

Discussion of the paper by J. Bony

ELSHSTAIN

Professor Bony, I was interested in your discussion of political education. Who are the subjects of political education? Is this general diffused knowledge which is to become available to all people who live in a particular political culture over a period of time, or do you refer to specific efforts to educate a group of élites in order that they will have a very powerful set of particular responsibilities? There is a long tradition of political literature concerned with attempts on the part of social scientists to explain how children acquire political knowledge and attitudes. I ask about this in part because several of the commissions on civil society and civic renewal in which I am participating in the United States have suggested political education as a specific answer to certain troubles of American democracy at the end of the twentieth century. Our young people are not being taught civic courses; they do not know what makes the Constitution work; they do not know anything about how government operates, and soon this absence of knowledge will lead to a failure of civic inculcation and information in terms of political formation. I would be very curious to hear your comments on the whole problem or question of political education.

MENSAH

As someone who comes from the region, and in fact very close to Côte d'Ivoire, I wish to thank Professor Bony for his very incisive analysis of the problem. I think that the question raised by the previous commentator is very important, that is the question of the nature of civil society in the new African States. I believe that the situation as described by Professor Bony, and as I myself have seen it in the neighbouring country, does not quite correspond to the conception of civil society as presented in the literature in the West. It is not that there is no "civil society" in these countries. Rather the fact is that there appears to be a proliferation of civil societies, with different kinds and forms of "civil society" in the same country. And this, I believe, has implications for the concept of political education. Indeed the question that needs to be asked is whether this multiplicity of

civil societies can be an impediment to the development of modern democratic systems. I think this a very pertinent question. For, in effect, what we have in some African countries is a situation in which society is made up of disparate civil societies which co-exist with one central administrative authority that attempts to bring the various elements together as a unit. This central state authority is, of course, very different in form and motivation from the separate groups. The question then is: is it possible to have a truly democratic system in such a society when the individual civil societies are so very different from the central core which is supposed to bind them together? What has happened in many of the countries in Africa is that the central governments have tried, usually unsuccessfully but very persistently, to combine what they think are the good elements in their traditional societies with what they consider to be the good elements in Western democracy. The result is that what used to be a diffusion of sovereignties, subjectivities and allegiances has been put together into a single system of allegiance. This is, of course, artificial. The result is that, instead of a system in which everybody looks at a centre, even if from a different perspective, and seeks to enrich and fortify the centre, we have a system in which everybody looks at their own individual centre, and these centres in turn react to a central system which is structured differently from each of the individual and separate centres. Where there is conflict between these individual circles there is no common system for evaluating them, there is no common system for bringing them together. I would like Professor Bony to expound a little more on this: to what extent does the existence of what I would call these circles which are not concentric but independent of each other, to what extent does this make it difficult to develop a common set of values which, as was said yesterday and the day before, are the essential ingredients of a democratic society?

MALINVAUD

Le Professeur Bony insiste à juste titre sur deux points: l'importance d'une culture de participation aux décisions publiques et le fait que diffuser une telle culture exige du temps. Ces deux vérités interpellent le Français que je suis, car mon pays a assumé en Côte d'Ivoire les responsabilités que vous savez. L'occasion m'est ainsi donnée d'exprimer le sentiment que la France a mal préparé ses anciennes colonies à la démocratie. Ni les méthodes de notre administration ni le comportement de nos colons ne favorisaient le développement d'une culture de participation, sauf peut-être dans quelques cas exceptionnels, tel le Maroc de Lyautey pendant les années 1920.

KAUFMANN

A seemingly important point of your paper means that democracy is always culturally embedded, that we do not have democracy as such, but that we have different forms of democracy which have emerged in historical processes, in processes of sedimentation of historical experiences which make then for a specific form and ethos of democracy in every cultural context. The problem is that within modernization we experience what Giddens calls the process of the disembedding of the political system. My question is, to what extent can the specific democratic ethos be maintained in such a disembedded form of the political system, and what goes on if different disembedded systems become intertwined, as is the case within globalization?

ZUBRZYCKI

I share other speakers' fascination with the African example, and I thank Professor Bony for giving it to us. It's a very welcome development in our largely Eurocentric Academy. My specific comment concerns the impact of Western capitalism on African culture, on a society largely based on mutual trust.

Capitalism pitches every value into question but it cannot withstand basic human anxiety, nostalgia, deracination, the tearing out of roots. How can this problem be seen from your perspective, Professor Bony?

ZACHER

My experience comes from comparative welfare studies. There, especially with Africa, I found that there was a high culture of solidarity and of implementing rules within a stable situation. But modernity means changes, means dynamics. What can be done to overcome this tension within a culture sticking to stability and modernity at the same time? What can be done to integrate the values of the traditional culture into a quickly changing dynamic development of society?

BETANCUR

Thank you very much. Eloquence, well, I certainly would like to congratulate Professor Bony for his excellent presentation. I would like to complement it with a question, and your statement refers to existing civil societies and political parties. Now, what happens when you are in a position where the civil society does not exist yet, nor the political parties, and these are examples of Latin America, for example indigenous communities in the mountains of Bolivia? I, for example, was with a group from the Inter-American Development Bank, and we were undertaking a feasibility

study for an electrical plant, and the bank had given us some additional funds for us to help the local community, so that they could work with us to help the local community, so that they could work with and would more willingly work with us, and we brought the representatives of that community at the end of Mass. But there hadn't been a priest for two years, so there wasn't any Mass, and therefore there weren't people outside the church on Sunday, where we thought we would find them. So, we brought the people together, the manas, a sort of witch doctors of the group, and we told them that there were resources that were available for them, and asked them what they wished to do with them, and they met at one time and they said that in this municipality there wasn't any electricity, there wasn't water, there wasn't any type of sewage system etc., so what where they going to do with this money? Well, what they were going to do was to buy musical instruments for a band, and the Inter-American Development Bank refused to accept that, and we said: "But why? Why are your people so musical?" "Every eight days" they said, "every week we meet to listen to the music, and when we do we solve the problems of the community, but the musical instruments are in very bad shape and that causes problems", and they were right, in this sort of pre-civil society condition.

ZULU

I come from a section, probably the latest to acquire democracy in Africa, and we have decided to rephrase our questions. The starting point is: if democracy is to be seen as a mechanism for the realization of the public good, then we probably have to disaggregate the public good and say what constitutes the public good. Freedom, equality and access to resources probably can be said to be those elements that constitute the public good. Then an evaluation of democracy becomes an evaluation of the delivery system to achieve this. In other words, an evaluation of these data is the final arbiter in the process. Mediating factors such as culture, civil society etc. should be subjected to the universal rules of evaluation at the level of the national unit.

In other words, to what extent is the composition of civil society, culture etc. conducive to the attainment of the realization of the public good in a country at the state level? Given the global factors, I mean, we could improve working at a village level, or working at certain little levels, and we have to work at the level of the national unit.

If we are to arrive at any mechanism of being together in the evaluation of the elements and contributions to a democracy, then we probably have to speak one language. We can't talk of Western forms and other types of

forms of pre-Western forms. To what extent are these elements in the modern world today capable of doing that?

BONY

S'agissant d'un thème vaste et complexe comme "culture et démocratie", les discussions auraient pu se disperser et se fragmenter; or ce ne fut pas le cas. Avec cohérence, les échanges se sont concentrés sur l'essentiel: les aspects connexes qui ont permis d'approfondir la réflexion — Quelques exemples corroborent le fait — Le Président E. Malinvaud a judicieusement mis l'accent sur deux points: l'importance d'une culture de participation et le temps nécessaire à la diffusion d'une telle culture.

En effet le problème que pose la participation à un système politique en général, que se soit pour l'édification de la Nation que pour l'édification de l'Etat, c'est l'augmentation rapide du volume et de l'intensité des demandes de participations à la prise de décisions politiques provenant des divers groupes et couches de la société. Ces revendications de participation peuvent amener un système politique conséquent à développer la compétence politique et les comportements adéquats au sien des groupes composant la société. Or cela nécessite du temps.

Mais l'aptitude à une bonne participation trouve un éclairage pertinent dans la question posée par le professeur H. Zacher, à savoir comment concilier une culture de grande solidarité existant dans certaines sociétés traditionnelles africaines assez stables avec une modernité caractérisée par des changements rapides? Quelle méthode, quelle procédure, quels moyens utiliser pour aboutir à un résultat positif?

Ce problème constitue une préoccupation majeure pour les nations en émergence. Une part de solution réside dans les efforts de réduction progressive entre les attitudes, les inclinations, les valeurs des cultures traditionnelles et les valeurs des cultures modernes par le moyen de la vulgarisation politique, processus par lequel les attitudes et les valeurs politiques sont inculqués aux enfants avant qu'ils deviennent des adultes et aux adultes appelés à assurer un rôle.

En Côte d'Ivoire le développement de la culture politique à l'école et dans les séances des conseils nationaux, amènent les populations à acquérir progressivement un comportement rationnel face à quelques problèmes et une expérience certaine dans l'action politique. Cette rationalisation de la culture politique a évité à ce pays des conséquences graves, car il s'est enraciné dans les consciences que le dialogue, la tolérance, la patience, le travail et la faix sont des atouts majeurs pour la santé morale et matérielle des Ivoiriens.

Un autre problème important soulevé dans les discussions concerne la diversité des démocraties. Cette diversité tient en grande partie à la différence des sociétés civiles. Monsieur Mensa a judicieusement noté que leur multiplicité dans les pays africains est une source de difficultés dans l'élaboration d'un système démocratique moderne. De fait l'édification de la Nation nécessite la prise en compte des aspects culturels du développement politique. Et ce développement se rapporte à un processus par lequel, l'attachement, la dévotion, la fidélité du peuple passent d'un niveau restreint, des tribus, des ethnies et des villages à un système politique central plus important.

L'évolution vers une intégration n'est pas continue — Elle comporte des ratées et des retours en arrière — Ce qui engendre des tensions, des conflits résultant d'une culture nouvelle insuffisamment homogène et non unifiée. Les discussions ont montré que l'élaboration du système démocratique n'est pas la même partout. Elle obéit à des conditions spécifiques propres à chaque culture ou à chaque sous-culture. Dans l'ensemble, elle procède de la capacité à donner des réponses appropriées à des défis. Le thème traité présente un grand intérêt pour les membres de l'Académie appelés à réfléchir sur les grands problèmes de notre temps.