



Meeting of Political Analysis on Africa
for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the CEAN
(1958-2008)



Bordeaux Institute of Political Studies
Montesquieu-Bordeaux IV University
3-5 September 2008

Penser la République
Think Republic
Pensar a República

État, gouvernement, contrat social en Afrique
State, Government, Social Compass in Africa
Estado, governo e contrato social na África

Guests of honour: South Africa, Brazil

“There can be no other motivation for research
than the desire to understand.”

Christian GEFFRAY
La cause des armes au Mozambique
Paris, Karthala, 1990: 17

“Holding a reasonable discourse on sub-Saharan Africa has never been simple.
Doing so nowadays at the dawn of the century is even less so.”

Achille MBEMBE
De la postcolonie
Paris, Karthala, 2005: 7.

In October 2008, the CEAN (Centre for African Studies – Politics, Society and International Relations) will be fifty. Created initially to bring together the varied research being conducted on (at that time colonial) Africa at Bordeaux University, it soon found its own scientific identity in the analysis of politics in Africa. It is one of the two “Joined Research Units” (UMR) recognized by the CNRS within the Bordeaux Institute of Political Studies (“Sciences Po Bordeaux”). As a host laboratory of the Political Science Doctoral School of Montesquieu-Bordeaux IV University and the Institute of Political Studies, it is involved in a variety of Masters and PhD courses.

The CEAN wishes to mark its fiftieth anniversary by holding an international Meeting of political analysis on Africa. Although it does not intend to make a self-congratulatory event,

those first fifty years of its existence will indeed have their place. There are many questions to be addressed: who, at the beginning of the 21st century, can truly claim to understand the full scope of the many realities of “Africa” – sub-Saharan regions, Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, diasporas and emigration? Difficult as it is to address this sort of macro-question, it is nonetheless necessary (What is Africa? What is “development”? What does “post-colonial” mean? etc.). The intention is to address this set of questions from a perspective that is directly political, taking the word in its broadest acception, by studying not only the *Republic* but also the *republic*. It is quite purposefully that no precise definition is given in the title, the idea being that the analysis should range from its strictest sense (the “government”) to its broadest meaning (*res publica*), including the various acceptions of the state (in the sense of Weber, Marx, Elias, etc.). At all events, the focus will be on the standards of distribution, regulation and integration, and on the social, identity and gender participation and marginalisation that are appended, imposed or applied, by more or less authoritarian or democratic means, in societies that are inventing or reinventing “ways of making do” (evasion, trickery, appropriation, etc.).

This approach is necessarily multidisciplinary, in the image of the activity of the CEAN over the last twenty years – an activity that is very much that of an inter-disciplinary centre of political studies focussed on the many different faces of Africa. We are therefore inviting political scientists, historians, geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, economists and specialists in law and the arts to *converge* from their different standpoints towards political analysis through this study of the Republic.

Any meeting, even international and multidisciplinary, needs themes for structuration. Those defined here are not claimed to be exhaustive, but the intention is to address the central issues. Africa appears to be one of the “places in the world” where the question of the state seems at its most problematic with all the possible forms of negation (*failed, collapsed, weak, soft, strong, authoritarian, fragile states*), where there seem to be the fewest “emerging countries”, where “societies of citizens” seem most outnumbered by “societies of subjects” (in the sense of subjection, rather than that of action), where no one knows where to start tackling “corruption” and where globalization produces little in the way of industrialisation, unlike the other countries of the southern hemisphere. After a generation of studies on the state in Africa where do things stand today? The study of societies of citizenship or subjection will be structured around the following themes:

1. The state in its historicity

Looking beyond the “post-colonial” debate (although without ignoring it), it is necessary to analyse *the state in its historicity*: although the contemporary view will preside over the major part of the proceedings, a view of the long- or at least medium-term past is indispensable, requiring that we go back at least as far as the 19th century, with the switch to colonial capitalism imposed on societies that were either indigenous (in the literal sense) or had already been shaped by the first mercantile and servile colonial age in regions where colonisation came early. Historicity includes the role of conflicts in the construction of the state, and raises questions as to the very nature of the notions of “imported”, “projected”, “colonial state” and “coloniality”. What exactly can the transmission of the colonial state mean? Are there such things as an African “specificity”, “temporality” or “modernity”, and how do they fit into global history?

These questions can only be studied if we develop a critical approach consisting no longer in transposing a framework of analysis of the public space onto Africa, but in showing the extent to which it is the appropriation of Africa and the African experience (including, and doubtless above all, on the symbolic level) that has been the driving force behind the construction of the western idea of the nation and the republic. Also, a reflection would be

useful on the possibility to raise questions about France that are already common in other parts of the world, such as the evolution of the relationship between Africanness and Americanness in the United states, Brazil or the Caribbean?

2. The relationship between the individual and the citizen

Can the state only exist if it is clearly “differentiated” from society, and is this possible only if the individual is “autonomous”? This question provides an invitation to take a new look at the *relationship between the individual and the citizen*, the “position” of the individual between community and society (*Gemeinschaft – Gesellschaft*), and to take a fresh look at the citizenship-individualism-holism link. Questions must also be addressed, leaving approaches in terms of manipulation aside, on the social sense of the emergence of categories such as *indigénité*, *autochtony* or *genuinidade*. Why do these “categories” take on a meaning in countries that are so diverse, and how are they used by the states and by people? Are they new forms of nationalism, like radical Islam is in some other zones, or of subjectivation? What are the frameworks of (religious or ethnic) identification and mobilisation that co-exist within, and compose the *res publica*? How have structures, references and solidarities evolved and how does the individual fit into the public space in Africa? What type of structures of political opportunity exist for women? What are the terms on which these opportunities can actually be seized upon? What effective place can women conquer in mixed assemblies and parties? What modes of (conventional or non-conventional) political participation are relevant and effective? What is the situation in terms of “bottom-up politics”, derision and humour?

3. Categories of states, political dynamics of institutional design

This third theme proposes to take a fresh look at the *categories of states* and even at how such states are “labelled”: who decides on such qualifications as *failed*, *collapsed*, *weak*, *soft*, *strong*, *authoritarian* and *fragile states*, and what are the consequences? Over the medium term, what are the *political dynamics of institutional design*? How is the *res publica* apprehended in the different forms of state (unitarian, federal or decentralised states, power sharing, constitutional monarchy...)? What are the potential for, and limits on positive action measures to facilitate access of African women to political power? What type of women benefit from the different types of measures, and how representative and legitimate are these female political leaders? Are African states following up the nation state pattern? Must we continue to take exclusively the “nation-building” view that has pretty much defined the “legitimacy” of politics in Africa since independence?

4. Perceptions of power, political representations and practices

Another major set of questions revolves around *perceptions of power*, and therefore also the internalisation of the rules. What are the words of the Republic and how is it represented, from the point of view of linguists, anthropologists, political scientists or artists? How are the registers of power put into words, and how do political cultures show through (societies of citizens or subjects, acephalism, power of kinship, gender relations...)?

These questions refer more generally to the issue of *political representations and practices*: what is the link between *res publica*, public space(s) and civil society(ies)? What are the frameworks of political representation and mediation? What is the link between social movement and political party, between social movement and civil society? What are the loci and mechanisms through which citizens are associated in the exercise and control of power (institutional and participative innovations)? The party system may have taken over from the authoritarian model, but a detailed sociology of political parties hasn't yet been reached.

Besides this, Africa is today not only a continent that is home to some states with high levels of female representation in their parliaments and with one female head of state, above

all it is the continent with states boasting the most spectacular growth rates in female representation. However, these states that reserve a prime place for women in their decision-making institutions are something of an exception on the African continent. How, then, can we analyse this diversity in the representation of women in politics in Africa?

5. The Republic and globalization

The question of historicity mentioned previously must be taken in conjunction with the question of *globalization in and of the Republic*. What impact does globalization have on the way in which the *res publica* is managed and invented? How can the role of external players (notably newcomers such as China) and regional ones be analysed? How can the interaction between the Republic in Africa and what is sometimes considered the globalized Republic (WTO, alterglobalization or “counter-hegemonic globalization”, international civil society) be understood? What is the importance of groups of women of all parties and international networks, and what is the influence of the women’s/feminist movement in the Northern hemisphere?

This approach in the form of a profusion of questions may evolve as we receive proposals. The Meeting must be an opportunity for genuine work in an international atmosphere, and for a fruitful encounter between “Africanists” and non-Africanists. It is also for this reason that the CEAN has decided to “invite” two countries – South Africa and Brazil – with which it is developing growing scientific relations and which will have a major role to play in the future in the evolution of an “Africanism” rid once and for all of any “orientalist” taint.

Bordeaux, 15 October 2007

The Organisation Committee will make its selection among the proposals for workshops and papers on the basis of their congruence with the subject of the Meeting and its topics. The working languages of the Meeting are French, English and Portuguese, with simultaneous translation for the plenary sessions.

Calendar:

- 15 October 2007: diffusion of the Call for Paper (in French, English and Portuguese)
- 15 January 2008: workshops submission deadline
- 15 February 2008: validation of the workshops & online registration
- 15 March 2008: deadline for abstracts (one page, in one of the three languages of the Congress)
- 15 April 2008: validation of the papers
- 1 August 2008: papers reception deadline

Registration fees (including coffee breaks but not lunches or dinners)

- participation free of charge for speakers
- early fee (before May, 15th): €50
- late fee (from May, 15th): €70
- African colleagues residing in Africa: €30
- students (evidence of status will be required): €20
- secure online payment (Paypal) on the Meeting website from 15 February 2008, or by cheque bank transfer

Your attention is drawn to the fact that the CEAN will only be able to fund a few participants, Therefore participants are invited to find their own funding. The CEAN will send to the selected authors of papers an official invitation so that they can apply for aid from their institutions.

All correspondence should be sent to:

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