YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE SEARCH FOR INCLUSION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN GUINEA

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ABSTRACT: *Guinean youth, who constitute more than half of the country's population, argue that for decades they have been infantilized and marginalized by elders and political elites. They contend this infantilization and marginalization has led to mistrust, as well as constant confrontation. Such confrontation involved elders and political elites, on the one hand, and youth on the other hand. Some of those encounters lead to loss of lives. While in 2010 the new democratic dispensation ushered in hope and promises of change, it appears that very little has been achieved. There is the perception among the youth that the government is, in fact, entrenching the prevailing status quo. This article critically analyzes the voices and expressions of Guinea's youth in their search for inclusion and participation in leadership, as well as the decision-making processes in their country. It also juxtaposes the views of youth against those of elders and political elites. Overall, it seems that the existing mistrust, fear, and doubt on the part of the youth may have negative implications for Guinea's nascent democracy.*

KEYWORDS: *youth, marginalization, inclusion, participation, democracy, elites*

INTRODUCTION

While extensive scholarly literature exists on youth in countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, there has been relatively limited focus on those in Guinea, especially in works written in English. Jay Straker (2007) indicates that it was not until 1999 that

> the plight of Guinean youths captured substantial international attention following the brutal shooting of Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo by New York City policemen, and the tragic death of teenage stowaways Fodé Tounkara and Yaguine Koita on a Sabena flight from Conakry to Brussels. (300)[1]

Even with these events, the attention was short lived, as the focus shifted yet again to youth in neighboring countries. Though it could be argued that the concentration on those countries could be attributed to the civil wars in which they were engulfed, the exceptional case of Guinea not degenerating into a violent conflict, in spite of the contextual similarities with its neighbors, provides a case worth examining. Guinea's reality raises critical questions about youth and democracy. While this issue has been fairly well addressed in war-torn countries, Guinea's equally problematic reality has largely escaped scholarly attention. This article is intended to fill this gap and add to our knowledge of critical conflict drivers and the state of youth and democracy in Guinea.

For over five decades, the youth of postcolonial Guinea who, according to Julien Bolamou, Charline Burton, and Benjamin Médam (2015: 5), constitute over 60% of the country's population, have been infantilized and denied access to leadership and decision-making roles in their society.[2] This resulted in the existence of an active army of disengaged, disaffected, and marginalized youth. The tragic history of Guinea's political evolution appears to have been enveloped today by the continued influence of the old guard and political elite who have reemerged and seized the political space. It is perceived that this development has shrunk any prospect for youth participation and leadership in decision-making in Guinea.

The active engagement of youth in the transition from a military regime to an elected civilian government in 2010, and the subsequent multiparty elections in 2015, held promises of a brighter future for the country and its youth. Nevertheless, after years in search of the promise of a place in their society, Guinea's youth are still wedged between the struggle to be part of the democratization process and their continued exclusion from meaningful participation in politics by a deeply-rooted autocratic gerontocracy. The marginalization of the country's youth

appears to have bred mistrust, grievances, and frustrations that have occasionally led to violence and chaos. Thus, participating in the new democratic dispensation for many youth is not only critical for sustaining democracy, but also for the long-term stability of Guinea. In spite of this, with a democratization pathway that is unpredictable and fraught with challenges, it is unclear as to what the future holds for the country's youth. What is clear for now is that the youth feel excluded and deeply mistrustful of the leadership and the political system.

Like Guinea, sub-Saharan Africa as a whole has a very youthful population, with about 42% of the population falling under the age of fourteen (Ouraich et al. 2017: 6). Interestingly, academics and practitioners have noted the involvement of youth in violent conflicts in Africa. Studies have argued that the marginalization of the continent's youth from active socioeconomic and political participation by political elites and community elders has largely been responsible for them resorting to or participating in violence, which for them serves as an alternative means of expression (Bangura 2016; Bangura and Specht 2014; Philipps 2013; Abdullah 1998). Countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire have witnessed full-scale civil wars, with young people actively participating in them as perpetrators of violence. Inasmuch as those civil wars may have been triggered by other factors, the availability of a vulnerable young people to be exploited by warlords may have also prolonged the wars. As International IDEA (2013) states,

> Increasing marginalized people's participation in politics and securing their access to political life is of particular importance to democratic development and sustainability. In order to achieve this, we need to understand the barriers preventing inclusion in both customary and democratic governance and identify effective measures based on successful examples in overcoming exclusion from political decision-making. (7)

Guinea is a notable case for its vulnerabilities to civil war due to autocratic rule and economic exploitation, which has left the youth discontent and more vulnerable to political, as well as economic exploitation. Though Guinea has not degenerated into a civil war, it is plagued by common drivers of violent conflicts in Africa. This article examines Guinea's political system and its impacts on the country's youth. The central issue of the article is youth marginalization in the political system. The article provides detailed accounts of the political system through the viewpoints of the youth. It not only presents the youth's perspectives, but also juxtaposes them with views of elders. Furthermore, the article critically examines the implications of youth marginalization on the democratization process and the overall stability of the country.

This study is based on a mixed methodological approach, utilizing survey and interview methods. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to four hundred youth (two hundred men and two hundred women) between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five in Conakry, Labé, and Pamalap from July to October 2016. All three locations of study are strategic places with a rich history of youth activism. Conakry, which is the capital city of Guinea, has a rich mix of youth from diverse cultures and backgrounds; Labé has a dominant and patriarchal Peul culture; and Pamalap, the border town with Sierra Leone, is an area that suffered intermittent attacks and an influx of refugees during the wars in the Mano River Basin. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were held with seventy people (thirty-five men and thirty-five women)[3] between the ages of forty and seventy, who were in their youth during the regimes of Ahmed Sékou Touré (1958–84) and Lansana Conté (1984–2008).[4] In addition, interviews were conducted with thirty officials from relevant government ministries, departments, and agencies. Many of the other respondents and focus group participants are civil society activists. Respondents were recruited through snowball and purposive sampling techniques. Data collection was done by the author with the help of four Guinean research assistants.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: GUINEAN YOUTH UNDER ONE PARTY AUTOCRACY

Shortly after Guinea gained independence from French colonialism on October 2, 1958, it "fell victim to the authoritarian trend. In a relatively short space of time, it was governed by a single party that was intolerant of divergent views and run by bureaucrats beholden to an autocratic leader for the maintenance of their positions" (Schmidt 2007: 183). President Ahmed Sékou Touré and his Democratic Party of Guinea (Parti Démocratique de Guinée, PDG), which came to power through a populist national coalition, quickly established a state policing machinery that dealt with any form of opposition through brutal tactics. Touré became a key regional player during the Cold War, holding strong anti-Western sentiments, which led him to isolate Guinea from Western countries. Since gaining independence, Guinea has been plagued by despotism and politically motivated ethnic tensions, which have led to the death of many Guineans.

Even though young people had been at the forefront of the decolonization struggle across Africa's transition from colonialism to independence, several African countries adopted autocratic systems that discouraged opposition and subsequently marginalized youth, women, and minority groups. Furthermore, corruption and the scramble for

ill-managed state resources by political elites created an environment of poverty in numerous African states. Reuben Loffman (2008: 132) argues that, "although society as a whole suffers when poverty prevails, it is the young who often bear the brunt of economic and social alienation." Such challenges are also compounded by traditional and cultural practices that further alienate young people, leaving them with little possibility to fully realize their potential, lift themselves and their families out of poverty, and contribute to the socioeconomic development of their societies.

The struggles of youth for access to economic opportunities and participation in decision-making processes has been a steady source of tension, along with confrontations between youth and political elites in Guinea since independence in 1958.[5] Although Touré used a nationalist approach in the struggle for independence that brought together people from different ethnic groups and ages, he became a dictator who failed to educate and empower the youth. In fact, he actually used youth as thugs and spies to protect his regime.[6] He also built a powerful dictatorship that disregarded human rights and the rule of law. Ismail Kourouma, a retired civil servant, states:

> [T]he struggle for independence was a struggle that brought together educated, uneducated, rich and poor Guineans. In the centre of the struggle were young people who championed the revolution and left the French with no option but to give Guinea her independence. Sékou Touré, the leader of the struggle, was himself a young man and he appeared to be on the side of the youth. Yet, this was quick to change after he became comfortable with political power. With Touré becoming a dictator, he sidestepped the youth and there was suspicion and distrust between him and them that continued until his death in 1984.[7]

Similar sentiments were expressed by Fatou Diaketé, a businesswoman in Conakry:

> Young people from all parts of Guinea supported Touré and the independence movement and we did all we could to get the French out of the country. Touré promised us the world but ended up beating fear into us and Guinea became a country of uncertainty as anything could happen to anyone during his reign.[8]

From 1958 to 1984, Touré and his regime reigned with terror and dealt with any opposition with brutality. Youth were subsumed into the ethos of the regime and used by elites as thugs and spies. The principal victims of Touré's ruthlessness were the Peul, who were perceived to be against

the regime. Consequently, many Peuls fled to safe havens in neighboring countries, such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Senegal.[9] With state intimidation and limited opportunities, the youth succumbed to pressure and gradually lost their struggle for a place in the decision-making processes in Guinea.

On November 22, 1970, Guinea was attacked by "several hundred Portuguese military officers, Bissau-Guinean colonial troops, Guinean exiles, and mercenaries" (Arieff and McGovern 2013: 200). The reason for the attack was Guinea's support for Amilcar Cabral and his struggle for the independence of Guinea Bissau. Touré used the attack as an excuse to further clamp down on perceived existential threats to his regime, an action welcomed by state security actors who had, by that point, perfected means of terror, torture, and the silencing of opposition.[10] As noted by Arieff and McGovern (2013: 201), Touré's supporters argued that it was necessary for the government to use highhanded measures to protect the regime. Such an argument demonstrates the sense of impunity that Guineans were contending with until Touré's sudden death on March 26, 1984.

Reflecting on what the death of Touré meant to the youth then, Condé, a civil servant, states:

> [T]he youth had mixed feelings. The thugs of the regime were sad at losing a patron but the bulk of the youth were happy he passed away, especially the Peul who were wailing and mourning outside but dancing inside their homes. The megalomaniac Touré was feared by all, even those from his tribe. He was even perceived to be immortal and when he died, most people believed his death was faked and was a ploy to identify his enemies.[11]

Condé's words present a bleak picture of the moment and what was a protracted case of fear, intimidation, and deep-rooted ethnic divide. During the political vacuum marred by succession struggle, Colonel Lansana Conté seized power in a bloodless coup in April 1984 and formed the Military Committee of National Recovery (CMRN). Diallo, a women's rights activist in Labé, recounted the days following the coup, "Conté was embraced by all, including the youth and was perceived as a break from the past and was embraced as a sense of hope and the future of Guinea."[12]

However, with no political experience and with very little education, Conté soon turned to the old guards for support and guidance. Conté soon realized that his political survival depended on him embracing the entrenched status quo, which he would not be able remove.

Conté fell under influence of the old guard of the former regime, as the corrupt and autocratic practices of the past gradually resurfaced. Arieff and McGovern (2013: 202) pointed out that "those who rose in the new system were pure products of the old one, and in the absence of any systematic attempt to address past abuses, they had reverted to the former practices of repression, torture, and killing of real and perceived opponents, albeit in a less organised fashion." With what may have been an unanticipated turn of events for especially the youth, who had looked at Conté's emergence with hope and expectation, the future was not as promising as was envisaged just after Touré's death.

YOUTH AND THE STRUGGLE FOR INCLUSION AND DEMOCRACY

Like other African states during the early 1990s, Guinea also made the transition from military to civilian rule. However, the December 1993 multiparty election was flawed. In fact, 93 percent of the interviewees indicated that Guinea's multiparty elections were largely a symbolic act intended to reduce international pressure. Conté was unwilling to follow democratic practices. As one civil society activist noted:

> Conté was not a believer of democracy and was never interested in respecting constitutional provisions. He openly harassed any form of opposition and used repressive state instruments such as the gendarmerie and the feared presidential guards [Red Berets] to rain terror on political opponents and protesting youth, chasing them through cities and towns and beating the life out of them when caught. He also refused to leave power after what was to be his second and final term.[13]

In 2004, Guinean youth became much more proactive in demanding their rights and presenting legitimate grievances over marginalization and state oppression. The grievances were exacerbated by the high cost of living, unemployment, and rampant corruption associated with bad governance. Rather than addressing the concerns, Conté and his gerontocracy reacted violently, thereby sparking demonstrations and violent clashes that enveloped the country from 2005 to 2008. Mohamed Camara (2016: 15) described that period as "the most chaotic years in Guinea's recent history." By January 2007, Guineans, especially civil society and young people started demanding the resignation of Conté, to which the regime responded violently. As IRIN (2007) reported, on January 22, 2007 "security forces shot dead at least 20 people.... as tens of thousands of Guineans turned out to demonstrate against President

Lansana Conté in the biggest nationwide show of discontent in his 23-year rule." The demonstrators were mostly youth (including street gangs) from poverty-stricken and gang infested neighborhoods (e.g., Hamdallaye, Bambeto, Koloma, and Cosa) that have been dubbed "Conakry's Axis of Evil" (Philipps 2013: 119).

While Conté survived the demonstration, his government was badly shaken and the relationship with the general populace never recovered. As Conté's health rapidly declined, he became reliant on his cronies to steer the affairs of the state, which further disintegrated the state. Over 80 percent of respondents in this study viewed Conté's regime as corrupt and nepotic.[14] Conté passed away on December 22, 2008, leaving no succession plan in a country on the brink of collapse. According to a senior cabinet minister in Conté's administration, "Conté did not trust any of his lieutenants and was fearful of what would happen if he relinquished power. The most qualified person and constitutionally the first in the succession line was Aboubacar Somparé, the President of the National Assembly. Unfortunately, Conté either did not trust or feared him and preferred to leave the country in chaos rather than initiating a transition process."[15] Equally, Conté's cronies did not address the succession issue for fear of reprisal.

As soon as Conté's death was announced on December 23, 2008, a group of military officers led by Captain Moussa Dadis Camara seized power in a bloodless coup and formed the National Council for Democracy and Development (Conseil National de la Démocratie et du Développement, CNDD). As with Conté's coup of 1984, the Guinean population was supportive of the military takeover. Coming from the minority Guerze/Kpelle ethnic group from the préfecture of Lola, Camara was seen as someone the country could rally around, as he was not part of the political establishment in Conakry (Engeler 2008: 95). Soon after taking power, however, "Dadis Camara and the CNDD government entrenched military control of the country's political affairs, failed to hold free and fair elections as they promised, and steadily and violently suppressed the opposition. The perpetrators of these abuses enjoyed near complete impunity" (Human Rights Watch 2009: 18).

A few months into the CNDD's rule, politicians, civil society, and the country's youth started agitating for a transition to democracy. On September 28, 2009, for example, they held a demonstration that was brutally suppressed by the military regime. As reported by Human Rights Watch (2009: 1): "members of the Presidential Guard carried out a premeditated massacre of at least 150 people on September 28 and brutally raped dozens of women. Red Berets shot at opposition supporters until they ran out of bullets, then continued to kill with

bayonets and knives." The incident received national, regional, and international condemnation. More importantly, the regime lost credibility and support, especially among the youth. With mounting pressure from the international community and blame-trading within the CNDD, Camara's aide, Lieutenant Aboubakar "Toumba" Diakite, shot him during an argument at Camp Koundara. In an interview with Radio France on December 3, 2009, Diakate stated: "I shot him because at a certain point, there was a complete betrayal in my view, a total betrayal of democracy. He [Camara] tried to blame me for the events of September 28" ("Guinea Aide" 2009). Camara, who sustained a head injury, was flown to Morocco and replaced by his deputy Sékouba Konaté. Konaté called for a presidential election on June 27, 2010, which was subsequently won by Alpha Condé.

DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION AND PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

Condé, who was imprisoned and exiled by Conte's military regime, was seen as a symbol of change, especially by the youth. The youth hung on to every word of Condé's campaign, which promised fundamental changes.[16] However, Condé had to contend with Guinea's deep-rooted ethnic politics, dating back to Toure's oppressive regime. Condé's campaign was supported by his fellow Madingo people and the Susu, but was strongly opposed by the Peul. The Peul supported Cellou Diallo, who was a member of that ethnic group. As in many other African countries, ethnic politics is deep-rooted in Guinea, where voting patterns are strongly tied to ethnic and regional identities (Bah 2004; Kwatemba 2008; Zounmenou and Lamin 2011). Like the previous regime, Condé also pursued ethnic politics and the stalling of democratic reforms. A key problem is that Condé repeatedly postponed legislative elections, which further intensified the opposition to his government. Condé only agreed to hold the September 28, 2013 legislative election after violent demonstrations in February and March 2013, coupled with mediation efforts by the United Nations.

In addition to lack of political freedom, a critical issue for the youth in Guinea is employment. On paper, Condé's youth strategy has three components: a) job creation and employment of the country's youth, b) investment in youth related socio-educational activities and institutions, and c) adoption of youth-friendly policies and programs ("Le Ministre de la Jeunesse" 2014). Condé has established the National Fund for the Integration of Youth, which specifically targets persons below the age of

twenty-five. There is also the National Agricultural Investment and Food Security Plan 2012–16 (PNIASA), which is crucial for employment and poverty alleviation, given the fact that an estimated 80 percent of the population rely on agriculture (World Bank 2013). Unfortunately, these initiatives have not yielded significant results, as most youth remain disaffected and impoverished. In fact, more than 60 percent of Guinea's youth remain unemployed (IRIN 2013). Moreover, the country has been falling in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) from 163 out of 187 countries in 2005 to 182 out of 187 countries in 2015 (UNDP 2016). Guinea's current real food prices are among the highest in the world (Oxfam n.d.; Knierzinger et al. 2016: 1).

Poverty has been intertwined with poor education. In 2014, half of Guinea's youth were without any formal education (Education Policy and Data Centre 2014). This fact has been acknowledged by the Minister of MOY&YE who stated that there "are nearly 300,000 youth who annually leave school with no qualifications and find themselves in the competitive job market" ("Le Nouveau Ministre Guinéen" 2014). Poverty was worsened by the outbreak of the deadly Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in Guinea in December 2013. As Knierzinger et al. (2016: 1) noted, "After the lives of thousands of Guineans have been claimed by the rampant Ebola epidemic, millions continue to suffer from the resulting economic isolation of the country."

This study indicates that youth-related programs have not yet provided much benefit. In the semi-structured survey, 89 percent of respondents indicated that they have not been involved in any youth program sponsored by the government. The few who have are mostly in Conakry (thirty-six participants), while only six were in Labé and three in Pamalap. Also, the forty-six youth that have participated in programs indicated that they were not consulted on their needs when the programs were designed. The most common needs of Guinea's youth, as indicated by the interviews, include access to affordable quality education geared toward enhancing employment, employment opportunities, and participation in leadership and decision-making processes. As one youth stated:

> The elites do not understand our needs, they want to think for us and even the basic programmes designed for youth are designed by older people who do not understand or appreciate our needs. We need education, livelihood opportunities and the ability to make decisions in our communities. What we are faced with is a system that is unwilling to support us, for our needs are not many.[17]

Similar sentiments were expressed by Fatou Camara, a youth activist in Conakry:

> Our painful reality is that, even though as young people we form a significant part of the country's population, we are the forgotten ones. Guinea is a rich country, but as youth we are uneducated, we cannot compete for jobs and we cannot take care of us or our families. We exist but we do not live as humans.[18]

A key problem in Guinea has been the unwillingness of the old guard and political elite to effect real democratic changes that are attentive to the needs of the youth. Despite continued promises by the government, youth remain very cynical. As Mohamed Sylla, a youth from Conakry, stated:

> [T]he professor [the president] is good at talking but not doing, just words, mere words, no meaning. This government does not believe that the youth are capable of handling strategic offices in this country. For them if you are not sixty years and above you are not capable of serving. They see us as children and people of the future and not the present. They are the same as previous governments.[19]

Sylla's statement brings to bear the query of why the youth are being marginalized from democratic processes. In seeking to answer this question, one must draw on the meaning and principles of democracy. Democracy is defined in the Universal Declaration of Democracy (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1998: IV) as:

> [a] universally recognised ideal as well as a goal, which is based on common values shared by peoples throughout the world community irrespective of cultural, political, social and economic differences. It is, thus, a basic right of citizenship to be exercised under conditions of freedom, equality, transparency and responsibility, with due respect for the plurality of views, and in the interest of the polity.

As defined above, democracy seeks to promote inclusion and participation in leadership and decision-making processes at all levels. Furthermore, it encourages diversity and discourages marginalization. The behavior of Guinea's political elites appears to be contrary to democratic ideals. They seem to be strongly resistant to an inclusive democratic process, especially one that embraces youth and women.

A senior official in Condé's administration argues that "this Western doctrine [democracy] is forced on us, it is not part of who we are. We believe it is the elders who should rule and the youth learn from us and use what they learn when it is their time to rule. They are the future, not the present."[20] Such cultural relativist arguments are often used to thwart democracy and marginalize the youth. However, they have been refuted in African scholarship and by some Guineans (Bah 2005). As a senior Guinean diplomat argued, "Corrupt and greedy politicians heavily criticize democracy and call it Western. Democracy is meant to have all of us live in respect and dignity. What Guinea needs now is a full-blown democratization process that embraces young people, give them a place in our society and strategically position them in leadership positions. They have the capacity and they should be encouraged to lead."[21]

A poignant issue for Guinea is the potential for major political violence due to its long history of autocracy and poor governance. In spite of the examples of civil wars in neighboring countries, political elites in Guinea doubt that the country's youth will seek change through violent means. Most of the elites indicated that if Guinea's youth were inclined to a violent approach to change, this could have happened during the civil wars in the Mano River Basin. However, studies have shown that there is a relationship between poverty, economic exploitation, and political violence (Richards 1996; Collier 2009). In the case of Sierra Leone, Henry Mbawa (2013: 135) notes that "[T]he RUF specifically targeted, with brazen alacrity, the structures, powers, and symbols of decades of rural exclusion. In the towns and villages the RUF captured, it became a common practice to kill or publicly humiliate chiefs and other public officials as if to strip them of their despotic authority and make them ordinary."

The civil wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire, which all share borders with Guinea, have been largely attributed to autocratic and corrupt political systems characterized by state decay or failure (Bah 2012; Bangura 2016). As Abu Bah (2012) pointed out:

> The political instability in West Africa over the past two decades is a stark reminder of the prevalence of failing and failed states in the region. While some of the countries have evaded anarchy, countries such as Nigeria, Togo, Guinea-Bissau, and Guinea have experienced major political violence…. The worst cases of instability occurred in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire, which experienced civil wars and virtual state collapse. (71)

"THIS IS THEIR SYSTEM, NOT OURS": ALIENATION, EXCLUSION, AND GRIEVANCE AMONG GUINEAN YOUTH

Guinea, like many countries in Africa, has an entrenched patriarchal system rooted in ancient cultural practices. Moreover, postcolonial Guinea has been plagued by autocratic and gerontocratic forms of leadership, which marginalize youth. Furthermore, the attitude of the elites toward young people has not changed over the years, and this has created a gap in trust, as young people pointed out during interviews. Youth report that their interactions with political elites typically happen during elections, when the elites would manipulate them for votes and political violence. As Alhaji Barrie, a taxi driver in Conakry, noted: "[T]he only time you see politicians going close to the youth is during election periods or when they want to stimulate tribal sentiments for their selfish gains. Other than that, the youth are regarded as potential troublemakers that must be contained."[22]

Poverty and poor education make youth easily vulnerable to be used as thugs during elections. This has been a common practice in all the three areas studied. In Conakry, 67 percent of respondents indicated that they have either participated in or have been asked to participate in election-related violence. In Pamalap (61 percent) and Labé (47 percent) respondents attributed their participation in political violence to manipulation by elites. One interviewee, Binta Diallo, expressed the frustrations of the youth in the following:

> The elites are not interested in the capacity development of young people; they believe that an empowered youth would challenge them. I cannot believe that after all we fought for, we gained nothing at the end. The youth lost, we lost lives and all we had. For the politicians, it is back to business. This is their system, not ours. We are their thugs and all they do is manipulate us, use us and dump us.[23]

Mats Utas and Maya Christensen (2016) and have found similar problems of elite manipulation of youths for political violence in Sierra Leone. Writing on manipulative tendencies of elites, Daniel Smith (2006: 143) argues, "Elites are able to manipulate both the apparatus of the modern state and traditional forms of patron–client relationships to their own advantage and this produces great inequality within the country."

Instead of participating in political violence, the study shows that Guinean youth are more interested in economic opportunities and democratic political participation. The lack of such opportunities breeds

frustration and distrust of the ruling political elite, who are seen as corrupt and oppressive. Expressing her frustrations, Hawa Camara, a university graduate, who has been unemployed for five years, pointed out[24]:

> [In] Guinea, you have the politicians and their relatives who are rich, they have access to the resources of the country and they keep the rest of Guineans away from the country's wealth. Guinea has the second highest deposit of bauxite in the world but we see nothing of it. The politicians do not invest in education or health, they leave us in bad schools and they send their children to France and Belgium to school and when they [the politicians] fall ill, they go to Europe and America for treatment. The poor cannot afford that, so we are left to die in our ill-equipped hospitals and clinics and the youth are left to contend with the challenges we face in our schools. Upon graduation, we cannot compete for or access jobs, because the better educated children of the politicians return from Europe and take available jobs.

With their marginalization and the lack of political will to transform their lives, Guinea's youth are trapped in unemployment and its attendant consequence, poverty. According to Peace Child International (Ba 2015), "In the capital, Conakry, two-thirds of higher education graduates under thirty are unemployed. This has to do with fewer opportunities in the formal sector and a lack of government jobs, which is aggravated by political instability and slow economic growth." Unfortunately, there is not much political will to solve the problem. According to one Guinean academic, "[Y]ou do not have to be Albert Einstein to understand what the challenges are and what needs to be done. However, our politicians who are wealth seekers are indifferent to the plight of the youth. If all is well with them, the rest of society does not count."[25]

A critical issue in this study has been youth marginalization. Youth not only experience unemployment and poverty, but also feel excluded and exploited in the political process. In many ways, youth marginalization has been attributed to patriarchal and autocratic practices displayed by the political elite. In this study, 76 percent of the survey respondents see elders' perception of the youth as the main barrier to their meaningful political participation. Tellingly, 78 percent of elders in Labé, 62 percent in Conakry, and 43 percent in Pamalap who participated in the survey view the youth as either thugs or incapable of responsibly handling positions of leadership. It was observed during interviews that elders and political elites fail to see that they have been partly responsible for the situation of the youth and their participation in political violence as thugs. Overall, Guinean youth are viewed as children whose

appropriate leadership role is in the future. This is the problem that youth constantly describe as infantilization. Guinea's recent democratization effort has not succeeded in changing the situation. Instead of moving from the patriarchal and autocratic system, Guinea is trapped in a gerontocracy that continues to fuel animosity between youth and elderly political elites.

Years of neglect and isolation from the formal structures of political participation has led youth in Guinea to engineer a new social space (i.e., the "bureau") for quasi engagement in political and social issues. The bureau has become the place where youth discuss politics and everyday economic and social problems (Bergère 2015; Finn 2014). As Clovis Bergère (2015: 8) states: "The activities that typically take place there [i.e. bureau] include talking about politics, women, the problems of society, and linked to these, the problems regarding the future of the country. Within them, a number of activities such as drinking and smoking both cigarettes and marijuana." The bureau is different from other youth hangouts, such as those used by gangs. In the bureau, discussions are typically peaceful and intellectually engaging. Such bureaus were found in many places in Conakry, Labè, and Pamalap. They are largely operated and frequented by young men. Interestingly, women are usually not expected to visit or spend time in the bureau, which is similar to local coffee shops in Sierra Leone (i.e., "Attaya Base") where "unemployed urban youth spend most … [of their time] discussing their frustrations and survival strategies" (Bangura 2016: 46). In both Sierra Leone and Guinea, the informal youth quasi-political spaces serve as temporal forms of respite from everyday economic, social, and political frustrations. Bureaus and Attaya Bases are places were the state and the political elite are judged and shamed by marginalized young people.

CONCLUSION

Guinea's youth have been struggling for inclusion and participation in leadership and decision-making processes since independence. Unfortunately, they have largely remained victims of a patriarchal, autocratic, and gerontocracy system that is plagued by poverty and stack inequality. The political elite has largely ignored the youth and viewed them as immature and unprepared for leadership roles. The recent democratic transition appears to be a disappointment to most youth, as the current government has not improved their lives. Guinea's inability to break away from its legacy of autocracy and patriarchal practices has profound negative implications for the ongoing democratization process. Ironically, the youth have been left out of the very system that

should have been a vehicle for improving their economic and political condition. In many ways, Guinea seems to be making the same political and economic mistakes that have contributed to civil wars in neighboring Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire.

NOTES

1. Diallo was shot forty-one times and killed by two New York City police officers on February 4, 1999. Tounkara and Koita tried to illegally travel from Guinea to Belgium by hiding in one of the compartments of a Sabena flight. They were found and pronounced dead on August 3, 1999.

2. The definition of youth in Guinea is those aged fifteen to thirty-five and is based on the African Youth Charter of which Guinea is a signatory.

3. The prospects and challenges faced by youth between 1958 and 2000 are different from those faced by them in 2016. Their realities and appreciation of what exists are different, thus it was of intrinsic significance to the study to interview both the older generation, who were youth between 1958 and 2000, and those who are currently considered to be youth to have a balanced understanding.

4. It was deemed necessary to engage people who were youth during those periods to have a better reflection of the differences and similarities between the challenges youth faced then and now.

5. It is worth mentioning that there were fewer confrontations between the youth and the Touré regime than with succeeding governments.

6. Based on interviews conducted. Many interviewees who were youth during the Touré days dispelled the notion that Touré empowered youth.

7. Interview, Conakry, August 13, 2016.

8. Interview, Conakry, August 14, 2016.

9. The Peul are also known as Fula, Fulani, Fulbe, and Fulfulde.

10. Anonymous interview in Labé with one of Touré's victims.

11. Interview, Conakry, August 13, 2016.

12. Interview, Labé, September 1, 2016.

13. Interview, Conakry, August 9, 2016.

14. Based on author's interviews and focus group discussions (FDGs) in Guinea.

15. Interview, Conakry, 2016.

16. Based on Conde's campaign speeches during the 2010 presidential election.

17. Interview, Pamalap, August 1, 2016.

18. Interview, Conakry, August 6, 2016.

19. Interview, Conakry, August 3, 2016.

20. Interview, Conakry, July 10, 2016.

21. Interview, Conakry, July 11, 2016.

22. Interview, Labé, September 5, 2016.

23. Interview, Labé, September 4, 2016.

24. Interview, Conakry, July 25, 2016.

25. Interview, Conakry, July 25, 2017.

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