

RADIOGRAPHY OF RESISTANCE

Conference n°1 / Thursday 28 September / 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. / Plenary Room



Bertrand Badie, Niagalé Bagayoko, Michel Wieviorka and Delphine Allès

What does it mean to resist in 2023? The first plenary conference of the Normandy World Peace Forum 2023 was based on the theme of ‘Radiography of Resistance’. The guests attempted to define the refusal of powerlessness and to take stock of the new sources of resistance, which, as dissidents and activists are there to remind us, always has a cost.

September is the month of major world events. In the wake of the G20, the United Nations General Assembly and the International Day of Peace, the Normandy World Peace Forum was held. At Caen’s Abbaye aux Dames, to rapturous applause, masters of ceremonies Frédéric Bedos and François-Xavier Priollaude thanked the prestigious guests of this sixth edition – some 130 speakers from all over the world. Hervé Morin, President of the Conseil Régional de Normandie gave the opening speech and expressed his delight at having created such an open forum, ‘open, interactive, participative, represented passionately and in significant numbers by the youth of Normandy and France.

I don’t believe in this absolute opposition between democracy and totalitarianism

Bertrand Badie

Next, Bertrand Badie, Professor Emeritus and pillar of the Forum, prefaced his keynote address with the statement that *‘nothing is external to the human’*, demonstrating the need to move beyond old patterns, those *‘which proclaimed that everything is human except international relations’*, as one former minister put it: *‘Letting public opinion have a say on international issues would be like admitting the patient’s family into the operat-*

ing theatre’. This, he said, has become a thing of the past. Gradually, a mysterious social energy has emerged that organises, controls and determines international relations. And this is nothing new, given that a few centuries ago, right here in Normandy, the Abbé de Saint Pierre explained that peace could only be built by taking social well-being into account. *‘I don’t believe in this absolute opposition between democracy and totalitarianism; things are infinitely more complicated than that’*, added Bertrand Badie.

The deep meaning of resistance

Refusing to be powerless and the driving forces behind resistance: this was the theme of the first round table, which asked the question: are the driving forces behind resistance the same as those we have seen in the past? The sociologist Michel Wieviorka believes that there are several levels of motivation: *‘There is the deep meaning of resistance. In the name of what value am I taking action? And there, it’s very variable.’* The sociologist pointed out that



Bertrand Badie

OPENING:

Hervé MORIN,

President of the Normandy Region

MODERATION:

Frédérique BEDOS, Founding President of the NGO, the Imagine Project

François-Xavier PRIOLLAUD, Vice-President of the Normandy Region

SPEAKERS:

Izzeldin ABUELAISH, Doctor, author of ‘I shall not hate’

Delphine ALLES, Professor of political science and vice-president of INALCO

Bertrand BADIE, University Professor Emeritus at Sciences Po Paris

Niagalé Bagayoko, President of the African Security Sector Network

Mikhail Khodorkovski, Exiled Russian opposition activist

Oxana Melnychuk, Director of the centre for political analysis and communication Unified for Ukraine

Shole Pakravan, Iranian activist, mother of Reyhaneh Jabbari, sentenced to death and executed for the murder of her alleged rapist

Pramila Patten, UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflicts

Michel Wieviorka, French sociologist

Nathan Law, Hong Kong activist

resistance movements could bring together people from very different political backgrounds for the duration of a struggle. He was closely involved in the birth of the Solidarnosc movement in Poland in 1980, and remembers a remarkable impetus driven by a very positive, open, non-violent idea of nationhood, which has now been transformed into authoritarian nationalism. In these grassroots movements where inequality of forces often predominates, is



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Shole Pakravan

rise to bloody repressions. *'In the five other countries,'* she explained, *'waves of massive support accompanied the military's accession to power and constituted their best means of remaining there. This reveals a powerful revolutionary wave that Africa had not experienced before, as in the Arab world, but which is now taking on a nationalist character. The authoritarian practices implemented by these regimes are not condemned by the people, who consider that democracy, reduced to its strict electoralist version with no individual or collective progress, has not kept its promises.'* Bertrand Badie confirmed these statements: *'What is the value of democracy if it doesn't bring you anything?'*

What is the value of democracy if it doesn't bring you anything?

Bertrand Badie

there a form of legitimate violence? In response to this question, Michel Wieviorka remained cautious. *'Yes, it is true that violence sometimes paves the way,'* he said, recalling the execution of Francoist President Carreiro Blanco by ETA in the 1970s, which contributed to Spain's transition to democracy.

And what about the African continent, the scene of numerous coups d'état since 2020? Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Chad, Sudan, Niger and even Gabon, where we have seen demonstrations of popular support for these coups d'état which are shaking up our conception of them. Niagalé Bagayoko, president of the African Security Sector Network, cited two scenarios: in Chad and Sudan, the accession to power took place against popular will and gave

Reactionary wave

Delphine Allès, Professor of political science and vice-president of INALCO, stated her belief that the common point of resistance movements is that they express dissatisfaction with the lack of control over the destiny of populations. *'In the 50s and 60s, recently decolonised peoples felt that they were invited to the UN international table with a secondary position. This was formalised in 1961 with the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement, with a discourse that was not anti-establishment but universal and constructive. Gradually this*



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Nathan Law



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Oxana Melnychuk

transformed into a certain bitterness and a questioning of the international order.' Michel Wieviorka, who wants us to remain vigilant about the excesses of these mobilisations, and Niagalé Bayayoko outlined their concern about the reactionary wave, which seems to be reaching the African continent, and not just that. At the conclusion of this first round table, Bertrand Badie noted that the dialogue between social unease and social energy is structural. And, addressing the young people in the audience: *'If you want to understand international relations, it's no longer based on geopolitics, but on a new sociology of the world based on this infinity of social parameters.'* Pramila Patten, the UN special representative on sexual violence in conflicts since 2017 (see Zooming in on), gave a poignant testimony in relation to the rape victims she was able to meet in the field.

Resisting: at what cost?

But active resistance also has a cost for those who embrace it. To illustrate this point, a second round table was held with activists and dissidents such as Nathan Law, a Hongkonger exiled to London since 2020 following his active participation in the Umbrella Movement. This young man in his thirties talked about the trigger for

his commitment and its consequences. *'The collapse of civil society in Hong Kong took only a year,'* he recalled. *It was a free place, like Paris, even if we didn't elect our leaders. Everything can collapse in a few months, that's an important lesson.'* Shole Pakravan – Iranian activist and mother of Reyhaneh Jabbari, who was sentenced to death for the murder of her alleged rapist – took over to tell the story of her commitment, which she owes to her daughter, who was executed in prison in 2014. *'She wrote every confession she was asked to write, but in 2014 the government and security services asked her to write a letter and say: "I was a teenager, I didn't know I can't identify right from wrong, and this man didn't want to rape me, in fact. And I made mistakes." I, as a mother, begged Reyhaneh: "Please write this letter." Because I wanted my daughter back and to come home. But my daughter told me: "No. I cannot close my eyes and I cannot wash the face of a rapist," she said, defining herself as a soldier for justice.'*

The entire history of Ukraine is the history of resistance to Russia

Oxana Melnychuk

Oxana Melnychuk, director of the centre for political analysis and communication Unified for Ukraine, also gave her insight into the Ukrainian resistance, which she believes is ingrained in the DNA of the Ukrainian people. *'The entire history of Ukraine is the history of resistance to Russia,'* she said, recalling in passing that resistance was a very individual matter. In tandem, the Russian dissident Mikhail Khodorkovsky could only agree, reiterating his support for the Ukrainian people. Twenty years ago, when he was the head of an oil group, he sent a report to the Kremlin to report corruption at the highest



Izzeldin Abuelaish

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levels of the Russian government. He ended up in prison for 10 years and went on four hunger strikes to protest this injustice. *'Since the amendment of the Constitution in 2021, it has become clear that fair elections do not exist. A change in power is only possible through revolution.'*

Izzeldin Abuelaish, author of the book *I Shall Not Hate*, grew up in Gaza refugee camps before becoming the first Palestinian doctor in an Israeli hospital. In January 2009, Israeli tanks fired on his house and killed three of his daughters and one of his nieces. *'My response to this tragedy is my fight, not for hatred, but for peace.'*



Watch the full debate on YouTube

The message Bertrand Badie took away from these discussions was the cost of non-resistance and the need for strategists to move on. *'There are 8 billion players in this world, not 193 as is too often said. The new international relations are based on microsociology.'*

ZOOMING IN ON

Pramila Patten Rape as a tactic of war

Pramila Patten, a British-and Mauritian lawyer, was a member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women until 2017, when she was appointed UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in conflicts. Her mission: to travel the entire world to track down these crimes and their perpetrators. She addressed the audience to give an overview of her mission.

'The use of rape as a tactic of war, torture, terror and political repression is a difficult subject to confront openly and I welcome the initiative to highlight the issue of sexual violence in conflicts, which is one of the greatest secrets of history and one of the greatest atrocities of the world today. At the Security Council last July, I presented some examples documented by my office during the year. Ladies and Gentlemen, the reality is that we are meeting at a time when trends in conflict-related sexual violence are worsening, and its continuing brutality on the battlefields of the 21st century continues to shock the collective conscience of humanity. We are experiencing massive, global turbulence marked by multiple cascading crises, increased militarisation, a coup epidemic and a rollback of women's and girls' rights. In an escalation that was unimaginable just eighteen months ago, a violent war has erupted in the heart of Europe. The world is facing the great-



Pramila Patten

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est number of conflicts since the Second World War while the number of people forced to flee their homes has reached the grim record of 110 million.

In Sudan, since the start of the armed conflict on 15 April between the Sudanese armed forces and the rapid support forces, sexual violence against displaced women and girls has raged. Over the past three years, the war in northern Ethiopia in Tigray has become one of the most violent and deadly conflicts on the planet. Sexual violence in the form of rape or cases of sexual slavery, sexual mutilation or forced pregnancies are still being used as a real weapon of war.

According to the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, the conflict has created more than

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10,000 victims of sexual violence. It is a serious problem with detrimental effects on victims, their families and their communities. Protection from sexual violence is not just an aspiration, it is a legal obligation. Our goal in making these crimes public is to give rape a history in order to deny it a future. United action in this area shows that their lives matter and signals to potential stakeholders that the world is watching.'