

## Paradigms of Knowledge Production in Africa: Reflections from the Centre for African Studies, Maputo

**C**entro de Estudos Africanos (Centre for African Studies) at Eduardo Mondlane University, organised a series of seminars in March 2016 to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the institution. With the theme "Paradigms of Knowledge Production, Challenges in the Relationship with the State and Opportunities for a Repositioning of the CEA", the seminars provided an opportunity to "reflect on the CEA's strategy for the next 10 years, the role of centres for African studies in researching the history of Africa and how social science research institutions in Africa are funded".

Founded in 1976, the Centre for African Studies (CEA) is part of the Eduardo Mondlane University whose main aim is to promote research in the social sciences and humanities through individual and joint projects, and conduct educational extension activities

The week-long activities took place on the campus of Eduardo Mondlane University. The opening and closing ceremonies were attended by the Chancellor of the University and Government officials responsible for the Education and Research sector. Among them were Professor Orlando Antonio Quillambo, Chancellor, Professor Leda Florinda Hugo, Deputy Minister of Science, Technology, Higher and Technical Education, and Professor Armindo Saul Atelela Ngunga, Deputy Minister of Education and Human Development. In addition to these high-level personalities, there was Professor Luis Covane, former Minister of Culture, who took an active part in the deliberations.

The scientific week organised by the CEA was an opportunity to cast both a retrospective and a prospective glance on the work of the Centre. The retrospective glance was cast at the exciting life of an institution that emerged from a struggle and the primary purpose of which was to accompany, at the theoretical, ideological and political levels, the national liberation venture and the foundation of a new Independent State. Research-wise, the early years of the institution have been characterised by this initial impetus spurred by an exceptional man: Aquino

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de Bragança, founder of the CEA, who died as hero in 1986 at the same time as the father of Mozambique's Independence, President Samora Machel.

For the commemorative ceremony marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the leading historical figures of the CEA who are still alive were present. These included: Silvia do Rosario da Silveira Bragança; Bridget O'Laughlin – who gave an emotional testimony, but with dignity, on the attack that, in 1982, took the life of another historical figure of the CEA, Ruth First, in an office of the Centre; Jacques Depelchin, Sergio Vieira, Carlos Serra, Yussuf Adam, Mota Lopes, Colin Darch, Anna M. Gentili, Luis Brito, etc. They all seized the opportunity offered by the narrative on the origins of the CEA to expound the basic philosophy of this monument, its scientific aims and its political ambitions. These men and women who came from various back-grounds and various continents were all united by the same militant faith, which is still alive and well, despite the passage of time.

The fact that they have accepted, though they often came from elsewhere, to associate within the framework of the CEA, in order to help in the emergence of a new world, amply demonstrates that for them, the socialist and internationalist ideal was not an empty term. In their testimonies, they celebrated each in their own way this ideal, in its various forms: anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, antiapartheid, etc.

During the week, the recent past of the CEA was reviewed by the generation of researchers trained by the historical figures, and that took over from them as scientific leaders, administrators, etc. This generation was mainly represented by Professors Teresa Cruz e Silva and Isabel Casimiro, former Directors of the CEA. With proven scientific competence, this generation was able to bring to fruition the legacy received. It is indisputable that this generation shares the same militant

faith with the pioneers; but it would appear that some of its members had lost their first illusions in terms of promises of national independence, social justice, gender equality, etc. On the face of this generation, disenchantment and a form of scepticism could be read easily. It is this scepticism that seems to have sharpened its critical faculties, made of methodological, theoretical and ideological vigilance.

How, then, is the problem of scientific articulation of critical social and political issues raised today within the CEA? There are interesting clues in the research outlines in the five-year Strategic Plan which the current management team defended during the work. It seems that these lines of research attest to epistemological, methodological and ideological changes underway within CEA. In fact, they deal with health, population and development; environmental management; governance; citizenship; language and communication; identity; globalisation; and historical memory.

The lines of research thus defined clearly show that the new generation of researchers based at the CEA has adapted to the changes which, for a couple of decades now, have been taking place in social sciences on the global stage. These changes relate to the dominance of *consensual topics* around the issues of health, population, environment, ecology, citizenship, governance, democracy, language, communication, identity, diversity, multiculturalism, gender, memory, etc.

Such changes probably mean a "more peaceful approach" of scientific and social issues, and increased involvement by researchers in their research subjects, with the idea of commitment having undergone complete change in meaning. Today, the CEA seems to have resolutely engaged in a deep process of *aggiornamento* that requires, of course, a real commitment to "change", "openness" and "modernity", both epistemologically and methodologically.

Such is, it seems, the price to pay for being anchored to the "global market of

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knowledge", whose requirements in terms of competitiveness and quality are known. Besides, this is how the current leadership clearly poses the problem of the future of the CEA, in the face of the challenges of rare resources and competition experienced nowadays by research organisations as well as researchers themselves. During the week, the difficulty for social science research to exist today without recourse to donors and without compliance to their requirements in terms of agenda, quality and competition was clearly stressed.

The director of Mozambique's National Research Fund, Victoria Langa, touched all of these issues in her presentation of the outlines of the government's research funding policy. This presentation showed that the research funding promoted by the Mozambican government integrates the major rules which nowadays regulate research funding worldwide, in terms of quality requirement and competitiveness.

The CEA seems to have already agreed to apply to itself these rules because, as a response to the requirement for quality and competitiveness, the CEA leadership proposes the following: institutional capacity building, performance, diversification of funding sources, partnership negotiations, and good management (good governance).

At that stage of the debate, the critical question of the usefulness and cost-effectiveness of social science research was inevitably raised. To this question posed even by States – faced with the accounting vision of the world – Madam Victoria Langa gave an intelligent answer, showing that the usefulness of social sciences cannot be measured in terms of financial profitability, as their primary and ultimate vocation is to be producers of society, of policy, in short, of community. This purpose of social sciences being sufficient on its own, they no longer need theoretical or practical justification other than themselves. As one participant noted, the scientific work on society is the surest and most economical way of preserving social peace, maintaining harmony in society and increasing understanding between individuals, groups and communities.

I completed my stay at Eduardo Mondlane University by attending the Seminar of Prof. Jacques Depelchin held on 10 March in the morning. The Seminar entitled "Paradigmas de produção de Conhecimento: Desafios na Relação com o Estado

e Oportunidades para o Reposicionamento do CEA", was a vibrant plea for African research that is part of the long term of history. This is the reason why Egyptology and legendary figures as Cheikh Anta Diop and Théophile Obenga were at the centre of this teaching.

The stated goal of the course was the following: how to rebuild, in Africa, the teaching of history, anthropology, political sciences, philosophy, etc., from new educational material – Egyptian and African texts themselves – generated by multilingual translation – ancient Egyptian-African languages?

Jacques Depelchin's approach, which is original, necessarily raises clearly – at last – the fundamental methodological and epistemological issue of orientation and destination of the currently dominant "postcolonial" African historiography. We need to understand why this historiography seems to be more concerned with novel issues like "fragmentation", "fiction", the break with "monumental" history, "anarchy", de-foundation", "out-of-nation", the "pathos of origins", "nativism", etc.

Underlying this important Seminar, these debates can no longer be avoided, especially at a time when the CEA is revisiting its past, because the issues recalled above were introduced by postcolonial historiography with the express aim of destroying the "great narratives" of emancipation, freedom, nation, progress, African unity, reason, modernisation, national independence, etc, all of which were the very foundation of the creation of the CEA. Prof. Depelchin's course was, therefore, well inspired.

### Final remarks

Born to support national liberation struggles and carried by the internationalist spirit of its pioneers, the CEA was, from its inception, a public institution with regional and pan-African vocation. It is as such that it accompanied the decolonisation and social movement in Mozambique, certainly, but also in Zimbabwe, in Namibia, in South Africa and in other former Portuguese colonies in Africa. The immense personality of Aquino de Bragança, the internationalist zeal of his comrades in the struggle, the regional immersion of FRELIMO and its leaders, and their engagement with nationalist movements in South Africa, in Zimbabwe, in Namibia, etc, could only lead the CEA to these horizons.

For the CEA to return to its initial regional and pan-African vocation, there is no need to seek to invent a personality of the dimension of Aquino de Bragança, or even to recreate a context of political and ideological ferment identical to that of the mid 1970's. It would be an illusion. Yet, there are solutions lying in the precious achievements of the past. These solutions are mainly based on the existence of infrastructure – the CEA being among the sub-Saharan research institutions best endowed with infrastructure and equipment – and of a team of top-level researchers with high regional, continental and African prestige; this is particularly the case of Prof. Teresa Cruz e Silva (former President of CODESRIA) and Isabel Casimiro (current member of the Executive Committee of CODESRIA). These respected figures and many others within the CEA can gather around them researchers from the sub-region and the region, to create a regional Centre of Excellence specialising in the areas defined in a Strategic Plan that is more ambitious than the one presented by the current leadership.

The benefits of a regional Centre of Excellence would be many. For example, it could allow the State of Mozambique: 1. to reposition itself at the centre of the strategic game as guarantor of the sustainability of the historical legacy the CEA is; 2. to resume the diplomatic initiative as driver of the development of research in the field of social sciences; 3. to share with the States of the region the costs associated with the funding of research.

The creation of a regional Centre of Excellence would also allow researchers from the region and the continent to profit from the rich experience of the CEA in research organization, programme design, and openness to strategic partners like Brazil.

Yet, one of the highlights of the commemorative week of the CEA was the presentation of the book by Ruth First, *The Mozambican Miner*, republished by Prof. Marco Mondaini, Coordinator of the Instituto de Estudos da Africa at the Federal University of Pernambuco (Brazil). Now, based on its experience and prestige, the CEA can serve as a platform and a relay to all similar initiatives, to enable the African social science community to develop better targeted, better framed and more concerted cooperation, not only with Brazil, but also with all its international partners.



More concerted action at the regional level would allow better use of resources, more rigorous support to junior researchers and more rational definition of the partnership policy, in order to respond more effectively to the many expectations of all our international partners.

Establishing the CEA as a Centre of Excellence would help facilitate the integration of African campuses. This is one of the old dreams of CODESRIA. Such integration would significantly facilitate the movement of researchers and students, in the sense of a South-South partnership; the development of joint research programmes; the sharing of publications; the upgrading, at reasonable costs and with relevant programmes, of research departments, faculties, laboratories and centres historically lagging behind. For example, I took advantage of my stay at Eduardo Mondlane University to visit the young Faculty of Philosophy created in 2010.

The (short) meeting I had with Mr José Blaunde and a few other young teachers in this faculty enabled me to measure the huge gap that exists between Maputo and other African universities which are

historically well ahead in this particular area. Yet, left to fend for themselves, as they are at this point in time, and isolated from the major African research networks and cut off from philosophical reflection, the young Mozambican colleagues are at risk of premature sclerosis. Establishing within Eduardo Mondlane University a genuine philosophical hub requires: that the CEA integrates it in its activities and provides it with a viable platform enabling the members of this Faculty to open to Africa and the world, in an organised framework; that the Faculty includes the programmes of CODESRIA where young teachers at the Master's and doctorate levels would benefit from high-level supervisory staff, for example in the field of methodology (Cf. the sub-regional Methodology Workshops, the Scientific Writing Workshops, etc); that the Faculty has programmes integrating the key epistemological and methodological issues, like those developed by Jacques Depelchin in his Seminar on the paradigms of knowledge production; etc. CODESRIA is willing to support such initiatives.

Last, the establishment of the CEA as a Centre of Excellence would enable researchers in the sub-region and in the region involved in its activities to avoid the fatal trap of competition – a competition imposed by the ruthless struggle for access to scarce resources. Cooperation and mutual assistance must be one of the main thrusts of its research policy.

The future of the CEA seems secured to me. During my stay, I could see the deep commitment of the Government of Mozambique to this national historical legacy. The fluidity and the movement between the academic world and the political world are a great asset to ensure this future. Therefore, there are levers to enable the CEA scientific community to persuade the Government of the Republic of Mozambique that this future also lies in the reintegration of the CEA – a precious legacy of the history of Southern Africa – in the sub-regional and regional environment in which it was established. Then this body will have to celebrate with Africa, but above all with humanity, the progress which developed it, incubated it, hatched it and raised it./.