

Joseph Ki-Zerbo, the man who dreamt about Africa

In 2004, Editions de l'Aube teamed up with six other African publishing companies to publish *A quand l'Afrique ? (Still Waiting for Africa)* a collection of interviews between Joseph Ki-Zerbo and René Holenstein. This book springs from an encounter between two historians: Ki-Zerbo, a politician from Burkina Faso, (1922-2006), an emblematic intellectual figure in the fight for independence and winner of the Right Livelihood Award for his research on original development models; and René Holenstein, an expert on African realities who ran the Swiss Cooperation Office in Burkina Faso for several years before becoming the current head of the SDC's Good Governance Division.

"A quand l'Afrique" is expressed in a challenging tone. Adamant in his refusal to subscribe to the fatalistic views that so often abound in Africa, the book places the African continent back within its historical context, between a glorious past when the continent was home to the world's first civilisation – the Egyptian civilisation – and a future free of self-doubt and self-denigration, where hope is no longer a word spoken in vain but a realistic endeavour to be pursued from the present day forward.

As he asks his questions, some rather blunt or pointed, René Holenstein reveals the boldness of thoughts rich with ideas and imagination, rooted in an awareness of facts that few people in the west are familiar with. The first African to graduate from the Sorbonne University and author of "Histoire de l'Afrique noire" (*History of Black Africa*), Ki-Zerbo sets the record straight, dispelling the myths long perpetrated by colonial powers.

He reminds us that his continent still rests upon solid pre-colonial foundations. Africa's strength comes from power sharing, ethnic and religious diversity, informal ties of solidarity, so many conditions favouring the emergence of federalism. When René Holenstein asks whether Africa will ever be able to move into the mainstream, Ki-Zerbo replies: "Intellectually, we are perfectly capable of redefining Africa. We have promising niche markets, especially cultural ones. We have researchers, inventors, producers and creators in the areas of music, dance, sculpture, theatre, relationships, interaction with others, solidarity, innovative stewardship of environmental resources, approaches to health and mortality, respect for our ancestors, love and affection, managing conflicts... *I have the impression that Europe doubts that Africa has anything positive to contribute to the world. It reduces African history to the past decades when Africa was colonised and then poorly de-colonised... This is why we need to start with history and end with history. Apart from this eye-opening historical revision, there will be no new vision of the world and no new cosmogenesis bringing goods, services and value.*"

Bibliography

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