

PANELISTS DEBATE

Thierry de MONTBRIAL

As I would be held responsible if the participants of the WPC suffered from malnutrition, I believe we should try to conclude shortly.

There are three things that strike me in what you just said, Lionel. First of all, I am happy to say that we at the WPC are willing to increase our number of African participants. Because our conference is a global club, our aim should be to have 8 to 10 % of African participants. I reckon it is quite a reasonable goal. To me it is thanks to this kind of conversations that we can modify global perceptions in a convincing way. That was my first remark.

The second one is related to the Young Leaders. We could think of one day creating a panel of Young Leaders with participants like the ones you just mentioned, in other words people who come back to their country of origin after succeeding abroad.

Lastly, after hearing you speak so brilliantly, we are all wondering “Why didn’t he get elected as President of Benin?” There seems to be a problem with the voters, as it often happens in democracies.

I will limit myself to one very simple question to you and we will leave it at that. Thanks to both of you, Prime Ministers, we have a very positive image in mind, thanks to your experiences, hopes, and despite your last words, Lionel. Paul Biya has been elected for the seventh time I believe, and he is now 85 years old. As the years go by, it becomes more and more normal to get elected for the seventh time at 85. But still, does it broadcast a very positive image of Africa? Is it an exception or are these phenomena going to keep happening in Africa?

Hailemariam DESALEGN

It should not be the choice of the leaders; it should be the choice of the citizens. I mentioned in my speech that if there is citizen activism, this kind of thing will not happen. There was an Arab Spring, but maybe we will have an African Winter. The young people will determine whether they like it or not, so before this happens, leaders should think twice and three times about this. This is looming in many countries and it is the main issue, so we need an African citizen movement which can take care of this kind of thing.

We have the APRM, African Peer Review Mechanism. Some countries have not joined it, but it should be critically seen and looked at closely – peer review of African leaders – and talked about frankly in terms of the impact of this kind of situation within our countries. Maybe the future is for the young people, and this will happen.

Lionel ZINSOU

I have two points to make. First of all, the fact that we are a young continent: the median age of the population in Benin is 17 ½ years old. But having this active youth who comes back with a degree does not change the fact that we are still following the tradition of respecting elders, which is a fundamental value across Africa and an element of coherence and stability. Besides, my dear Thierry, there are many institutions that make do with this reality. You have never had a less than 60-year-old Pope, and still there is great continuity within the Catholic Church. In the end, the respect for elders remains, as it is an essential and consistent part of the traditions across Africa.

My second point is about the pace at which the democratic transformation is happening. There are still different steps. You said earlier that the voters in Benin had made a mistake. Maybe they have, or maybe not, but actually, neither you nor I know who have actually been elected in Benin because there is a certain weakness in showing the results of the elections. Once I shocked Jean-François Copé by saying it was sometimes the same at the UMP party in France or at the Socialist Party, but I will not go further down that road because it had upset Jean-François Copé. We do have a certain weakness when it comes to the election results. Simply put, think of it that way: straight away in our independent constitutions we have had true universal suffrage. Women could vote straight from the beginning. We reached a level in



terms of elections and ballot that some countries took 200 years to reach. We did not go through selective suffrage first, etc. There are some things that we were able to accomplish very fast and very naturally, for example the composition of the government and gender-equal assemblies. We went extremely fast. Now, we have elections and universal suffrage in countries where the stakes and the participation are high, such as in my country. It is less true in central Africa, because there is less suspense when it comes to the election results. It is less appealing to go out and vote when you already know the results in advance.

So when it comes to voting results, there might be some room for improvement. It is already more difficult than before to go back. We can now modify them but it is very difficult to completely reverse them because, ultimately, connectivity has made a lot of progress. We manage to consolidate the results outside the State and the Commissions on Elections. I am just generally pointing out that indeed, we still have some progress to make, but take this example: in a country like mine, my opponents said "This country is turning into a tyranny", and I said "Absolutely not". There might be about a hundred people who are actually routing for tyranny but there are ten million people who use democratic norms when they reason. We now have a public opinion that is holding us accountable and wants some kind of power, regardless of the country. Your question was quite anecdotal, asking whether seven mandates was a lot, or if the election results are actually published as they truly are. We have achieved some things almost instantly, while we were still under the *indigénat* status. We have managed to go from a political situation, in most African countries, where we were dominated and colonised without any rights to a sudden ability to express our general willingness. And then there are areas where we are going to make some progress, little by little, but very quickly. In my opinion, what you just described is going to become very rare.

Thierry de MONTBRIAL

Well, thank you very much. I can say for sure that Pope John Paul II was 58 years old when he was elected pope and by the way, when I founded IFRI, I was 36 years old. So let's conclude.

Lionel ZINSOU

That means that we get better with age. I make amends because I admit I thought he was 61 years old. But something you should know, in our countries, the civil status is negotiable. You are seeing things through Western glasses. 58, 61, it should not matter that much. And it means we get better with age.

Thierry de MONTBRIAL

That is absolutely true, and actually I believe in the African wisdom. By the way, Prime Ministers, you just showed a beautiful example of that wisdom. On behalf of everyone here, I thank you very much and let me add some good news: since you told us that we had gained 20 more minutes of life expectancy, we just gained 20 more. And now, I regret to tell you that you only have 20 more minutes to finish up your meal. Thank you.