of the conceptual framework and a definition of social and political philosophy, differentiating it both from ontology and ideology. The second chapter clarifies the broader understanding of sources for social and political philosophical thinking. Kasanda includes not only the conventional texts of professional philosophy but also written and oral sources in literature, religion, and art. The third chapter explores the contribution that pre-colonial thinking and authors from the African diaspora have made to contemporary African social and political philosophy. The fourth chapter focuses on the theory and movement of negritude and more generally the approach of ethnophilosophy. The fifth chapter then deals with pan-Africanism, the idea, its main proponents, the idea's political application, and its actualisation. The following chapters focus on particular concepts: democracy (chapter 6), civil society (chapter 7), and globalisation (chapter 8).

I would like to highlight Kasanda's transdisciplinary methodology. Transdisciplinary research is an immense task and one in which he has fully succeeded, bringing together philosophical thought, political analysis, and reflections of social practices. And in doing this he successfully fulfils his starting premise that 'African social and political philosophy is anchored in African daily realities' (p. xi). Such an approach is much needed but still marginal in the social sciences and humanities today. As a result, theoretical thinking is often separated from an empirically grounded analysis of lived experience and social struggles due to disciplinary fragmentation. Therefore, it loses the cumulative potential of the social sciences and humanities that would benefit from bringing together different conceptual or spatial perspectives and scales.

Moreover, the monograph offers a valuable perspective in presenting African social and political philosophy up to the present. While the author devotes due space to the contribution of African anticolonial struggles and political thought, he does not limit contemporary African political and social philosophy to this and takes on new challenges, especially with respect to the defining global cultural and political interactions and transnational practices of global capitalism today. I agree with the author that today it is not possible to understand and analyse African political and social thought without an actualised vocabulary and adequate analytical perspectives.

In this review I would like to highlight the author's analysis of pan-Africanism which is guided by the effort to actualise this idea as a powerful source of solidarity in the social struggles for global justice. In Chapter 5, Kasanda convincingly argues that pan-Africanism can be stripped of Afrocentrism and nativist groundings. He writes that 'pan-Africanist struggle is not reducible to a racial phenomenon, because it deals with the global issue of human dignity and freedom. It concerns the question of equality of human beings and the right to be different' (p. 65). He starts by presenting the origins and different trajectories of the concept of pan-Africanism and follows by introducing the thoughts of its main founding figures – Booker T. Washington, Anna Julia Cooper, Marcus Garvey, and W. E. B. Du Bois. The second part of the chapter concerns the intertwinement of pan-Africanisms and the anticolonial struggles in Africa in the political thinking of Kwame Nkrumah, Franz Fanon, and Muammar Gaddafi. And it ends with the new perspectives and challenges of pan-Africanism today, building on the works of Achille Mbembe and Kwame Anthony Appiah.

Kasanda problematises the identification of African identity solely with black people, proposing a more inclusive understanding of Africa as a destination and also a departure point in the globalising interactions that reconfigure local identities. Here he builds on his critical analysis of theories of identity, namely negritude and ethnophilosophy, in Chapter 4. In particular, he brings pan-Africanism into a conversation with Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism. The concept



of Afropolitanism emerged under the influence of the cosmopolitan discourse of the 1990s. In Chapters 5 and 8, Kasanda refers to Selasi and Mbembe, who talk about Afropolitanism as 'a way of being in the world', highlighting cultural hybridisations and cross-border circulations. Afropolitans are seen as the new African migrants and a symbolic representation of African modernity. However, Kasanda argues that this image is clearly connected to an elite transnational mobility regime and it is an element of neoliberal political economy and global consumerist culture that overlooks pressing social and political issues in Africa and the everyday struggles for livelihood of the powerless majority.

Kasanda brings the notion of pan-Africanism into a fruitful dialogue with struggles for global justice. He argues 'that for proponents of pan-Africanism, the defence of black people and culture is not an end in itself. Rather, this movement aims at delegitimizing and even dismantling a social, political, and economic order based on the negation of the multiple figures of humankind'. And he continues: 'for today's pan-Africanism, the key challenge remains the problem of social inequality that has historically been mapped into a racial grid and blackness. This remains a major crisis, both globally and in Africa ...' (p. 84). He criticises contemporary African state leaders as well as supranational institutions, such as the World Bank or the IMF and the main Western powers, that by promoting neoliberal policies compromise the pan-Africanist goal of African unity. Thus, he proposes centring the rethinking of pan-Africanism around struggles for global justice and people's empowerment rather than around African states and sovereignty, which is necessarily reconfigured by the current globalising world and is in a sense an unattainable ideal.

Globalisation and its manifestations today are the topics discussed in the last chapter. Here again Kasanda problematises essentialising perspectives on Africa as the home of one African culture, which is endangered by global circulations and interactions. However, he points out to the dangers of the neoliberal form of globalisation as a distinctive form of globalisation that restructures human interactions into commodified exchanges guided by the principle of profit. In Chapter 7 he also discusses the power of international foundations and foreign institutions that is exerted through the financing of civil society in Africa. Kasanda highlights mutual cultural interactions – historically and today – as a constitutive element of every culture, thus rejecting the idea of inherent conflicts between world cultures. In particular, in the African context he warns against tribalism and cultural differentialism, which he, together with Achille Mbembe and Mahmood Mamdani, sees as a legacy of colonial occupations, albeit reinforced by the ethnic antagonisms in the aftermath of independence struggles. Even though many of today's conflicts in Africa are interpreted through the lens of ethnic conflicts, he denounces this simplifying view, highlighting conflicts that exist over resources, power, political interests, and ideological disputes, and that ignite

within Africa or are ignited by global forces in the context of neoliberal globalisation, which are masked as ethnic issues.

Kasanda's book provides an inspiring perspective on African social and political philosophy as an integral part of global dialogue and struggles for global justice. His perspective highlights the relevance of African social and political thought beyond African studies and thus avoids locking it into a particularistic framework, in contrast to Western social and political philosophy and its claim to universalism. The richness and breadth of issues and approaches Kasanda discusses is not exhausted in this review, in which I have focused particularly on the idea of pan-Africanism in a dialogue with global interactions and global justice. However, I believe that this can be seen as a one of the threads that Kasanda follows in his book. His commitment to social and political philosophy in the service of human emancipation and efforts to find remedies to major social wrongs in Africa and globally makes his book a must-read for all those interested in a deeper understanding of contemporary African socio-economic and political realities as well as those searching for embedded universalism in a globalising world.

Já, transgender

Nela Andresová

Wiesner, A. 2017. *Jediná jistota je změna: Autoetnografie na transgender téma*. Bratislava: VEDA, vydavateľstvo SAV.

„Jediná jistota je změna,” tak praví citát, kterým Adam Wiesner zaštiťuje svou knižní prvotinu. Jak uvádí název knihy, jedná se o autoetnografii, transtematika je tedy autorovi osobně blízká. Struktura textu samého je poměrně netradiční. Autor nejprve provází čtenáře tématem celé knihy a vývojem psaní v průběhu let. Dále přibližuje zvolený žánr autoetnografie pro tuto práci, teoretický rámec tématu transgenderu, dále reflexivní přístup a etiku v kvalitativním výzkumu. Poté se věnuje budování LGBT organizací na Slovensku, u jejichž vývoje se angažoval od roku 2011. V poslední části knihy představuje svůj proces tranzice, především v rámci diagnostického procesu. Wiesner usiluje o inovativní způsob přístupu k práci, ve kterém se snaží obsáhnout problematiku v nejširší možné míře. Nejsou u něho však úplně patrné teoretické pilíře a hlavní teze práce.