



Africa as a global player in the 21st century: reality, potential or (des)illusion?¹
A África como um global player no século XXI: realidade, potencial ou (des)ilusão?

Amine Ait-Chaalal

Professor of International Relations at Institut de Sciences Politiques Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE), UCLouvain, Belgium. His current research deal with the U.S. foreign policy, the Middle East, the Euro-Mediterranean matters, and the Brazilian external policy.

117

¹ Recebido para Publicação 01/08/2024. Aprovado para Publicação em 01/10/2024.

Editorial note: This article was concluded in July 2024.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14796506>





Abstract

In recent decades, Africa appeared sometimes as a neglected continent. This analytical, geopolitical and historical mistake became obvious to international leaders and to international relations scholars. It is important to underline the diversity of Africa in its various components, including its political, social, economic and cultural dimensions. It is also relevant to consider the particularly strong impacts of colonisation, (neo)colonialism and decolonisation processes on African countries and peoples. These perspectives help to better understand the positions and actions of African countries during the Cold War. Since their return to independence, African countries have had to face the challenges and dangers of underdevelopment and maldevelopment. African countries have gradually asserted themselves on the international stage, notably through the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and then the African Union (AU). This international assertiveness is also reflected in sub-regional organisations with different objectives and varying degrees of effectiveness. The post-Cold War era posed a significant challenge, with the risk of marginalisation and neglect of African countries and their populations. However, in addition to the former colonial powers, the United States and Russia, influential international actors (notably China, India, Brazil, Turkey, Japan, Germany, South Korea) have recognised the importance, centrality and significance of African countries and their peoples. Over the last years, new African leaders have emerged, asserting a greater aspiration for the real independence and full sovereignty of their states. They are also asserting a willingness to take greater account of the will of their peoples.

Keywords: Africa; Colonisation; Decolonisation; African Union; Independence.

Resumo

Nas últimas décadas, a África apareceu algumas vezes como um continente negligenciado. Este erro analítico, geopolítico e histórico tornou-se óbvio para os líderes internacionais e para os estudiosos das relações internacionais. É importante sublinhar a diversidade da África nos seus vários componentes, incluindo as suas dimensões políticas, sociais, económicas e culturais. Também é relevante considerar os impactos particularmente fortes dos processos de colonização, (neo)colonialismo e descolonização nos países e povos africanos. Estas perspectivas ajudam a compreender melhor as posições e ações dos países africanos durante a Guerra Fria. Desde o seu regresso à independência, os países africanos têm enfrentado os desafios e perigos do subdesenvolvimento e do mau desenvolvimento. Os países africanos têm-se afirmado gradualmente no cenário internacional, nomeadamente através da Organização da Unidade Africana (OUA) e depois da União Africana (UA). Esta assertividade internacional também se reflete em organizações sub-regionais com diferentes objetivos e variados graus de eficácia. A era pós-Guerra Fria representou um desafio significativo, com o risco de marginalização e negligência dos países africanos e das suas populações. No entanto, além das antigas potências coloniais, os Estados Unidos e a Rússia, atores internacionais influentes (notadamente China, Índia, Brasil, Turquia, Japão, Alemanha, Coreia do Sul) reconheceram a importância, centralidade e significância dos países africanos e seus povos. Nos últimos anos, novos líderes africanos surgiram, afirmando uma aspiração maior pela independência real e soberania total de seus estados. Eles também estão afirmando uma disposição de levar mais em conta a vontade de seus povos.

Palavras-chave: África, Colonização; Descolonização; União Africana; Independência.





Introduction

At the beginning of the post-Cold War era, Africa may have seemed a forgotten or neglected continent on the international stage. The error of this approach quickly became apparent to international actors and to international relations scholars. For Africa is, in many ways, a key continent. From a demographic standpoint, Africa represents a very significant proportion of the world's population and this proportion will continue to grow in the following decades. From a political standpoint, the democratic challenges in Africa affect the success of the democratisation process on a global scale. The successes of the democratisation process in African countries are a kind of litmus test on a broader perspective. The setbacks of democratisation in Africa represent failures that are also relevant outside Africa. From an economic standpoint, Africa is rich in natural resources that are essential for the development of the world economy and Africa is a significant trading market. Access to these natural resources is crucial to the development of many economic and commercial sectors around the world. The conditions of this access and the fact that the revenues from these resources can benefit the populations of African countries - and not just their leaders, multinational companies or the states of the North - have been a cause of concern for several decades. From a cultural standpoint, music, literature, cinema, fashion and all other forms of cultural creativity by African artists and creators (in and outside Africa) demonstrate Africa's centrality in the field of artistic and intellectual innovation. Africa's artistic, cultural and intellectual creativity has been vibrant and abundant throughout the centuries. This creativity was maintained and sustained even during periods of colonisation, when the colonial states tried to suppress or even deny it. When African countries regained their independence, they were able to unleash their creative energies, which sometimes had to be expressed discreetly or even with colonial contempt. Civil societies regained a voice, even when post-independence regimes tried to muzzle them.

119

From a civilisational point of view, Africa is the original continent of our humanity, it has some of the great nourishing rivers of history, which have been the basis of human development, and important civilisations have developed in many parts of Africa over time. In addition, Africa is at the crossroads of the





Mediterranean world, Europe, the Arab world and Asia. Africa is therefore a zone of passage, of crossing, of interaction and of mixing.

Geopolitically, Africa is in proximity to Europe, to the Middle East, to the Arabian Peninsula and to Asia. Major communication and trade routes pass through or along Africa; maritime spaces such as the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, the Strait of Gibraltar, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal affect the stability of Africa and of the world. Africa therefore has many features of geopolitical centrality with global implications for regional and international stability and security. This strategic position has been the source of much envy over the centuries. It is an asset for Africa, which remains central on the world map from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Cape of Good Hope, from the Suez Canal to the Bab-El-Mandeb Strait. The instability of certain African countries sometimes has very significant consequences, both on land and at sea.

120

Those facts and elements, and many others, argue for considering Africa as a central continent on the map of the contemporary world, in a situation of complete transformation and reconfiguration. In this respect, the neglect of Africa by certain "traditional" powers and/or former colonial powers after the Cold War is very surprising. In this context, some of the "new" powers have not made this serious error of analysis and have understood the importance of the African continent in general and of many African countries in particular.

Not one Africa but many Africas

In fact, and as a point of departure for any sound analysis, it should be underlined that there is not one Africa but many "Africas". Any serious and coherent analysis must consider Africa in all its diversity, plurality and multiplicity. The geographical size, the socio-demographic diversity, the linguistic diversity, the diversity of economic development levels, the plurality of historical paths: these elements explain the need to consider Africa in its multiplicity.

From North Africa (Maghreb) to South Africa and to Central Africa and all the other African countries concerned, the States that make up Africa represent a wide range of situations that should be perceived





with their specificities. Any generalisation would be hazardous and counterproductive. The analysis must therefore be nuanced, cautious and subtle. In this respect, it is important to understand that it would be a mistake to think of Africa as a single, coherent whole. Nevertheless, since it is not possible to treat each country separately, it may be helpful to have a global vision of Africa. In this regard, in order to clearly understand Africa or the “Africas” of today, it is important to take into account its history, especially the recent past.

The stigma and indelible marks of colonization and colonialism

Colonisation is historically over, but not its many destabilizing effects on African countries and peoples. The effects of colonisation on the political, economic and social structures of African countries are still present and widespread. It is also important to consider the traumatic and brutal effects, at all levels, of the slave trade, which depopulated large parts of the African continent. Whatever their duration (from a few years or decades to more than a century), the phases of colonisation and the processes of decolonisation, sometimes very violent and bloody, have left indelible marks on all African societies. It is inconceivable to understand and analyse the current situation of African countries without making an effort to look back at the impact of colonisation on African societies. Several decades after the end of colonisation in some countries, this phase of dispossession of political sovereignty, economic exploitation, cultural destruction and multidimensional destabilisation of African countries continues to affect the conditions of political, socio-economic and cultural development of these countries.

121

For the sake of coherence, the analysis will focus on the recent colonial time, because its consequences are still the most present in the functioning of African states. Indeed, at the time of independence, European political and ideological structures, originating from the colonial powers (mainly Belgium, France, Great Britain, Italy, Portugal and Spain) were often imposed on (and/or adopted by) African governments. These imported political and ideological structures proved to be highly unsuited to the historical, demographic, social, cultural and philosophical realities of African societies. This process has often resulted in dysfunctional and inappropriate political frameworks since independence. As a result, most African regimes have evolved towards non-democratic forms of government and sometimes brutal





dictatorships or harsh authoritarian regimes. In this respect, the conditions under which independence was achieved were not conducive to the development of democratic structures and dynamics.

The context of colonisation, the violent impact of colonisation on the functioning of African societies, the destabilisation and trauma of colonisation on the political, economic, social, cultural and human aspects of these countries created harmful situations whose effects are still being felt today. The ability of the newly independent African states to meet the challenges of their construction, their capacity to be engines of economic and social development, their solidity, their capacity for international action are therefore characteristics that must be taken into account in order to understand the current situation of African countries. Post-colonial Africa is still dealing with the consequences of colonisation, sometimes more than 60 years after independence of the great majority of African countries. Border issues are an important example of this problem.

122

The situation of African countries is also, in many cases, that of trying to build nations after the constitution of states. This is the case partly because these states were often constituted following arbitrary territorial divisions decided by the colonial powers, without taking into account the specificities and realities of local situations.

After independence, the policy adopted by African states, particularly within the framework of the “Organisation of African Unity” /OAU created in 1963 (since 2002, the “African Union”/ UA), was that of the *intangibility of borders as they existed upon achievement of independence*. This choice was undoubtedly the wisest and most rational in order to avoid opening the way to many tensions or even conflicts between African countries. However, this decision has also created situations of lack of homogeneity and stability in many cases, due to very significant community and linguistic diversity within certain countries. In this context, the use of the languages of the former colonial powers to create a framework of linguistic coherence for the whole country has sometimes been seen as a way of solving some problems. This dispersion and diversity will have a significant impact on the ability of African states to act internationally.

Certain subdivisions can also be made on the basis of the linguistic framework created by colonisation: Portuguese-speaking countries, French-speaking countries, English-speaking countries. For example, some countries in North Africa belong to the Arab world, but are also connected to the French or English-speaking world. These linguistic divisions are reflected in the membership of certain political and/or





linguistic groupings led by former colonial powers such as Francophonie, Sommits France-Afrique (France-Africa Summits), the Commonwealth, Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (Community of Portuguese-speaking countries), etc. The question arises as to whether these structures are not elements that perpetuate old dynamics and whether they are favourable to the international action of the African countries concerned. Indeed, the question of the contribution of these groupings to the international projection of the African countries remains largely unanswered. For some analysts, these groupings, still largely influenced, directed and oriented by the former colonial powers, do not constitute a framework conducive to the emergence of full sovereignty for African countries and would contribute to the perpetuation of neo-colonial ties. For other observers, including Africans, the analysis is more nuanced and a kind of pragmatism seems to prevail. The idea is that, once such groupings exist, it is better to be part of them in a realistic and lucid way than to remain on the sidelines or on the fringe. The political and scientific debate remains open.

123

Africa in the Cold War context

Since independence and until the early 1990s, African countries were largely caught up in the context of the Cold War. In this geopolitical framework of East-West tensions and confrontations, the ideological affiliations of African leaders determined the capacity of states to act, and determined their political, economic and ideological orientations, as well as their involvement in struggles beyond themselves.

In this historical sequence, some African leaders were able to take advantage of the Cold War context. Depending on the context, this benefit could be political and/or economic and/or geostrategic. But it was also often very personal, limited to them, their families, their clients and their supporters. In this case, it was highly detrimental to the standard of good governance and to the exercise of power for the benefit of the people.

In addition to political and ideological frameworks that were very exogenous and unsuited to the intrinsic characteristics of African societies, and therefore disconnected from the realities on the ground, the context of the Cold War imported into Africa reading grids imposed from the outside. This situation led African states to insert themselves into alliance games where the real interests of African peoples were not





really present. The Non-Aligned Movement sought to remove the countries of the South, and African countries in particular, from this ideological confrontation. But despite the successes of the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1960's and the 1970's, the Movement was not able to implement a significant and efficient framework in order to take into account the main interests of the African populations. Similarly, the Organisation of African Unity and then the African Union, despite the sometimes very determined actions of certain African leaders, have not been able to implement a coherent and harmonised policy on the scale of the entire African continent. The objectives of a continent-wide policy were perhaps too ambitious and too bold. A clearer perspective could therefore be found in sub-regional organisations. However, even at this sub-regional level, the results so far seem rather disappointing.

After the end of the Cold War, African countries were largely neglected, not to say abandoned. However, the desire for the natural resources of African countries has never diminished, because Africa is rich, especially in its natural resources.

124

Underdevelopment and the numerous challenges of development in Africa

The processes resulting from decolonisation have had difficulties in implementing homogeneous and coherent development processes for African countries. One of the main difficulties was that of giving the African countries real and substantial economic sovereignty and the difficulty of freeing the African countries from the economic and commercial ties and links structured during the colonial period with the colonial metropolises.

The empowerment dynamic was bound to take time. The emergence of new economic and trade partners has taken longer than expected and the process is often not complete. However, a recomposition is underway with the affirmation of new important and influential protagonists on the African scene, such as Russia (even though the Soviet Union was a significant player, at least geopolitically, during the Cold War), China, India, Brazil and Turkey. This process of diversification of partners is seen by many observers as favourable to the economic, commercial and political affirmation of contemporary Africa.

In this context, African states are often confronted with various social and economic challenges. The level of corruption in many African countries is a major problem and destabilises economic development. As





a result, the level of poverty remains high in several countries, resulting in a significant lack of access to social services, inadequate employment opportunities (even for graduates with high skills) and inadequate social security structures.

History, society, culture, economy, politics: these different dimensions cannot be separated in a global analysis of the situation in Africa. The problems of economic and social maldevelopment and underdevelopment have repercussions on the functioning of political systems. The poor and inefficient functioning of political systems, in turn, affects the process of economic and social development. In this context, African countries face many challenges.

African countries are obviously not alone in suffering from political, economic and social problems. They do not have any monopoly on corruption, nepotism, misuse of public funds, lack of pluralism and lack of democracy. Internal conflicts, border disputes or international conflicts exist on most continents. However, these problems are sometimes very pronounced, to varying degrees, within or between several African countries. These problems are crucial for several reasons. First and foremost because they directly affect the daily living standards of the African populations. They have serious and far-reaching consequences in terms of adequate health, housing, education, social services, transport, infrastructure and many other aspects of the daily lives of African women, men and children. Moreover, these problems often affect populations that are already economically and socially vulnerable. These problems can therefore have a dramatic impact on the living conditions or even the daily survival of many people in numerous African countries

125

These problems also need to be taken into account at the level of international action by African countries. Indeed, disorganised and/or conflict-ridden situations within a country do not allow the state to develop a solid and credible foreign policy. A coherent, structured and sound foreign policy can only be conceived within the framework of stable countries with balanced social structures and consistent economic development. Divided, unstable and unbalanced societies do not allow for a credible and coherent international projection, especially in the long term. Furthermore, the human and financial resources allocated to international policy must be substantial to ensure a credible foreign policy. In this regard, effective diplomacy requires the acquisition of proven expertise over time, based on experienced, competent and effective diplomats. Credible diplomacy is built over the long term, with well-trained staff





who have a strong understanding of sub-regional, regional and international issues. Such expertise requires time, patience, regular and continuous efforts, and diplomats who are fully committed to their missions. Some African countries have succeeded in building credible teams of diplomats in order to promote a coherent foreign policy that is listened to. Other countries remain in an unfavourable situation, with a diplomatic apparatus that is still in need of improvement and a foreign policy whose credibility has not yet been established. Even participation in (sub-)regional organisations cannot compensate for these weaknesses.

Africa is also severely affected by climate change and its terrible consequences for many populations (desertification, anarchic urbanisation, slums). Significant areas of Africa are also affected by brain drain and/or migration dynamics that local governments are unable to prevent. These processes tend to weaken the economic development process of many countries by depriving them of sometimes highly qualified professionals or young people.

126

The complex and arduous political affirmation of Africa on the international scene

Africa understood as a whole is indeed a complex reality characterised by multiplicity and diversity. This diversity can be seen as a richness, an asset and an advantage. But it can also be envisioned as a factor of difficulty, because it is complex to reconcile such a variety of situations within a coherent framework. In this context, the unitary approach has been embodied since 1963 by the regional African organisation based in Addis Ababa, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which became the African Union (AU) in 2002. This organisation was supposed to embody the ideal of post-independence African construction. However, the hope of achieving “union” or “unity” has not really been realised. Despite the multiplicity of their organs and missions, the OAU was and then the AU is today structures whose capacity to act with efficiency remain to be proven. This is certainly not to say that nothing has been done. However, Africa's political, economic, social, health, humanitarian and other problems are often of such magnitude that the OAU and then the AU have not been able, and probably have not had the means, to solve them effectively. In this respect, even UN action has often proved insufficient to deal with those problems in a concrete and decisive manner.





It is also important to note that the institutional dynamics of contemporary Africa are embodied in several sub-regional organisations, which are more or less effective and efficient. It is useful and pertinent to mention some of them as significant tools in order to create, among many aspects, sub-regional political stability, economic development and social coherence. The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) has 21 member-states. The Community of Sahel-Saharan States has 25 member-states. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) / Communauté Économique des États de l'Afrique Centrale, CEEAC has 11 member-states. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) / Communauté économique des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEDEAO) has 15 member-sates. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has 16 member-states. The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)/ Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA) has 5 member-states.

Unfortunately, these sub-regional organisations are sometimes very far removed from the objectives they were set up to achieve. Some of them are even in disarray or without real effective actions. Despite the fact that economic cooperation between these countries represents real added value, the dynamics are often highly unsatisfactory. Political differences between leaders prevent certain progress. Development is often approached from a very national perspective, and the (sub-)regional perspective is only marginally considered and implemented. The potential is many and varied, the complementarities are clear and the prospects are promising. But the results are often disappointing and fragmented. The dynamics of regional development remain largely unsatisfactory. Some leaders seem to find it difficult to envisage a dense, coherent framework for cooperation to get out of the rut of underdevelopment or maldevelopment. They prefer to maintain rentier economic regimes rather than project their populations into sound and promising economic and social development processes. It seems that the maintenance of rents and an economy under the guardianship of the rulers is sometimes a means of trying to hold on to power, even at the cost of serious economic and social setbacks for the populations concerned. A sense of the common interest and the common good does not seem to be on the minds of some leaders even today. As a result, it is the people who suffer from these dubious political decisions.

127

This is also reflected at the banking and financial level, in particular considering structures such as the African Development Bank (ADB). However, despite many aspects of progress, development and dynamism, Africa, or at least some African countries, suffer from many internal problems such as political





instability or internal conflicts. Consequently, these difficulties translate into a difficulty to act effectively on the international scene. These problems and difficulties also constitute important obstacles to the full emergence of Africa as a whole, and of African countries in particular, as fully-fledged actors on the international scene. In addition, some countries are severely affected by terrorist groups, which sometimes seriously undermine their political and social stability. Organised crime (from drug trafficking to human slavery and arms trafficking) constitute another major threat to the stability of states.

It is not possible or conceivable for a country to assert itself politically and diplomatically on the international scene if it does not have a stable internal situation. It is illusory and naive to try to build a credible and convincing external action in the context of a fragile or deteriorated internal context. Foreign policy is part of the whole. A state that is credible at home can be credible abroad. No international action can be sustained over time without a solid domestic foundation. This is part of the explanation for Africa's relative discretion on the world stage.

128

But Africa is not absent from the international scene. On the contrary, its visibility has increased over the years. Africa and African leaders are taking initiatives and being invited to influential international forums such as the G20. Among other initiatives, the NEPAD/New Partnership for Africa's Development initiative launched in 2001 by several African countries has increased Africa's international visibility. It has since evolved into NEPAD - the African Union Development Agency of the African Union.

In this context, international actors have understood the importance of Africa and have taken Africa and African countries into account in their foreign policies. Africa is an integral part of world history, whether through the tragic, painful and violent periods of the slave trade, which concerned the Middle East, Europe and America. Or through the colonial episodes where, it should also be remembered and underlined, African troops of colonised countries participated in the World Wars and paid a heavy price in terms of dead and wounded people. During the Second World War, those African troops contributed to the liberation of Europe and the defeat of Fascism and Nazism, just as African-American from the United States participated in the US Army for the liberation of Europe and Asia. Even if it is sometimes forgotten and not duly recognized in schoolbooks in the North, the history of freedom in the world has also been written with the blood of African fighters.





To return to the current international context, it is appropriate to mention the actions of some new international protagonists towards Africa. With former colonial powers such as Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom, the links with a certain number of African countries are obvious. Some of these links have become and still are sometimes constraints from which it would be appropriate to emancipate each part on both sides. The dislocation and dismantlement of what was described as “Françafrique” is highly significant. It is epitomized by the removal of regimes favorable to France in Burkina Faso (2022), Mali (2021), Niger (2023) and Senegal (2024). These events show that the role of former colonial powers on the African continent is clearly diminishing. Reconfigurations and reshuffles are underway. New waves of leaders are coming to power, and they seem determined to move toward new diplomatic options that clearly take into account national interests. The process seems to indicate an emancipation from old ties towards more autonomous, sovereign and independent diplomatic relations. The question remains, however, whether there is not a phenomenon leading to the creation of new political, economic and/or cultural dependencies. There are no powers that project themselves and act on the international or African stage for strictly altruistic reasons. It remains to be seen, therefore, whether the dynamic is really directed towards the implementation of policies that serve the interests of the populations concerned. For example, some analysts have doubts or reservations about the increased involvement of states such as Russia and China in Africa.

129

The actions of other actors are important to take into account because their involvement is more recent and reveals new developments. Countries as diverse as the United States, Russia (some analysts underline that for the US and Russia this is a continuation of their Cold War roles), Canada, Japan, Germany, India, China, Brazil, South Korea and Turkey are strengthening their diplomatic, economic and commercial presence in Africa.

Since the beginning of the 21st century (at least), China has played a growing role on the African continent. It has become an important trading partner. It has also become an increasingly present and influential economic player. Chinese companies are part of a broader strategy by the Beijing government to establish itself as a strong alternative to the long-standing relationship between African countries and the colonial powers of the past. This dynamic is presented as a form of new partnership, without political interference. Today, this dynamic raises questions about the long-term implications and new dependencies





that could emerge. African countries do not want to pass from one patronage to another. Maintaining their capacity for independence and sovereignty is therefore a major challenge. China has included a number of African countries in its “Belt and Road Initiative”. It remains to be seen whether these countries and their populations will benefit from this initiative, or whether it will mainly benefit Beijing and its (not so new) economic, commercial and geostrategic interests. The same applies to Russia's role and actions on the African continent. Russia's influence has clearly increased, but the long-term consequences of this new influence have yet to be fully assessed.

And now, what's next for Africa?

Africa's future is written before us. It is Africans, primarily, who will build it. With solidarity, generosity and concerted action from outside protagonists. But African countries alone will not be able to do everything. That is why external support is essential. Africa's future is still in the making.

130

For many countries, more than 60 years after independence, much progress remains to be made. But with the liberation from the guardianship of the past, with the help of diverse and supportive international partners, and with the will to serve the common good, Africa's future can be fruitful.

Today, Africa stands at a crossroads. The regimes must make a firm commitment to address a wide range of challenges. At the political level, African countries must find the means to progress towards democracy, political pluralism and alternation of power without crises or coups d'Etat. At the economic level, one serious challenge is the implementation of balanced structures involving the greatest number of people, without corruption and with a fair distribution of national wealth. At the social level, the development of stable employment, of a quality education system open to as many people as possible, of a health system covering the whole population and decent, of affordable housing must be pursued. At the cultural level, African countries must continue to see their diversity as a force to be harnessed, allowing creativity and inventiveness to flourish.

In terms of Africa's geopolitical position on the international stage, it is important that African countries are now respected as sovereign states without interference in their internal affairs. Neo-colonialist policies are relics of the past and no longer an option. It is high time to turn the page on the past and write





a new, responsible and mature chapter in the history of the African continent. African peoples must be seen as full participants in their own present and future. Combining genuine economic and social development policies with respect for people's freedom of choice will enable to address the highly complex issue of migrants and refugees. This is a challenge for African countries, which host the vast majority of African refugees. It is also a challenge for European countries, which are sometimes the destination of refugees and migrants from Africa. It is neither conceivable nor sustainable to have islands of opulence and wealth alongside oceans of poverty and despair. A balanced world can only exist if wealth is better redistributed and the needs of disadvantaged populations are clearly and decisively addressed.

There are many challenges, some of which seem to have been with Africa since independence. Some might draw the (all too) premature conclusion that Africa is stuck, bogged down or making poor progress on the road to democracy, economic and social development and cultural creativity. This pessimistic view is clearly contradicted by the determination of African citizens to assert themselves as full protagonists in their countries, in Africa and in the world. Even if some regimes are moving backwards in history, the African people are fully involved in history, present and future. This forward movement, this desire for progress, this dynamism in the service of the common good are powerful forces to defeat regimes and dictators that do not know, do not want to know, and/or do not understand the march of history. These outdated regimes will one day end up in the dustbin of history. The people, the popular movements and the creative dynamism of Africans will enable Africa to move forward towards more promising, more encouraging and more fruitful prospects. Africans have no desire for oblivion. The future is open...

131

References

AMOUGOU, Thierry; PIOLAT, Jérémie (ed.). *Une trajectoire décoloniale: Des development studies aux postcolonial studies*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2021.

BURT, Ben. *Africa in the World: Past and Present*. London: British Museum, 2005.

COMITÉ SCIENTIFIQUE INTERNATIONAL POUR LA RÉDACTION D'UNE HISTOIRE GÉNÉRALE DE L'AFRIQUE (ed.). *Histoire générale de l'Afrique (8 volumes)*. Paris: UNESCO, 1980-1998.





DUBRESSON, Alain; MAGRIN, Géraud; NINOT, Olivier. Atlas de l’Afrique: Un continent émergent?. Paris: Autrement, 2022.

FANON, Frantz. Œuvres: Peau noire, masques blancs; L’an V de la Révolution algérienne; Les damnés de la terre; Pour une révolution africaine. Paris: La Découverte, 2011.

HUGON, Philippe; SERVANT, Jean-Christophe. Géopolitique de l’Afrique: 40 fiches illustrées pour comprendre le monde. Paris: Eyrolles, 2020.

LE GOURIELLEC, Sonia. Géopolitique de l’Afrique. Paris: Que sais-je? / PUF, 2024.

LEMARCHAND, Philippe (éd.). L’Afrique et l’Europe: Atlas du XXème siècle. Bruxelles: Complexe, 1994.

LE MONDE AFRIQUE – LA VIE. Atlas des Afriques. Paris: Le Monde, 2023.

MBEMBE, Achille. De la postcolonie: Essai sur l’imagination politique dans l’Afrique contemporaine. Paris: La Découverte, 2020.

MBEMBE, Achille. Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l’Afrique décolonisée. Paris: La Découverte, 2010.

NORMAND, Nicolas. Le grand livre de l’Afrique. Paris: Eyrolles, 2022.

POURTIER, Roland (ed.). Géopolitique de l’Afrique et du Moyen-Orient. Paris: Nathan, 2022.

SELLIER, Jean. Atlas des peuples d’Afrique. Paris: La Découverte, 2008.

TRIULZI, Alessandro; ERCOLESSI, Cristina (ed.). State, Power, and New Political Actors in Postcolonial Africa. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2005.

