

https://dspace.org/

# The "Conference Nationale Souveraine" in Zaire and the Convention for a democratic South Africa: a comparative study through Claude Lefort's theory of democracy

**Nsundi Mbambi, Pascal**

**2008-03-19T12:04:18Z**
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/4692

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

# IV. GENERAL CONCLUSION: LESSONS FOR THE D.R. CONGO

Fundamentally, the CNS and the Codesa have been strong and important moments of the history of ex-Zaire and South Africa. They were moments that allowed the redefining, within a national consensus, of the profile of a new society, thought as democracy.

We have highlighted in previous section the features of Codesa, as a moment of democratic foundation in South Africa; it is now possible to underline some democratic features of the CNS in Zaire.

Certainly, the two experiences differed in many respects, notably their organization, the levels of participation, the duration, but also the definition of issues to deal with. In general, these experiences converge towards the pursued objectives, namely the definition of new foundations of governability of society, the definition of a new social contract appealing to the inclusivity of all social tendencies (political parties, civil organizations, government, etc.). In the specific case of Congo, the following elements need to be emphasized:

1. Pluralism

In the Congolese case, pluralism is visible through the number of participants. This means the CNS' determination to embrace, to bring together, all Zairians, without leaving any social substratum or community outside this forum. This pluralism is political, social, religious, tribal, ethnic, and linguistic. This pluralism encloses, as we said previously, the principle of inclusivity, a crucial principle for Claude Lefort. The Zairian people, who, for more than three decades, were kept apart from fundamental decision-making, are now conscious that this work cannot any longer be reserved for experts. "Specialists of politics", I mean 'politicians', have disappointed by their irresponsibility during Mobutu's regime. Now, it is important to listen to everyone in society, to build a new social order where everyone can participate.

2. Participation

Since the beginning of the CNS, all the plenary sessions were broadcast on national radio and television. This, particularly, allowed people outside the *Palais du Peuple* to take part in this forum. Those who could not benefit from media broadcastings turned to newspapers and magazines, which experienced a rapid and unexpected proliferation during this period. The issues discussed within the CNS were also debated on television or radio, as well in fora organized by other social actors like churches and universities in order to allow people to have their say on the definition of national institutions. Thus, the media played a fundamental role of intermediary between the delegates at the CNS and the people at home. The dialogue that they tried to establish was so strong we can affirm that the CNS' constitution was that of the whole Zairian people; naturally apart from those who resisted this change – Mobutu and his supporters.

3. The nature of issues

Compared to Codesa, the CNS had to deal with a wider range of issues. In the case of Codesa, the major issue was, of course, how to move from minority rule to majority rule by taking into account the issues related to redressing and improving the living conditions of the great majority of the population. But for the CNS, all social aspects had to be considered. It required every sector of society to be restructured. Thus, education, human and natural resources management, the economy, finances, tourism, agriculture, health, science, technology, industry, administration, and politics were all discussed.

For Lefort, as we have seen, democracy implies just this i.e. all can be questioned or called into question; there is nothing established in advance and any topic is subject to discussion.

Before ending, it is important to raise another question related to the apparent failure of the CNS. How to explain the non-implementation of the Zairian talks of the 1990's?

There are, of course, a lot of reasons, but I would like to emphasize two of them that seem to me crucial. The first one is the pursuit of personal interest in Congolese (Zairian) politicians. A great number of opponents to Mobutu's government tried to sabotage the outcome of the CNS. This can be illustrated by the case of Nguz a Karl I Bond, a former opponent, who became the Prime Minister of

Mobutu during the CNS. But beyond this, what is crucial is the fact that personal advantage or personal interest seems more important to Congolese politicians than the national interest, a concept around which all great nations built their policies. Here is perhaps the big difference with South Africa.

At the same time it should be remembered that rather than negotiate his departure, as in South African context, the CNS chose to force Mobutu to leave office. The formation of two sensitive commissions during this conference – the Commission of Assassination and the Commission of Corruption – was a message sent to those who had ruled by violence and embezzlement to go away.

In short, a lack of national reconciliation is the most important explanation of the failure of the CNS. If, in South African context, Codesa can be considered as a success, it is because it set out to reconcile the South African past with its future, and the South African people, Blacks and Whites, Indians and Coloured, ruled and rulers. And this exercise was continued by the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission), defined during the negotiation process. Had the Zairian focus been on national reconciliation rather than condemnation, perhaps the two wars of 1996 and 1998 could have been avoided.