WHEN HISTORY CANNOT WAIT:
DEMOCRATIZATION THROUGH NATIONAL CONFERENCES IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA
CASE STUDY: BENIN AND DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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Abstract

In order to understand the outcome of national conferences and to answer to main questions of this research (about the importance of national conferences for Africans, the place and impact of national conferences in political development of those states, for political world and political science), my approach focused on some causes. There were some factors which conditioned the outcome of the conferences and I analyzed comparatively some common factors for both cases and their influence in the process of democratization: the nature of previous regime, the role of political elite, the role of civil society, the role of Catholic Church, the process of state-building and the pressure of the main external powers (former colonial powers and United States.)

Keywords: national conferences, neo patrimonial regimes, state-building, civil society, Catholic Church

Introduction

There were two main strategies of democratization in Africa, depending on the nature of the previous regimes and the choices of the incumbent presidents: the pattern used by some leaders who accepted to

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hold „free" elections hoping to yield them in order to maintain themselves in power (specific especially for former English colonies) and the pattern of national conferences, specific for Francophone Africa.

My research focuses on the second pattern, the democratization trough national conferences and seeks to present the phenomenon by taking into account two entities: Benin and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

You might ask: why Benin and DRC? Benin is too small if compared with DRC, then their position on the continent is very different, etc. and that's true. But my interest was to find out how transition was initiated through national conference, taking into account some previous common factors which these countries (but not only) had in common. These factors which had the main influence over this process, from my point of view, were: the nature of political regime, „state-building" (in Fukuyama's terms[1]) or making a new institutional architecture, the importance of civil society and religious groups –especially Catholic Church which had the main role in tranzition- and the influence of external powers –USA, former colonial powers-.

Last but not least, a national conference took place in each one of these countries; it was invented as the best solution by far and managed to succeed in Benin, but failed in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The main questions of this research are about the importance of national conferences for Africans, the place and impact of national conferences in political development of those states, for political world and political science. That's why I considered that a view of the previous situation of national conferences help us to a better understand of the role, impact and outcome of these conferences. I analyzed comparatively some factors existing in both cases and their influence on this process. In my point of view, we must find out the causes in order to notice the importance and impact of effects. I wanted to find out how theories of Huntington about institution and political changes and Fukuyama of state-building can apply to African transition through national conferences.

My hypothesis is that national conferences were an African invention which occurred when history couldn't wait, when internal and external context and an emerging awareness of a national entity and public welfare

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[1] Francis Fukuyama, "The Imperative of State-Building", in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.15, No.2, April 2004, pp. 17-31.

beyond individual or ethnic groups made pressures for change. When Benin found out this solution, it was not another Poland, but an "African Poland", it didn't imitated the way in which Poland initiated transition in Europe, because national conferences were more complex regarding the dimensions –representatives of a variety of groups-, the influence it exerted over a number of African states, the leading role of Catholic Church and the inner causes of African states which I'm going to expose further.

Furthermore, the originality of Benin's national conference is given by the fact that it was put forward by Kérékou, but also recommended by France. At the end of '89a national conference seemed to be the best solution because it had a precedent: there was another crisis in Benin in 1979 and the regime saved the situation by organizing a "conference des cadres"; when Kérékou was talking about national conference in 1989, he was thinking at the conference from 1979.[2] Then, there had to be a sort of a national or public, collective awareness in order to be able to organize such a process.

I made use of some theories, writings of some well-known writers of this domain, especially, Michael Bratton and Nicholas wan de Walle[3] who wrote about neopatrimonialism and political transition in Africa, Samuel Huntington[4], Francis Fukuyama,[5] which guided my research.

Neopatrimonial regimes of Mobutu SeseSeko and Mathieu Kérékou

First of all, the biggest cause from which flourished the others, was the nature of political regime. The Independence of African states occurred in the context of Cold War and, as Huntington noticed[6], the two giants conflicting in the Cold War, USA and Soviet Union, put forward two opposed models for new African states, ready to be swallowed into this turmoil.

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[2] Thomas Bierschenk, "Democratization without Development: Benin 1989-2009", in *Springer Science*, 25 July 2009,pp 337-357, p. 340.

[3] Michael Bratton, Nicolas Van de Walle, "Neopatrimonial Regims and Political Transitions in Africa"in *World Politics*, Vol.46, No.4, July 1994, pp. 453-489.

[4] Samel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, 1973.

[5] Francis Fukuyama, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-31.

[6] Samel P. Huntington, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

First of them stressed the need of free elections, a superficial democracy and economic aid and the second one, stressed the political dimension, an alternative of "governments that can govern".[7] But the way in which these governs governed, we're going to find out.

As for previous political regime, I chose the two authoritarian leaders, because after the Independence, African countries were marked by internal struggles for power and Mathieu Kérékou in Benin and Mobutu SeseSeko in DRC ended that period and introduced stability, if compared with previous period; they had an important role in state-building process and they succeed to maintain themselves in power until they were removed peacefully (Kérékou), or violently (Mobutu). In order to delimitate their states of former colonial powers which were on the same side with the USA during the Cold War, the independent states chose the opposite pattern put forward by Soviet Union[8], that of an authoritarian regime. But, African leaders adapted these new regimes to African "authenticity" (a notion invented in 1972 by Mobutu and taken afterwards in various degrees by all African leaders)[9]. With this respect, the resulted political regimes were "hybrid", a "military-Marxist regime" in Benin[10] and an "authentic" one in RDC, based on Mobutuism.[11] These delimitations went further and both leaders abrogated even the constitutions adopted around the independence.

State-building process

After independence, both leaders brought a relative stability, stoping for a while the struggles for power and this which should have been vital for their cardinal mission: state-building[12]. Before the colonization, there had

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[7] *Ibidem*, p. 8.

[8] Crawford Young, "The Heritage of Colonianism", in John Harbeson si Donald Rothchild (Ed.), *Africa in World Politics. Reforming Political Order*, Fourth Edition, Westview Press, 2009, p. 33.

[9] Peta Ikambana, *Mobutu's Totalitarian Political System. An Afrocentric Analysis*, Routlege, New York & London, 2007, p. 24.

[10] Thomas Bierschenk, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

[11] Préambule du Consitution du 15 août 1974 du Congo Zaire [http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/cd1974.htm], 25 May 2015.

[12] Fukuyama defines *state-building* as a process of building new guvernmental institutions and streightening of the existing ones (p. 17).

never been states-in a modern sense- in Africa, but they took shape at the independence, overlaped on former colonies. So to speak, „state" was imported by former colonies as a new form of organization of a political comunity which needed new institutions. State-building means in these cases, a matter of political and economical integration in a state structure /at a state level before that regional or local level.

Therefore, another problem linked to the political regime was that of state-building. When a political community steps forward and surpasses the traditional period, or when the ancient regime, the old institutions don't work and achieve their aims no more, there is a need for change. Decolonization offered such a context and independence meant creation of independent, sovereign states, so a need for new institutions. It was a time for "state-building" in Fukuyama's terms. This was the point neglected by USA: the construction of new political institutions suitable for this new construction.[13]

But, besides the authoritarian regimes (the Mobutu's regime slipped down towards a totalitarian regime especially from 1974 on), "state-building" was a failure. Huntington defined an institution as an expression and "behavioral manifestation of the moral consensus and mutual interest"[14], but as we can notice, institutions created after the independence (and I am not referring to the period between independence and coming into power of Kérékou-1974-and Mobutu -1965-, a period full of violence and struggles for power among different ethnic groups, but to the period of their political regime, associated with the process of state-building).

For a few years (until 1974 for DRC and 1979 Benin), it seemed that both leaders and their regimes were those who would lift their states, because of an economic development and a relative political stability, the investments into public services and public policies, in education, health system, and so on.[15] But then, both leaders practiced misleading economic policies, without paying attention to the economic costs of their network of clients which they were building at that time. They inherited their countries with a good economic background and the slightly growth during the first years of their

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[13] Samel P. Huntington, *op. cit.,* pp. 7-8.

[14] *Ibidem,*p. 10.

[15] James Putzel, Stefan Lindemann and Claire Schouten, *Drivers of Change în the Democratic Republic of Congo: The Rise and Decline of The State and Challenges for Recontruction,* Crisis States Research Center, DESTIN, Working Paper No. 26, 2008, pp. v-vi.

regime[16], made them to think that public resources are infinite. At the beginning, public resources were bigger than the network of clients, but in a couple of years the network was growing and the resources (natural or national treasury) proved themselves to be limited and overcome by supporters of political regime.

Therefore, at the beginning of these regimes, it seemed that a sort of 'mutual interest' was attained. But soon after, there was no compatibility anymore among the interests of different groups of society and between them and those of the leaders and their "clients", because these neopatrimonial regimes were characterized first of all by the authoritarian leaders who managed to maintain their position thanks to a system of clients.[17] In such circumstances, state-building was used by Kérékou and Mobutu for personal purposes, not public ones, in order to maintain them in power and to maintain the system which they had created. With this respect, institutions were used as means of control for the access and distribution of power and resources. This control was exerted by means of the authoritarian regime and one-single party which was parasitizing all state's institutions. Besides, the control of means of coercion was under the monopole of the president[18], who strengthened them and named in charge of them their relatives or friends[19], people they could trust.[20]

Civil society

Building their political regime, both leaders subordinated state-building to this aim and very soon civil society started to be excluded from benefits by regime, even if all people were "represented" through the unique party. Mutual interest and moral consensus were produced by leader's (Mobutu) will or the will of a small group, an oligarchy (Benin-Central Committee of PRPB), imposed as national interest, but it was in fact the private interests of leader and his clients.

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[16] Peta Ikambana, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-37.

[17] Michael Bratton, Nicolas Van de Walle, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

[18] Robert Bates, *When Things Fell Apart. State Failure in Late-Century Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 45.

[19] *Ibidem*, pp. 45-46.

[20] Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa.A History of the Continent Since Independence*, Public Affairs, New York, 2011, p. 434.

With this respect, here is the paradox of these regimes: they claimed themselves to be the expression and manifestation of the whole people, a unity, but in fact, they divided society into 2 main sides: outsiders and insiders and the number of outsiders grew constantly up to the national conferences.

Up to the beginning of the '80, both leaders had built their clientelist network, eliminated opposition (Mobutu did that very violently, using imprisonment and murder, or using institutions to give death sentences executed in public space as an example for all those who would try to challenge or oppose the system[21]). There was no political unity, because anew cleavage occurred: the pluralism was eliminated and those excluded from political expression or economic opportunities formed the group of outsiders which was getting bigger and bigger. Insiders were those useful for the regime to survive and their number decreased constantly up to the end; they were motivated by the material (economical), social benefits, their support was neither unconditioned, nor conditioned by a sort of belief or public/national loyalty.

This cleavage, insiders-outsiders, implied an ethnic calculus. Among those who were privileged, in both cases, were leader's relatives and his ethnic group; Here are some differences between the two leaders: Mobutu privileged especially the Binza group which had supported him to take over the power, but excluded almost entirely the provinces from east (Katanga, both Kivu, etc.) which led those people to develop local networks semi-autonomous[22]. This cleavage also led to ethnic conflicts and Mobutu took care to provoke them in order to limit any attempt to overthrow him, applying the principle "divide and rule". In Benin, Kérékou tried to use the Marxism-Leninism in order to create a kind loyalty beyond the ethnic one, but he didn't succeed in the end[23]. Then, the ethnic group of Kérékou –Somba- was too small and too far from the capital city, so he had to obtain a larger support than that and he privileged

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[21] Peta Ikambana, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-59.
[22] Heinrich Matthee, "The context and dynamics of war in Congo-Kinshasa since august 1998", in *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, Vol.28, No.2, I998, pp. 252-264, p. 253.
[23] Tyler J. Dickovick, "Legacies of Leftism: ideology, ethnicity and democracy in Benin, Ghana and Mali", in *Third World Quartely*, Vol. 29, No. 6, 2008, p. 1124.

a majority of people, not a minority, as Mobutu did. So, Kérékou focused more on the integration and de-ethnicisation into the organizations of PRPB, so to speak, into bureaucracy and military force.[24]

In order to give privileges and to satisfy their supporters, both leaders made a process of nationalization, which in DRC was an 'authentic' one, named 'zairianization'[25] (from the name of the country, Zair). This was one of the last big stages of exclusion and those excluded from formal means, began to use the informal ones and the main field where they did that was economics. The informal economy expanded very fast,[26] [27] attracting even insiders who considered it a new form of enriching, or the former insiders who were at that moment outsiders, because of economic crisis which made leaders to reduce their networks and to throw away "useless" people. All average citizens were pushed into informal economy by increasing bad living conditions. Both leaders were aware of this phenomenon, but they took their advantages from that.

It is worth to notice that all these characteristics highlights that during these political regimes, both states turned into "predatory states" in Douglass North's terms.[28]

Political opposition

In the last decade, in DRC a political opposition was strengthening; it was led by Etienne Tshisekedi, which challenged more and more the establishment. The Catholic Church was increasingly active too: politicians and bishops wrote to Mobutu and explained that the country was in collapse and the solution was a national forum which would decide a new direction. But Mobutu reacted violently, arresting politicians, people, killing

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[24] *Ibidem.*

[25] Kisangai N. F. Emizet, "Confronting Leaders at the Apex of the State: The Growth of the Unofficial Economy in Congo", in *African Studies Review,* Vol. 41, No.1 (April 1998), pp. 99-137, pp. 103-104.

[26] Thomas Bierschenk described the informal economy of Benin in *op.cit.,* p. 345.

[27] James Putzeldescribed the informal economy of Zaire in *op. cit.,* p 12.

[28] Douglass C. North, *Structure and Change in Economic History*, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1981, p. 22.

them and so on.[29] At the external pressures, Mobutu allowed in 1987 the party Union pour la Democratie et le Progres Social- led by Tshisekedi to exist officially, but tried constantly to intimidate it, sending army to stop any meeting.[30]

At the end of '80, both states were in collapse: corruption at any level in any institution, economic crisis with an informal economy surpassing the formal one, a neglected army, a huge unemployment rate, students without a future, no public investment, strikes, etc. So, internal context exerted pressures for change.

External pressures

At the beginning, USA and the western block thought that economic growth leads to political growth, but they thought wrong, because all the external aid was controlled by the president and used according to his will and interests, not for public policies[31]. At the end of Cold War, western block needed no more supporters around the world and through International Financial Institutions, decided to limit its financial aid and to condition it by some changes, both political and economic. Being in a state of bankruptcy, Benin and DRC couldn't deny such demands.

This was an important factor of initiating transition, because at that moment external donors, demanded political changes for the first time besides the economic ones. In the report of World Bank, from 1989, political demands were clearly mentioned: it was time for "less govern, but better governance"[32]. Kérékou was more obedient to those demands, but Mobutu tried to avoid them, exerting pressure over the multinational and local companies in order to obtain incomes and to maintains his aims.[33]

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[29] Peta Ikambana, *op. cit.,* p. 59.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 60.

[31] Robert Bates (*op. cit.,* p. 44) and Martin Meredith (*op. cit.,* p. 434) described more about this topic regarding Benin and R. Bates (*Ibidem)* and Alex Thompson (*An Introduction to African Politics*, 3rd edition, Routledge, 2010, pp. 233-239) gave more detailes about Zair.

[32] World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth,* Nov. 1989, pp. 37-38, [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/1999/12/02/00017 8830_98101901364149/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf], 25 May 2015

[33] Heinrich Matthee, *op. cit.,* p. 254.

Catholic Church

Catholic Church was the best organized institution after the ruling party. Its activism was given by the fact that it was excluded by both leaders in the name of "authenticity", because Catholic Church was a remnant of the colonial period. During these political regimes, Catholic Church was the only institution which succeeded to give cohesion beyond ethnic identity, to unite outsiders and to give them at least a moral support; it was "the big player, the body to which they turn in time of crisis."[34] Then, when state couldn't offer basic public services, in education, health, etc., Church helped people, as it did during the colonial time.[35] From this point of view it is no wonder why these societies trusted this religious institution and gave it the leading role during national conferences. Then, the majority of these people were Catholics (around 50% out of entire population of 60 million in DRC at the end of '80s[36]), so it was its moral duty to protect its followers. In Benin, a certain opposition of Catholic Church occurred in 1974, when Kérékou adopted Marxism-Leninism as the guiding ideology and then nationalized all catholic schools. Then, Church expanded its social actions, both in towns and villages and that was interpreted as a stimulant for awakening of a slight, local awareness.[37] In Zaire, the opposition between Catholic Church and political regime began in 1972, as a result of Mobutu's "authenticity" which changed all Christian names, abolished all Christian celebration and subordinated Church to the unique party. From that moment on, Catholic Church was increasingly critical, but active criticism of regime unfolded during the last decade.[38] In DRC too, Church was an alternative of dysfunctional state.

In 1985 in Benin took place a council of bishops regarding not a religious issue *stricto sensu*, but a political one: they wrote a letter for Kérékou demanding him to accept students' requests.[39] In Zaire, bishops sent a letter to Mobutu in 1990, blaming the nature of political regime as a source of

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[34] Patrick Claffey, *Christian Churches in Dahomey-Benin. A study of their socio-political role,* BRILL, Leiden, Boston, 2007, p. 222.

[35] James Putzel, *op. cit.,* p. 42.

[36] *Ibidem.*

[37] Patrick Claffey, *op. cit.,* pp. 194-195.

[38] James Putzel, *op. cit.,* p. 42.

[39] Thomas Bierschenk, *op. cit.,* p. 342.

state's bankruptcy[40]. Besides, Catholic Church had an important role starting with its highest level. Between 1980 and 1990, Pope John Paul II visited Africa 12 times, including 2 visits in Benin and 2 in Zaire; the new Pope, adopted a new discourse and moved the accent on new concepts: "development" (*Populorum Progressio*) and "solidarity".[41]

The important role of Catholic Church in these states is emphasized by the fact that a bishop chaired the national conference –Catholic Church had a leading role of transition in most of African countries with national conferences-; after elections, Catholic Church retired, but remained a supervisor of socio-political evolution.[42]

The important role of Catholic Church in this process is given by the fact that political vacuum created, opposition forces being fragmentized, fragile, as well as the civil society. All institutions were weak and people needed a moral, neutral authority, as a mediator among civil and political elites.

Civil Society

At the late of '80 something happened in the collective mentality; people felt that the gap between them and those in power, between mutual interests and interests of those in charge, was too big and began to act. The main actors were from academic world, students and professors, workers, but they were weak in Benin and much weaker in Zaire. Social movements of that time were a sign of an emerging civil society. Some authors (Bierschenk[43], Dickovick[44], for instance) stated that Kérékou' politics of integration into PRPB of population along with a de-ethnicisation beyond ethnic lines, was a good thing for this mobilization and made it possible. In other words, Kérékou succeeded in a higher degree than Mobutu to create a sort of 'national' identity, an awareness which is above ethnic, regional, identities, etc.

In Benin, in 1989 there were many strikes in Universities, then workers joined them into a general strike. Krekou, who was hesitating, was thus forced to make a decision, because external powers didn't want to help

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[40] Peta Ikambana, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[41] Patrick Claffey, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.

[42] *Ibidem*, p. 219.

[43] Thomas Bierschenk, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

[44] Tyler J. Dickovick, *op. cit.*, p. 1129.

him and army was undisciplined and didn't support Kérékou anymore[45].
Kérékou announce a constitutional reform, a national conference and the
abandonment of Marxism-Leninism, on 7 December 1989.

In Zaire, civil society was almost inexistent in terms of contesting
the establishment, because the state of entire exclusion of some ethnic groups
and the state's collapse made groups to struggle each other; Mobutu 'helped'
them in order to obstruct the raising of a powerful opposition. But the challenge
came from Universities: the strikes from the 1970s made Mobutu to integrate
students in his system, but in the late of '80 there were too many unemployed
people and students had no future after studies.[46] Mobutu initially accepted
some concessions under the external pressures (the decrease of financial
aid) on 24 April 1990, but not for a national conference.[47]

Then, the international context –the fall of communism in Europe
and the end of Cold War– was favorable to democratization, because these
regimes had no legitimacy anymore.

National Conferences

Babacar Gueye defined ,national conference' as "an invention,
an African contribution at the theory of democratization", composed by
representatives of different organizations from civil society and the outcomes
are variable.[48] Let's see how they unfolded in Benin and DRC.

Benin was a pioneer in this process, because it initiated it, it found
this solution to initiate and negotiate transition and it was the only one where
national conference had a real success. The conference was unfolding between

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[45] Thomas Bierschenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 339-340.

[46] Peta Ikambana, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

[47] According to Bobb F. Scott, *Historical Dictionary of Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire) African Historical Dictionaries*, No. 76, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, Maryland, and London, 1999, p. xxx, on 24 April 1990 Mobutu announced the end of single-party regime and the beginning of a two-parti system. But Bierschenk, *op. cit.*, p. 25, wrote that that decission lead to an explosion of number of political parties: more than 200 parties were founded, having an ethnic base. Martin Meredith, *op. cit.*, p. 437, agrees with Bierschenk and adds that this was Mobutu's plan, because he wantend a split political arena, not a strong opposition. This was called ,multi-mobutuism'.

[48] Babacar Guèye, "La démocratie an Afrique: success et resistances", in *Pouvoirs.* Nr.129, 2009, pp 5-25, p. 5.

19 and 28 February 1990 and many authors stressed more the importance of its outcome: the schedule of transition, free and competitive elections, the institutions of transition and so on. But from my point of view, there is another huge importance on this conference, before the outcome to occur and which is somehow neglected. There participated 493 delegates at the conference, including those of ruling party[49] and their gathering and work highlighted that it was for the first time over many decades, or maybe for the very first time in these state's history, when mutual interests, moral consensus and an identity at a national level were attained against private interests of individuals or ethnic groups. The national conference couldn't take place if those people weren't aware of public welfare, if they weren't aware that they had to do something for them as a nation, as a unity, something which the unique party hadn't succeed to attain during the authoritarian regime, but it determined this awareness in the end. The single party hadn't succeeded to integrate people voluntarily in a strong unity, but involuntarily it determined their integration into a unity against the regime and when it occurred, it turned against the regime itself.

At that moment, institutions created and those designed by national conference worked for public interests and put forward public policies. The delegates had the tough work to create institutions based on public/ national loyalty, not tribal, ethnic, etc. It was the moment of a real state-building which should have been done soon after independence. 'Conference Nationale de la Forces Vives de la Nation' was chaired by archbishop of Cotonou, Isidor de Souza; on February 25 the conference proclaimed itself sovereign[50]. The delegates established institutions of transition (Haut Conseil de la Republique- the Parliament of transition, the most important institution with legislative and juridical powers[51], chaired by the same archbishop, a new govern, NicephoreSoglo being elected as prime-minister of transition), but Kérékou was maintain as president with limited powers until the scheduled elections[52]. What is worth to notice is that transition unfolded according to the schedule;

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[49] Pearl T. Robbinson, "The National Conference Phenomenon in Francophone Africa", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 36, nr. 3, 1994, pp. 575-610, p. 575.

[50] Thomas Bierschenk, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

[51] Noel Dossou-Yovo, "The experience of Benin", in *International Journal on World Peace*, vol. 16, No. 3, September 1999, pp. 59-74, p. 68.

[52] Martin Meredith, *op. cit.*, pp. 434-435.

elections took place in 1993 and Kérékou entered the competition, but Soglo managed to succeed and Kérékou accepted the results and retired. The elections were qualified by international observers fair and free.[53] In 1990 Freedom house[54] qualified Benin as "partly free"-until 1990 Benin had been hot free- and beginning with 1991 Benin became a "free" country.

The national conference of Benin was broadcasted all over the continent and then pressures for such a peaceful change occurred in other countries. Thereby, between 1990 and 1993, 7 countries held national conferences[55]: Gabon, Congo, Mali, Togo, Niger, Zaire and Chad. In all these states, the national conference declared itself souveraigne, except Gabon.

For Baratton and de Walle, there were 4 main types of neopatrimonial regimes in Africa, Benin having a „plebiscitary one-party system" and DRC the „personal dictatorship" system. The Benin's political regime is characterized – as a distinctive mark- by holding elections, with a massive public participation (at least 90%), but the only role of these elections is to reconfirm the incumbent president. Personal dictatorship is characterized distinctively by a strong exclusion, a very strong ruler with an absolute power.[56] These authors make a causal link between the type of political regime and the way in which tranzition unfolds: with this respect, in Benin, the plebiscitary one-party system is a „cause" in itself of National Conference, and in RDC, personal dictatorship is a „cause" of failure of NC, the ruler may be removed only with violence.

Keeping this in mind, let's see briefly how Mobutu dealt with conference. Following the same principle, divide and rule, Mobutu declared on April 24, 1990 the acceptance of multi-party system and encouraged many satellite parties to emerge, because he didn't want a strong opposition, but a weak one.[57] As a result, there emerged over 200 parties, weak, small, having an ethnic beckground. He promised even a national conference, but he postponed it several times, because he didn't plan to be removed. He used his prezidential guard, well payd, to repress the protests. But external powers, as USA or Great Britain, stated that they wouldn't give any

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[53] *Ibidem.*
[54] [http://www.freedomhouse.org/], 25 May 2015.
[55] Pearl T. Robbinson, *op.cit.,* pp. 580-581.
[56] Michael Bratton, Nicolas Van de Walle, *op. cit.,* pp. 474-475.
[57] *Ibidem.*

support, especially financial, if he didn'd liberalize political and economical field[58]. In such a context, Mobutu announced a national conference for August 1991; there participated 2670 delegates and the Conference even suceeded to declare itself souveraigne and make Mobutu accept it.[59] The conference was interrupted by Mobutu and his men under the pretext of army's rebelion, but under external pressures he accepted to share power with opposition: he coexisted with tranzitional institutions created by national conference, but whet they tried to limit Mobutu's power, he dismissed them.[60]

The national conference of Zaire followed the same pattern as that of Benin, but it didn't succeed, because Mobutu was too powerful to be overthrown. There were adopted important documents: a transitional act and others for a constitutional revision, new institutions of transition and socio-political ones; the delegates established a transitional government led by Tshisekedi adopted new economic, political, social policies and Mobutu accepted all of them initially; he had to remain in power until scheduled elections.[61]

The national conference in Zaire was chaired by a catholic bishop, Laurent Monsengwo[62]. Zaire's national conference was so radical and determined to change, that it changed all national symbols considered as signs of Mobutu's regime.

Meanwhile, external pressures continued. President Bush sent 3 letters to Mobutu in 1992 demanding him to retire, but he didn't want. Then President Clinton even retired the US ambassador in Zaire as a sign of protest. [63]

Mobutu ignored the conference, ordered its closure, dismissed Tshisekedi and even arrested the members of HCR on 24 February 1993and kept them hostages for 3 days[64]; he reinstated the constitution of 1967, dismissed the parliament of transition, made a summit of parties closed to him, and in October 1993 made a fusion between the parliament of transition

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[58] Martin Meredith, *op. cit.,* p. 433.

[59] Peta Ikambana, *op. cit.,* p. 39.

[60] Martin Meredith, *op. cit.,* p. 437.

[61] Peta Ikambana, *op. cit.,* pp. 39-43.

[62] *Ibidem*, p. 44.

[63] Martin Meredith, *op. cit.,* p. 439.

[64] Peta Ikambana, *op. cit.,* p. 46.

and his parliament and it was fully realized on January 1994.[65] On 30 January 1995 the parliament voted to postpone the scheduled elections for 9 July 1997, then the archbishop was dismissed[66] and thus any trace of national conference was erased.

Thus national conference of Zaire ended and Mobutu's personality and his ability to manipulate opposition allowed him to maintain in power until 1997 when he was overthrown violently by a rebellion led by Kabila.

Conclusions

In this paper I tried to highlight the importance of national conferences for Africans, the place and impact of national conferences in political development of those states which held them. I wanted to analyze some common factors and their influences over national conferences.

I analyzed the neopatrimonial regimes of Kérékou and Mobutu with their single party system and clientelist networks, how they used the process of state-building for personal purposes not for public interest, how the institutions created during their regime weren't based on 'moral consensus' and 'mutual interest, as Huntington defined political institutions.

Then, these regimes hadn't succeeded to unite all civil society into a unique entity, but led to the opposite result: a new cleavage between insiders –those useful for the regime to survive, the clientelist network- and outsiders, those excluded from political expression and economic benefits. Besides, these regimes succeeded involuntarily –by exclusion– to give birth of an emerging of collective awareness that the emerging civil society had to make something for public welfare. From my point of view, this was the most important thing which happened with these people, before national conferences and their outcome. It was for the first time over many decades, or maybe for the very first time in their history when public welfare, moral consensus and mutual interest was taking into account and formed the core of national conference's debates, beyond personal or ethnic interest. At that time they became aware that they are a national entity and change couldn't occur if they put forward private interest.

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[65] Bobb F. Scott, *op. cit.*, p. xxxii.
[66] *Ibidem*, p. xxxiii.

The Catholic Church had a leading role, because it was an old, well organized institution, from colonial time and when state was dysfunctional, it provided basic services or at least a moral support. Church was a firm opponent of the authoritarian regimes along with a weak political opposition and contributed to the emerging awareness of people. That's why these people gave it the leading role in transition, because it was the last source of trust.

Finally, the nature of political regime and personality of incumbents proved to influence the outcome of national conferences, as Bratton and Van de Walle wrote. The plebiscitary regime of Benin and Kérékou's attempt to incorporate all social categories were benefic for emerging of civil society and social movements. In the end all these factors led to a positive outcome of conference, with free elections and a peacefully change of regime. On the other hand, Mobutu's strong personality and his ability to manipulate political opposition helped him to manipulate and destroy the national conference and to maintain in power until 1997 when he was overthrown violently by Kabila.

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