WHAT PERSPECTIVES ARE THERE FOR DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA?
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Democratisation is an issue of a general nature. Undoubtedly it presents itself in a particular light in Africa.

1/ Disillusion

Forty years have passed since most African countries gained their independence. All types of policies have been employed by France, the UK, and even Germany and Italy who withdrew much earlier from their colonies. These included all types of policies and different forms of co-operation, that were more or less focussed on substitution and then on education.

Overall we feel that over the decades a lot of time has been wasted since no policy has given the impression of having succeeded, for any length of time at least.

Of course I do not intend to put forward too pessimistic a picture because we can quote examples of countries where things have turned out well, like for example in South Africa. This is a very interesting example and the only one where the policy of sanctions worked. Sanctions that were applied at the right time in the right place provided us with positive results whereas so often the policy of sanctions that we in the West love so much proves to be counter productive. The pessimistic forecasts were not confirmed in South Africa.

We should also quote Senegal where the situation is developing well - peacefully, with democratic changes in power. We know that in Africa this is a decisive problem since Heads of State decide not to quit power unless there is a drama.

But we should not be totally pessimistic. We can see a development in Western type democratic practices if we include criteria such as the number of constitutions, development of the press and the conditions in which elections take place. A kind of general trend is emerging which is certainly not a bad one, but everyone quite clearly sees the stagnation and the regression. We also feel that we have sham democracies before us. The clash between tribal-ethnic reality and the Western idea of democracy, that is based on the individual or rather individualism, is quite evident. Since independence Africa has experienced between 10 to 15 major conflicts that have caused between 500,000 to 1 million deaths as well as interminable civil wars.

What would the scene have looked liked in 1970 during a conference of this kind? We would have had discussions about economic take-offs, we would have compared the merits of planning or private investments. We would have been more confident discussing an almost exponential development in modernity. We would have maintained that economic modernisation went hand in hand with democratic development and that everything would move forwards quite smoothly.
In comparison with the hopes that we might have had and the ones shared by the African elite themselves in the 1960's the present situation must be of concern to us. Why did it have to come to this?

No one champions the relativist trend. Practically no one supports the idea of incompatibility between Africa and democracy. This theory has sometimes been proffered for the Arabs, the Chinese and others. To my knowledge this theory is no longer supported today. But there is disillusion and questions are raised. Without facing up to reality it is impossible to progress.

2/ How should we tackle this problem?

An initial observation: although today there is a spectacular discord between the American President and Western public opinion, in reality the Bush administration and other Westerners have something in common: they all think they are responsible for democratising the World. It is a mission that the West has given itself and that it continues to undertake with varying justification. Some think they should undertake procedures like the "Peace and Love" movement, others like the Bush administration think that this is only possible by military action. This remark is not an innocuous one, as Westerners, Europeans, even the most pacific amongst them believe they have been given the task to spread democracy. This is a fact.

It is a question of knowing whether democratisation results from an endogenous, internal movement, or external intervention. Do societies democratise themselves by means of a process or are they democratised by an external intervention of a different kind? During the course of history, in Western countries, who believe themselves to be the most advanced in terms of democracy, there was never any external intervention. We have witnessed a rather slow maturing within each country and then there was the American graft. And this remained true for centuries. Even France, that loves to give lessons in democracy to the whole world and that declared itself home of Human Rights (whilst several other countries deserve this title), 150 years passed between the first elections in 1795 and women's right to vote. With violent revolutions, terrible repression, progress and setbacks, development always came within the framework of an internal evolution. Neither France nor the UK became democratic because an NGO from another planet stepped in to help out. We often forget this historic fact when we start to take care of democratising others and where relations are of a different nature. This remark is legitimate if we accept that democratisation is a process. It is an economic and social process that becomes political and that is consolidated by a legal process creating a culture and a coherent whole.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Marxist universe many have thrown out the "baby with the bath water" and have turned their backs on history. These people treat democratisation like a conversion and this applies not only to the USA but also to Europe. Conversion is not a process. Conversion means "St Paul falling from his horse on the road to Damascus". If democracy is equal to the true Faith then we might be led to think that it is an instantaneous event. We find this conflict in terms of the "external" process to be adopted vis-à-vis China, Russia and even Africa.

If we opt for the endogenous process of democratisation why until now have the mechanisms that we experienced (are we maybe being slightly too impatient?) not been set in motion in
Africa? The constitution of local administrations, the State of Law etc… Why isn't it working all on its own?
Has the economic underdevelopment remained so much below a certain threshold of revenue per inhabitant that it is impossible to take care of democracy because other tasks are of greater importance?
Is the health situation so serious?
Are the different cultures at fault? This question has to be faced even if it causes a problem. Group, tribal or even ethnic cultures (this qualification often seems pejorative to the West) operate in Africa like a "welfare" system, it is protective like "social security" - it is a system we knew in Europe during the feudal period.

If people continue to operate like this in some regions of Africa it is because the State is unable to provide basic guarantees to its citizens. When Westerners intervene they hope that their democratic customs will be adopted; these are practices that are individual and for which even we broke with the old customs of solidarity.

Why are the internal processes in Africa at a standstill?
We should incidentally listen to the African elite on this question so as not to adopt a paternalistic approach!

If we are asking this question in Paris, London or Washington it is because we are involved in the external process. We hope to help Africa to democratise from the outside.

Amongst these external interventions we can include:

- intervention by force
  Force can possibly re-establish peace, a primary condition for democracy, but it cannot declare democracy with the dropping of bombs.

- intervention by sanctions
  European and Americans particularly like this method but we are not always in control of all of effects it has.

- intervention according to conditions
  Today all types of international policies (IMF, World Bank, EU) are subject to fulfilling a certain number of conditions. But, is it of any real effect to impose conditions from without (more honest accounting etc.), if we know that a profound change in mentality is required?

There are more positive forms of intervention

- co-operation (all types of aid)
  Co-operation by substitution was the first type of support, notably by France towards Africa that aimed to manage the countries for over 20 years in place of local representatives until they were in a position to take over themselves. The second stage was educational co-operation. But with the major development in NGO's we returned back to a form of substitution when in times of extreme crisis the latter stepped in.

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External intervention can only be effective if it runs along side an endogenous process of democratisation. If the contrary happens counter productive results emerge quite quickly.

All societies have the potential to democratise (and not for democracy, since this is yet another stilted situation). In a given society it is always possible to go further, step by step. All types of external intervention, whether the are violent or co-operative must be linked with internal developments. The political intelligence of situations must be applied to the full. Hence the pace of events becomes a significant factor.

Democratisation is not a technique to be exported like a toolbox. You cannot parachute it in either. It is more than a question of culture.

The foundations can play an important role by conveying democratic know-how and yet be patient for the results that are hoped for. The activities undertaken by NGO's must not be done against governments ie civil society must not replace the State. The paradox in Africa is that the State is still too weak. We tend to believe the opposite. Whilst society is rising again, organising itself and making a new start with "the traditional methods at hand", after many crises that are unimaginable for Europeans who are used to all types of protection. We should pay homage to their vitality.

It should be our objective to bring together all the different types of intervention I have spoken of today.