DIGITAL SOCIETY AND THE POLITICS OF YOUTH IN GUINEA

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Digital Society and the Politics of Youth in Guinea

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This dissertation explores the intersections of youth, politics and social in Guinea, West Africa. It is based on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted online, as well as participatory visual research with twenty Guinean youth aged between eighteen and twenty-nine years-old, living in two urban centers: Conakry, the country's capital and Labé, a major urban center in the Fouta-Djallon region. In recent years having a page on social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter, has emerged as a key 'marker' of youth in Guinea. Emergent digital practices such as correcting errors made in French by older politicians on Twitter, hashtag campaigns such as #GuinéeVote or #TaxeDeSuivisme for instance or the introduction of a new Internet Tax point to the emergence of new forms of governmentality and relations of power in Guinea, a largely gerontocratic society. Building on Chatterjee's distinction between civil and political society, I argue that a new domain of political which I term 'digital society' is emerging in Guinea. I also propose the phrase 'conscious bits' as a heuristic devise to locate digital society within the current political moment in Guinea, and reflect some of the more affective, social technical and lived dimensions of digital society in Guinea.

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> With one tweet, youths who had been working in the shadows since 2011 were invited to meet the Minister Naité [last name of the Minster for Youth Affairs, ed.][1]

In recent years, having a page on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter has emerged as a key marker of youth in Guinea. As one Guinean Internet user recently commented, opening a Facebook account has now become a 'ritual' or 'rite of passage' for urban youth in Guinea[2]. The significance of this recent change is perhaps most vividly captured by an anecdote that circulated across Guinean social media a few years ago, around 2011, when getting online was still a rare feat in Guinea requiring considerable time, money and trips to the local cybercafé. As the award-winning Guinean blogger Alimou Sow reported at the time, having a Facebook page was so important to being young and 'IN' that young people in Guinea's main urban centers such as Conakry or Labé, were resorting to creating 'virtual' Facebook pages, imaginary pages on the social networking site, just to save face in front of their peers[3]. The practice involved going to an Internet café, and when Internet was unavailable, just sitting in front of a computer and pretending to be chatting with friends on Facebook. The practice even earned a nickname in some Conakry youth circles: doing 'Facebook without Facebook'.

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[1] Twitter message posted by Alpha Pountioum Bah – 10 November 2015
[2] See http://lims.mondoblog.org
[3] *ibid*

Today, inexpensive wireless networks and fierce commercial competition between large international telecommunications providers have greatly facilitated Internet access for Guinean youth. With hyper-flexible contracts and widely available third generation or 3G high-speed connections, a large proportion of youth in Guinea's urban centers, including poor and unemployed youth, have regular access to the Internet. This is not to dismiss the remaining effects of the global Internet divide. In Guinea, for instance, most Internet users connect using 'prepaid' Internet passes. The price of these passes start at 1,000 Guinean Francs (GNF), equivalent to 0.10 US$. Such passes involve several options including Facebook-only passes that limit access to the social networking site only. For 1,000 GNF, users can enjoy unlimited to Facebook for a 24-hour period once the pass is activated. Monthly passes start at 10,000 GNF, enabling users to download up to 100 Mega Octets over a thirty-day period.

Clearly, these costs are not negligible in a country where an estimated 43% live on less than 1.25US$ per day, one of the poorest countries in the world. Still, for the price of a couple of onions or box of matches, it is possible to connect to the Internet, and even enjoy unlimited access to Facebook for 24 hours. The steadily reducing costs of Internet access, combined with increasing quality of connections, has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of Internet users in Guinea. In fact, the Internet penetration rate in Guinea went from a mere 1.87% at the end of 2013 to 29.3% in the final quarter of 2016[4]. The number of users increased by an impressive 13.11% between the second and third trimester of 2016, according to official data from the Guinean government. What is more,

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[4] http://www.arpt.gov.gn/sites/default/files/Documentation/observatoire_0.pdf

modes of connections have also greatly changed with the overwhelming majority of users

connecting via their own personal cellphone (Pew Research Center, 2014). Within this

boom in connectivity, social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram

have emerged as key sites of sociability for Guinean youth (www.socialbakers.org). As

several of the youth who took part in this research noted, today 'everybody young person

I know is on Facebook'.

Presumably, within this rapidly changing telecommunications' landscape, the

need to resort to doing 'Facebook without Facebook' just to keep face has greatly

reduced for Guinean youth. Still, what the story shared above reveals is the extent to

which youth understood as a socially constructed category is imbricated in social

networking practices in Guinea today. In other words, social networking technologies

such as Facebook or Twitter are not just tools that young Guineans increasingly use for

communicating. These technologies are profoundly reshaping the very terms of what it

means to be young in Guinea. So much so that opening an account on a social network

such as Facebook or Twitter for the first time can be compared to a 'rite of passage',

precisely when initiation rituals and 'rites of passage' that used to mark the transition

from childhood to adulthood are disappearing or so profoundly transformed that their

meanings become largely unrecognizable. Guinean youth increasingly use social

networking sites and have adopted the technology at a disproportionately faster rate than

any other groups in Guinea. For instance, at the end of 2015, Facebook was adding over

25,000 new users from Guinea per month. Over 50% of these new users were between

the ages of 18 and 24 and over 80% are between the ages 16 and 34[5], an age group that

represented approximately 35% of the population as a whole.

Guinea provided a particularly apt terrain for studying emergent digital practices

and their junctures with youth as a socially constructed category. Anthropological

studies of digital media are not new (see Reid, 1994; Ito, 1997; Miller & Slater, 2000; for

instance) and works such as those featured on the University College London's

Anthropology of Social Networking directory[6] reflect a trend towards research focused

on social networking in non-Western contexts. Yet to date (as reflected on the UCL

page), no significant studies of social networking have been based within Sub-Saharan

Africa, despite the sub-continent being at the epicenter of growth in social networking

adoption in the world (Deloitte, 2014). What is more, in selecting a region or country

within Sub-Saharan Africa in which to base a study of social networking practices such

as the one here, it is important to also attend to existing gaps in knowledge and the

relations of power they reflect. Discussions of Internet technologies in Africa have

tended to focus on a handful of countries seen as the leaders in new technology adoption

within the sub-continent, including South Africa, Uganda, Nigeria (usually linked to 419

scams and other illicit activities) and Senegal. Yet, as noted in a recent report by

business consulting firm Deloitte (2014), these countries are starting to reach saturation

point with regards to Internet penetration. In fact, the so-called 'next frontier' in Internet

growth is located in countries such as Guinea, long infamous for its lack of electricity

even compared to its West African neighbors. Today, Guinea finds itself at the epicenter

[5] See www.socialbakers.org
[6] See http://www.ucl.ac.uk/global-social-media/projects

of Internet growth, making this study even more crucial.

In order to understand Guinean youths' social networking practices, I conducted twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork online. This entailed immersing myself in the everyday online lives of twenty young Guineans aged from ages 18 to 29 years old living in two of Guinea's major urban centers, the country's capital Conakry and Labé, Guinea's third largest city. These cities were not randomly selected but rather purposefully chosen: I have visited Guinea on regular occasions for the past two decades since September 1996 when I first lived for twelve months in Labé. During this first extended stay in Guinea, I taught and worked in a vocational training center, IGET-formation, focused on Information Technologies. These were the early days of IT in Guinea, and in addition to teaching English, French and basic IT, I remember spending many mornings trying to fire up a rather capricious late 1970s Russian-made generator, our only source of electricity. The academic year in Guinea runs from September until May, which also happens to be the dry season when Labé's only electric dam dries up, which at the time meant a months-long power outage. Still, the experience was highly formative and sparked a now couple of decades long interest in both Guinean youth and IT. Daily, between July 2015 and July 2016, I read the Facebook posts and Tweets of twenty young men and women purposefully selected to represent a range of ethnic affiliations, economic situations and engagements with social media technologies. I became well known to them, made sure to regularly reply to their posts, shared information which I felt would be of interest to others, because it was funny, informative or raised important issues. I got to know their friends, interests and political views, and they got to see photographs of my children and friends, and they learned about my

interests in climbing, electronic and funk music or my stance on a range of issues from environmental protection to the 2016 elections in the US.

The young Guineans who took part in this research used social networking sites and Facebook in particular, to keep in touch with friends and family, living abroad or in a different part of the country or town.   Given young Guineans disproportionate mobility compared to older Guineans, many noted how important maintaining communication through social media was to them. One even noted how he was now in touch more frequently with friends living far away than with those living close by. But, as the examples from my research will show the use of social media is much broader than keeping in touch with friends and family. Some of the participants in this research ran businesses and earned side-income on Facebook. One, for instance, earned some extra cash selling custom-made t-shirts. Every time he made a new design he would publish it on Facebook in the hope of attracting clients. For some, social media helped reduce 'boredom'. A student noted how she used it to discuss course material with classmates. Two participants said they had met their partners online, and others shared how it changed the way they got news, now from an increasingly wide range of sources. A few claimed new technologies had made them more 'open' and aware of the world. What is clear is that today these technologies are no longer external to Guinean youth, but have been incorporated in many ways by youth who are dependent on them for many aspects of their daily lives.

As became very rapidly clear when embarking on this project, thinking and

talking about social networking technologies in Guinea was in many ways thinking and talking about 'la jeunesse' or 'youth' using the French word, as was invariably the case. Whenever the topic of social networking was discussed, the category of youth tended to also come up. And vice versa; youth was often defined in terms of its social networking practices. As one young person from Conakry explained the current generation lives with 'their noses in their screens'. As I show in this dissertation, 'youth' as a social category ran as a sub-text to online campaigns such as those that cohered around the hashtags #GuineeVote, #DroitALIdentite or #GuineeDu21eSiecle [In French '#GuineaVote'; '#RightToIdentity' and '#21stCenturyGuineanWoman']. Although each of these campaigns were officially aimed at 'any' citizen or Guinean willing to take part, and most certainly welcomed contributions from any age groups, all made both explicit and implicit reference to 'youth', which they saw as uniquely positioned to participate in these campaigns. One of the first goals of this research then is to explore and begin to disentangle the link, both culturally-constructed and lived, that intimately connects youth and social networking technologies. In doing so, I situate my work within studies of social media and media anthropology that posit digitally-mediated experiences on social media seriously, as terrains worthy of research (Boelstroff, 2008; Baym, 2010; Miller, 2011 or Miller and Horst; 2012). Clearly, in Guinea, as elsewhere, the adoption of social networking as a key everyday activity by large numbers of youth in Guinea has not been uniformly celebrated. On the contrary, within local popular discourse, in newspapers, blogs and other social media platforms, many fears have been raised about the technologies [7]. Overwhelmingly, commentators have raised the possibility that young

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[7] See http://guinee50.blogspot.com; http://lims.mondoblog.org; http://cireass.mondoblog.org; www.visionguinee.info for instance

people might be misusing new digital technologies, essentially wasting their time online, sharing photos or discussing trivial topics instead of doing 'real' work offline. However, the tangibility or even presumed 'reality' of work offline, in what is misleadingly referred to as 'IRL' or 'In Real Life', needs to be questioned in the Guinea city, where youth unemployment has been estimated at over 90% (Phillips, 2013; Simone, 2004). What is more, it is also the assumed inconsequentiality or 'virtuality' of digitally mediated activities on social networks that needs to be scrutinized.

As anthropologists concerned with digital cultures such as Boelstroff (2008), Baym (2010), Miller (2011) or Miller and Horst (2012) for instance have pointed out such popular assessments of social networking rely on a misconstrued notion of the digital, understood solely in its opposition to a supposedly more natural or 'real' analog. This dichotomous view of digital versus analog worlds, which is found not only in popular reactions to social networking but also in journalistic and many academic accounts (Miller and Horst, 2012: 12), centers around a nostalgic attachment to face-to-face interactions, which presumes immediacy and authenticity is lost in digitally mediated communications. Such laments for a more 'real' and less mediated past however fail to recognize that all human interactions whether within a hunter-gatherer society or in today's deeply networked world are highly mediated. Indeed, the cultural mediation of human sociability is a foundational principle of modern anthropology (*ibid*). As this research makes clear the adoption of new forms of digital communication intersects with and contributes to broader processes of cultural mediation. As Miller and Horst simply put it: "people are not one iota more mediated by the rise of digital

technologies" (2012: 11). This has important consequences for how we approach making sense of digitally-mediated cultural life. For instance, Miller and Madianou's research on Filipina mothers who live and work as domestic workers in London, UK explores the various ways in which they use digital technologies in order to remain in contact with their children in the Philippines and the affective attachment that comes with deciding between writing on email, chatting on Skype or sending a text message on a cellphone. Their research required much more than understanding the technologies themselves and, as they explain: "at least as much effort was expended upon trying to understand the Filipina concept of motherhood because being a mother is just as much a form of mediation as being on the Internet" (Miller and Horst, 2012: 12).

When investigating young Guineans' current adoption of social media, my research similarly assumes the ontological stance that youth is culturally mediated. What changes with digital usage is not the fact of that mediation but rather the forms of this mediation of youth. Here, Straker's study of the complex ways in which changing notions of youth played a key role in the establishment of Sékou Touré's post-independence socialist-revolutionary regime provides a fascinating example of the shifting cultural mediation of youth in Guinea (Straker, 2009). As he explains: "[no] postcolonial regime took matters of youthful cultural development and authenticity more seriously than the one led by Sékou Touré from 1958 to 1984" (2009:2). As Straker clearly shows, the re-envisioning of youth that was necessary for Sekou Toure's socialist nation-building effort was mediated by, took expression in, and was ultimately contested through a variety of platforms such as political tracts, newspaper articles, revolutionary

poems and novels, photography and perhaps most importantly 'militant' theater, which became compulsory practice for all young Guineans (2009). These diverse modes of expression become forms of mediation through which new visions of youth in Guinea were imagined, enforced and contested (Straker, 2009: 2). Social networking today, just as 'militant' theater during the post-independence era, provides key terrains from which to study not just digital technologies but youth itself as a changing social category.

Making sense of social networking adoption in Guinea required me to approach the research of digital practices as a profound cultural phenomenon, and not as the antithesis of all that is authentically cultural or social (Boelstroff, 2008; Miller, 2011; Miller and Horst, 2012; Baym, 2010). This foregrounds the need to research social networking as a deeply contextual practice. In many ways, it is easy to dismiss the increasing ubiquity of online social networking amongst Guinean youth as simply another iteration of a global phenomenon. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Tumblr have been part of the daily lives of most young people in the US, Europe and other rich industrial nations for over a decade now. Echoing dominant popular and journalistic accounts of the phenomenon, we could easily see this in teleological terms, as 'Guinean youth are finally catching up'. Yet, such an approach would miss the cultural significance of current change, the fact that as social networking sites such as Facebook make their way into the daily lives of Guinean youth, the networking sites also get remade in the process. As Miller explains, there is no 'such thing' as Facebook (2011: 158). Despite being one social networking facility developed in the US, 'what any given population actually uses, based on that facility, quickly

develops its own cultural genres, and expectations, which will differ from others' (*ibid*). Following Miller (2011) and other digital anthropologists (Barendregt, 2012), my contention is therefore that Facebook and other social networking sites in Guinea need to be understood and approached as Guinean phenomena that are at once influenced by the nexus of global and local cultural trends. My digital ethnography, although clearly embedded in the Guinean context, also raises broader questions about the changing fabric of political agency emerging at the juncture of youth and social media.

The second major line of enquiry pursued in this dissertation is around politics. When discussing social media technologies with participants, they tended to connect themes to the category of youth and in a similar vein, discussion around youth also tended to raise the question of politics. In other words, this dissertation's focus on 'politics', political agency and the processes of subjectivation, was not an initial focus of the research. Through fieldwork, I discovered a number of events, circumstances and sustained engagements on Facebook and Twitter that made it clear that political participation was a key issue for youth. Therefore, I followed their lead making the theme of politics a relevant focus for this dissertation. To put it bluntly, and to borrow from Janet Roitman, 'the topic was thrown up to me' (2005: 3). As one of my research participant explained to me very early during my fieldwork: 'Politics is like a national sport, or even like oxygen, in Guinea.' As he made clear, Guineans lived and breathed politics. Also, the presidential elections took place on October, 11th 2015, during the middle of my fieldwork, and this context even further precipitated politics to take centerstage.

As became evident during my fieldwork, youth occupied a collectively unique position in the often-heated political climate that surrounded the October 2015 elections. They led the election monitoring campaign known as GuinéeVote, which forms the focus of chapter three of this dissertation. As a demographic majority, those aged eighteen through 35 voted massively, thus representing a force that could not be ignored by the various political parties and candidates battling it out in the elections. What is more, youth led the numerous demonstrations that preceded the elections, and participated in both peaceful and violent protests to demand that the electoral calendar be respected. In many ways, their unique position in the democratic process stems from their involvement in the repeated protests beginning in 2009 that led to the toppling of the military junta that had taken over control of the country following former president Lansana Conté's death in 2008, and the organization of the country's first democratically held elections in 2010. Political violence aimed at young people in Guinea has been quite common, perhaps most strikingly exemplified by the events of September, 28th 2009, when at least 67 youth were killed inside a stadium in Conakry while they protested the military junta's stronghold on power.

My contention here is that youth, as a social collective, is today one of the most crucial, and under-theorized political themes in Africa today. This is not to say that many studies have not in recent years provided compelling accounts of the complex and often ambiguous ways in which youth navigate the postcolonial political landscape that characterize most Africa polities (Phillips, 2013; Branch and Mampilly, 2015; Sarr, 2016;

Di Nunzio, 2012; Fredericks, 2014; Diouf, 1996). Many scholars have provided incredibly rich ethnographic accounts of the significance of young African's participation in protests and the politics of their everyday lives. In Guinea, Phillips, for instance, has explored the ways in which Conakry youths loosely organized in different types of clans or gangs have become an instrumental force in the country's political protest movements, maintaining often ambiguous yet agentic relationships with powerful political patrons and parties (Phillips, 2013; Fredericks, 2014). His work is particular helpful at highlighting Guinean youth's 'firm entrenchment in political society' to borrow the terms usefully proposed by post-colonial scholar Partha Chatterjee. This dissertation offers to add to current debates about the politics of youth in Africa in two significant ways. First, within current literature, the focus has tended to be on the politics, and providing detailed accounts of the political things that Guinean youth do, and much less on what the 'politics' do to youth, as a socially constructed and mediated category. By comparison, this work's focus is not only on what youth do with emergent digital technologies and social networking, but also on what the digitalization of politics in Guinea does to youth collectively.

The first chapter offers a detailed account of the ways in which Guinean youth have taken to social media in order to expose and correct errors made in French in official documents and political speeches. Yet, this is taken as an opportunity to think through what the emergence of Guinean politics on social media sites, and Twitter and Facebook in particular, means for the status of Guinean youth, and its changing position within what remains a largely gerontocratic order. As I show, being young and online opens up

possibilities for challenging the terms of that order. This requires complex 'boundary work', and also boundaries that constantly need to be transcended in order to make due within Guinean's increasingly limited horizon of economic possibilities. By foregrounding literacy as an articulation of social difference in Guinea, then, social networking is forcing youth to reinvent themselves as both distinct and available, bounded and transversally positioned. In other words, whilst working on defining themselves collectively as a population with distinct characteristics such as age or possessing specific abilities, digital literacies in particular, youth are also constantly working at 'keeping channels open', making sure these same boundaries that made them distinct are also kept porous, allowing for sufficient circulation. This transversal circulation across age, ethnic or economic lines is the necessary condition of survival in Guinea, where set pathways to jobs or social advancements are notoriously uncertain.

The next two chapters continue this focus on youth by exploring different junctures of social media, politics and youth. Here, again, the research is driven by a desire to both explore how young Guineans negotiate the changing terms of political life as interactions between Guineans and the state increasingly move to social networking sites, and in turn, think through what the digitalization of political life in Guinea does to youth as a social category. As chapter two shows, digital technologies are the backbone of an emergent digital addressing infrastructure at the heart of new forms of governmentality and the management of youth. Increasingly, photographs of youth posted online are used to locate deviant behavior and these actions point to the emergence of a continuum of surveillance that involves institutions of the neighborhood, the state, and private industry. Thinking about youth as a social constructed category also raises

questions with regards to young people's agency, their ability to envision and realize

movement outside of the reproduction of social patterns. As I argue in chapter three, on

social networking sites, youth Guineans' agency finds itself remade and distributed

across complex and uncertain assemblages of age, bodies, devices and policies. In this

context, launching a hashtag becomes for activist youth an extension of their agency.

However, as agentic moves these also become more akin to bets hedged on uncertain

terrains, attempts at piecing together a collective 'presence' in what remain highly

dissonant times. Too often, youth is taken as a coherent moral community. As I show,

the theorization of youth in the post-colonial context needs to move beyond binaries of

'youth' versus others or alternative simplifications. In fact, the current moment is

characterized by both extreme circulation particularly online where users find themselves

part of a constant flux of information, 'fake' news, updates from ministers, friends or

family members, potential opportunities to waste time or find work, and extreme forms of

social and economic impediment and gridlock. Most of youth that took part in this

project belong to the 'half employed and half unemployed' youth that constitute the

overwhelming majority of Guinean youth[8]. All had some level of secondary education

ranging from 9th grade up to University degrees. Some were at the time of fieldwork

enrolled at University. Others were doing unpaid internships or alternated periods of

short-term employment with longer periods of unemployment. Several ventured into

self-employment selling t-shirts, tempting as journalists or for NGOs. Out of twenty

participants, one had full-time employment, working as a supervisor in a call-center

focused on giving technical support for cell-phone users. This center was run by a major

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[8] See Di Nunzio (2015) for a fuller discussion of this phenomenon in Ethiopia, a case that offers many similarities with Guinea

international telecommunications company. Most, apart from one, found it difficult to pursue meaningful careers or strive for social advancement. Yet, they could, and some did exchange messages on Twitter with minsters. One got barred from the Guinean President's Twitter account for pointing out his repeated typos and orthographic mistakes. Another used his social media skills in order to arrange for a group of marginalized 'analphabet' youth to meet with a Minister in Conakry, and gain support for their education.

In thinking about the politics of marginalized populations within post-colonial contexts, 'subaltern studies' scholar Chatterjee provides a particularly helpful framework. He makes a relevant distinction between the formal institutional space of 'civil society' and the fluid space of 'political society', where a large part of the everyday practices of government in the post-colony take place. He grounds his discussion within India. As he explains:

> In political society, people are not regarded by the state as proper citizens possessing rights and belonging to the properly constituted civil society. Rather, they are seen to belong to particular population groups with specific empirically established and statistically described characteristics, which are targets of particular government policies. Since dealing with many of these groups implies the tacit acknowledgement of various illegal practices, governmental agencies often treat such cases as exceptions, justified by very specific and special circumstances, so that the structure of general rules and principles is not compromised. Thus, illegal squatters may be given water supply or electricity connections but on exceptional grounds, so as not to club them together with regular customers who may have secure legal title to their property. […] All this makes the claims of people in political society a matter of constant political negotiation, and the results are never secure or permanent. (2011: 223)

Most of the actions on the part of Guinean youth at the heart of this dissertation

can be understood to belong to 'political society'. So, for instance, one research

participant went on Twitter to share pictures of model replicas of planes, cars or houses

made with recycled scrap metal by a group of children. These children had never

attended school and they sold these models in the street in an effort to raise some cash

(see chapter 1, figure 2). My research participant shared those pictures to showcase the

'talent and resourcefulness of Guinean youth' and also as an effort at lobbying through

social media on these young people's behalf. The Minister actually responded and

invited the youths to come to meet with him. When the young model makers explained

that they wanted to emigrate to Europe, the minister offered to pay for their education if

they promised to stay in Guinea. This is a prime example of the kinds of negotiations and

state interventions, 'justified by very specific and special circumstances' that Chatterjee

associates with 'political society'. The youth negotiated directly with the minister rather

than by trying to influence policy change through their local elected representatives.

They did so by invoking their position as belonging to a marginalized population i.e.

Guinean youth. And the minister responded not by trying to effect policy change on any

broad level, trying to address the problem of youth literacy or unemployment as might be

expected, but simply by creating an 'exception', offering to find funds to pay for these

particular four youths' education. Although the scale is relatively small, these are exactly

the type of experiences of government, which Chatterjee associates with political society.

Similarly, when Guinea youth take to social media to demand that the government begins

to issue identification papers again – after it had stopped doing so for one and a half years

(See chapter 3) – they are entering the kinds of 'direct political negotiations' outside the

official channels of representative democracy that Chatterjee see as the hallmark of

'political society' (2011: 219).

The distinction between the domains of 'civil society' and 'political society' proposed by Chatterjee is also useful in explaining the unique positioning of youth as a collective constituent group within the contemporary Guinean political landscape. As Chatterjee explains, marginalized populations such as the rural poor or street vendors or illegal squatters are addressed by the state not as individual citizens with rights but as belonging to a specific 'group' or population with specific 'empirically established and statistically described' characteristics such as living in a rural district or earning less than 2 US$ a day or illegally occupying land, etc. These individuals are officially citizens of the Indian state with officially defined rights, however, in their interactions with state representatives, they get addressed in bulk, as 'rural poor' or 'illegal squatters'. As Chatterjee notes of marginalized populations in India:

> These people do, of course, have the formal status of citizens and can exercise their franchise as an instrument of political bargaining. But they do not relate to the organs of the state in the same way that the middle class do, nor do governmental agencies treat them as proper citizens belonging to civil society. Those in political society make their claims on government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations. (2011: 219)

Many of the examples shared in this dissertation show youth is Guinea to be one of the key populations recognized by the state under the terms of political society. The #5000cbon campaign for the lower gas prices discussed in chapter three offers here one of the most marked examples. The campaign was started by a group of young Guineans

online using the tools of social media mobilizing, primarily cohering and generating

'buzz' around a hashtag #5000cbon [#5000isenough]. Yet, as soon as trade unions, taxi

unions and other formally constituted citizens' groups recognized as belonging to

'proper' civil society got involved in the campaign, the government side stepped 'youth'

as an interlocutor. It was easy enough for the government to discount and exclude youth,

as a constituent group. As a loosely constituted group whose operations could be

dismissed as either 'virtual' and taking place online, or as 'vandalism' once they took to

the streets, youth could be dismissed as 'improper'. The government then focused its

negotiations with the 'proper' groups constituted in civil society. Given the lack of

transparency that characterizes 'civil society' in Guinea, this resulted in a widely decried

behind-closed-doors deal between the transport unions and the government, and in effect

'hijacked' the original claims youth made within political society. This case highlights

the fragile nature of negotiations and political dealings within political society.

One of the key contentions of Chatterjee in putting forward his notion of 'political

society' is that what takes place within the domain of 'political society' should be taken

seriously and not simply dismissed as 'backward' or corrupt. As he shows, political

society allows a domain for marginal populations to engage with the state, place demands

on government and negotiate with institutional powers. So, it is not the case that justice

is better served by the 'proper' institutions and legal framework of civil society, and that

political society is the domain of the 'arbitrary and tyrannical' (2011: 16). On the

contrary, it is possible that just decisions can be reached within the informal and

contingent domain of political society and that unjust or arbitrary decisions can be

reached with civil society. The example of the #5000cbon campaign shared above and discussed in greater detail in chapter three is here a clear example of an arbitrary decision reached within the terms of civil society bargaining.

For Chatterjee, then, taking into account the actual exercise of power and state interventions that take place within political society should be the basis for re-thinking democracy away from the normative imperatives of Enlightenment-based Western models. As chapter one demonstrates, for Guinean youth being able to go online and correct the errors made in French by prominent politicians and figures of authority right up to the president offers them new avenues of asserting themselves as a population and government interlocutor. As such, it expands the horizons of possibilities for this group with the domain of political society. Yet, as I show in chapter two, an expanding digital infrastructure increasingly frames the interactions between Guinean citizens and the state. These structural forms of mediation also raise new questions. The example of the new telecommunications' tax at the heart of chapter two is here a case in point. When market sellers in Labé in August 2014 became fed up with the lack of hygiene and general state of uncleanliness that resulted from the market authorities failing to regularly clean the market, they refused to pay their 'market tax'. As the online newspaper Aminata.com reported at the time, some even started hurling insults at the market officials on their daily rounds to collect the tax. Cleary, this was not the official or even 'proper' channel for lodging a complaint about the market's upkeep. Yet, as most market sellers very well knew, official complaints were highly unlikely to result in any meaningful change, and in any case would likely take far too long. Given the urgency of the matter, they resorted to

using the means of negotiating and engaging with authorities available to them within the domain of political society. Yet, this capacity to negotiate and constitute oneself as a population to be reckoned with within the terms of political society becomes greatly reduced when the relations between citizens and government take place entirely through the exchange of digital information between wirelessly connected devices. As I show in chapter two, when youth find themselves constituted as fiscal subjects and subjected to a new form of taxation when purchasing passes to connect to the Internet, their ability to foot-drag and protest becomes greatly limited. Their primary interactions are with the multinational corporations selling the passes rather than the government directly. Besides, they have no other options to connect to the Internet and access this global resource. What is more, the significance of the introduction of this new form of taxation is reduced within public discourse to a dispute over increased cost rather than about the fragmentation of the fiscal subject occurring insidiously via digitally connected devices. At stake, here, is the rise of new forms of governmentality to locate Guineans, and youth in particular, in new ways. In digital society, then, Guinea's youth population experiences a dual process characterized by both an opening of possibilities for engaging with the state and the absolute closing up of the political domain at the heart of new forms of subject location and governmentality. This requires further thinking about the political moment for Guinea youth, a moment that is defined by both an opening of democratic politics and simultaneous closing up of the possibilities of political action within the sphere of political society.

In other words, this dissertation does not offer to simply transpose Chatterjee's argument about 'civil' and 'political society' to the Guinean context, despite the

interesting nature and relevance of this comparison. Rather, the politics of youth through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter point to the need to move Chatterjee's analysis even further. This necessitates a way of accounting specifically for the consequences for youth of the digitalization of the political domain in Guinea. Although 'civil society' and 'political society' continue to be domains in which state policies and government interventions are experienced in Guinea, it is also worth considering the emergence of a qualitatively different domain, that of 'digital society'. By 'digital society' I refer to the emergent domain of political life in which relations between people and the state, which includes both how people make their claims on government and how in turn they are governed, are mediated by a range of digital technologies, and social networking first and foremost. Just as for Chatterjee the emergence of 'political society' was a response to new technologies of government beginning in the early 1990s under the impetus of 'developmental state' agenda, a 'response to changed conditions of governmentality' as Chatterjee refers to it (2011: 148). As a result of these changed political and economic conditions, a whole set of government agencies providing education, health services, electricity or emergency relief began entering the lives of marginalized populations including the rural and urban poor in an increasingly piece-meal and fragmented fashion, creating the 'myriad and changing grids within which population groups could make their demands' (*ibid*). As a result, the state, through these various agencies' work, become increasingly internal to the lives of marginalized populations in India, who responded by developing a whole range of skills necessary for obtaining benefits under the terms of 'political society' as described above. Today, an increasing number of interactions between Guineans and the Guinean state are

mediated by digital technologies, and social media in particular. The many examples in this dissertation illustrate the range: from youth interacting directly with government officials, including prominent Ministers and the President himself to election monitoring and activists' campaigns making specific claims on the government, as well as new forms of government power in the form of increased surveillance and distinct forms of taxation. In other words, digital technologies are changing the 'conditions of governmentality'. As Chatterjee notes, within political society people are not regarded as individual right-bearing citizens but rather constituted as 'populations', groups with shared statistically measurable characteristics such as ethnicity or location of residence. As I show in chapter three, on social networking sites, the locus of interaction with the state responds to a different logic. Groups cohere around a hashtag or through 'presencing' themselves to borrow the term proposed by Couldry (2012: 47). Rather than statistically determined, the logic here is participatory and self-selecting. Groups coalesce and respond to an invitation contained in the technology's design to take part. These changing arrangements point to a 'digital society'. It is important to note that just as for Chatterjee political society does not 'replace' civil society – both domains continue to exist side-by-side -, similarly, 'digital society' represents an additional rather than replacement domain of politics in Guinea, alongside civil and political societies. In the next section, I propose to further reflect on the current political moment for youth in Guinea. In doing so, I propose the term 'conscious bits' as a way to link the recent Guinean political context to the emergence of a 'digital society' offered here.

Conscious bits: the techno-politics of youth in dissonant times

In proposing the phrase 'conscious bits' in order to consider connections across 'digital society', youth and the current political moment in Guinea, I hope to do three things. First, in using the term 'conscious' I intend to strategically mobilize the notion of 'generation consciente' or 'conscious generation', a term increasingly used across Francophone Africa to distinguish the generation coming of age at the turn of the millennium from their parents' generation who grew up in the early decades of Independence. In doing so, I do not wish to define or locate the youths in this research as members of the 'generation consciente'. Rather, my goal is to retain some of the elements typically associated with 'generation consciente', particular this generation's perceived sense of responsibility. And in doing responsibility, I seek to clarify the contemporary political climate's differences with Guinea's politics in the late 1990s and early 2000s. My second aim is to make reference to the hip hop term 'conscious beats', which characterizes political engaged rap as a way to reflect on youth's contemporary political status. In doing so, I embed this part of the discussion in recent theorization of hip hop as a political force in Francophone Africa (Fredericks, 2012; Sarr, 2015) but also wish to foreground the specific relation to time that characterizes 'digital society', further differentiating it from both 'civil' and 'political society'. Finally, in coining the phrase of 'conscious bits', I wish to draw attention to the role of the digital technologies themselves in shaping the relations between Guineans, and youth in particular, and the Guinean state.

In thinking about 'digital society' as it relates to youth in Guinea, it is worth briefly retracing some of the most recent political events in Guinea to provide some

context to the discussion at hand. Much recent academic research on African youth – a field that witnessed a revival of interest starting in the late 1990s – has been particularly helpful in theorizing the critical juncture for African youth that characterized the turn of the millennium. As scholars such as Diouf (2003), Cole (2010 or Honwana and De Boeck (2005) have shown, starting in the late 1980s, urban African youth found themselves at a critical historical moment when both traditional models and nationalist projects had increasingly become irrelevant and discredited (Diouf, 2003: 4). My aim, however, in retracing some of the events that marked Guinea's recent history, particularly following the death of ex-President General Lansana Conté in 2008, is to highlight how in Guinea, the political situation is very different today than it was even as recently as the turn of the millennium—something that is also reflected in the examples presented in the chapters of this dissertation.

Between 1958, when Guinea recovered its independence, following many decades of colonial occupation, and 2010, when the first democratically-held presidential elections took place, the country only had two political regimes both autocratic and dictatorial: the totalitarian socialist and nationalist regime under Sékou Touré between 1958 and 1984; followed by the military dictatorship of General Lansana Conté between 1984 and 2008, when he died. The period was briefly followed by a disastrous and violent transition period marked by the media antics of Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, who seized power in a military coup in December 2008, shortly after Conté's death. The transition period would be remembered primarily in two ways: by the YouTube antics of Dadis Camara known as the 'Dadis Show', a bizarre series of videos shown on Guinean television and YouTube in which the then head of the military junta in charge of the

transition would use his famous 'franc parler' or straight-talk style to dress down officials, including his own ministers and aides, in a public sphere. In perhaps one of the most famous moments of the 'Dadis Show', he addressed a rather surprised and somewhat dumbfounded German Ambassador by reminding him in all seriousness: 'I am not your little kid. I am the president of Guinea. You have to respect my authority'. Highly theatrical moments such as this one turned the 'Dadis Show' into one of Guinea's first Internet phenomenon, the show regularly breaking viewing records on YouTube, even at a time when the Internet was still a rarity in Guinea. The other much more somber event through which the transition rule under Dadis Camara would be remembered was the violent massacre on the 28th of September 2009. On that day, which marks the anniversary of Independence in Guinea, approximately 50,000 demonstrators gathered in the 'Stade du 28 September', one of the largest Stadiums in Conakry, to protest the military junta's handling of the transition and demand the organization of democratic elections. Dadis Camara's response was swift: troops were sent in who began opening fire on the crowds. At least 157 demonstrators were killed, over 1,253 were injured and hundreds of women were raped. Hundreds of protesters were arrested and charged without trial. Dadis Camara was forced out of office shortly after in December 2009, following a failed assassination attempt on December 3rd, 2009. On 27 June 2010, the country's first democratic elections were held.

The violence of the 28 September 2009 surprised most Guineans, despite high levels of political violence and the violent military repression of demonstrations having been part of the country's political landscape for years. For many of the youths who took part in the demonstrations on that day, it was a turning point in their political

engagements. Significantly for this project, Fodé Kouyaté, the head of ABLOGUI, the Guinean Bloggers' Association, behind the GuinéeVote election-monitoring campaign at the heart of chapter three, traces much of his career as a web-activist and blogger to that somber day. Twenty-two at the time, he witnessed the events at close-range perched on the balcony of a nearby building. He was one of the first to report on the events warning the news network France 24 of what was happening. Although his photographs of the massacre featured on news sites across the globe, the events also forced him to exile in nearby Mali. It is there that he developed his blogging skills before returning to Guinea in 2010.

My contention here is that moments such as the 2009 massacre, ousting of the military junta and the 2010 elections represent for many Guinean youth at the forefront of these movements key defining moments and turning points in the Guinean political landscape. It is not that youth-led demonstrations didn't exist before that. I remember witnessing violently-repressed student demonstrations in Labé in the late 1990s that also led to a student's death. And these were far from isolated incidents. Youth in fact have long borne the brunt of military violence in Guinea.   Yet, politically, the moment felt very different. Student protests of the late 1990s tended to be focused on a specific issue: non-payment of student's financial aid or lack of spaces in the classrooms, rather than regime change or democratic elections as in more recent protests. Generally, as a political moment, the late 1990s and early 2000s, seemed to be defined by a disillusion and a lack of hope that things could change, as the result of decades after decades of totalitarian rule. The foreclosed nature of politics at that time led scholars such as Diouf for instance to posit that 'identity politics' and young people's bodies had become the

primary sites of political protest and agency. Today, the political moment has shifted.

2015 saw the second democratic election in Guinea. This transition to democratic

process clearly doesn't undermine the continuation of old and entrenched practices:

corruption is by all accounts rampant at all levels of government, and economic policies

continue to fail to raise the standards of living of the overwhelming majority of Guineans

who continue to live in one of the poorest countries in the world, despite incredible

natural wealth. The recent gesturing of current president Lansana Conte, who was re-

elected in 2015, toward the possibility of changing the constitution to allow him to run

for a third term – something prohibited under the current legislature – has everyone on

edge.

Yet, many of the examples shared in this dissertation, including youth-led

campaigns such as #GuinéeVote or #DroitALidentité, seem to attest to the emergence of

a qualitatively different political moment. Youth can be seen wearing political t-shirts,

discussing divergent political views online or rooting for their candidates as we saw

during the elections. What is more as the GuinéeVote campaign illustrates, supporters

from opposing parties and different ethnicities can come together to participate in joint

efforts to ensure transparent elections. Overall, there seems to be a greater sense that it is

up to youth to take the responsibility to advance democratic change, something that is

accompanied by even if only partial or faint signs that long-entrenched institutional

blockages might begin to open up. In Guinea, democratic elections – even if still plagued

with logistical difficulties – are clearly a major step in this direction. The notion of

'generation consciente' which I call onto in coining the phrase 'conscious bits' captures

some of that mood, and particularly the changing sense of responsibility that comes with

an opening up of possibilities for youth in the political landscape. It is therefore useful in tracing some of 'generation consciente's' contours before discussing more directly its relation to 'digital society'.

The term 'generation consciente' was first coined in the late 1990s by Claudy Siar, a French radio DJ of Caribbean origin, known for promoting African and Caribbean music in France, most noticeably through his work at Tropique FM and Radio France International (RFI). Incidentally, Claudy Siar, a supporter of pacifist groups in Africa, has a long history of working in Guinea, where he recently initiated the first national youth consultation, an effort to invite a dialogue between the Guinean government and youth. The term 'generation consciente', however, has a much broader appeal within francophone Africa, where it is often used to designate millennial youth, and distinguish them from the 'youth of independence', their parents' generation who grew up in the first decades of Independence. The generation who came of age right around the time of Independence, in the late 1950s until the early 1970s for most African countries, was primarily defined by its strong involvement in nationalist struggles often expressed through Pan-Africanist values or socialist leanings. However, in the case of Guinea, this 'generation consciente' is understood primarily by its sense of its own responsibility toward the realization of democracy and justice in Africa. This strong awareness of its own responsibility – a sense that the 'onus' is now on them and them alone - is in many ways a result of decades of structural adjustment policies. The neoliberal agenda pursued vigorously through the leverage of foreign aid by International organizations, starting in the 1980s, has led to the stripping down of African governments' roles in providing education, health care and social security. As I have argued elsewhere (Bergère, 2016),

faced with decaying urban and social institutions, young Guineans have responded by constructing complex networks of self-organized social formations including complex networks of improvised social centers and street corners that operate as important sites of socialization. I do not aim to idealize these movements, which are often desperate and highly ambivalent, yet that sense that the 'onus is on them' lies at the heart of the 'generation consciente's' sense of self. The term has been widely used in popular culture, as song titles and as the name of several youth groups in Guinea for instance. In a recent press article, a group of Guinean commentators explained the term as follows:

> Whereas our parents led the fight for independence and democracy, it is up to us now to take responsibility for our destiny and to the fight for modernization and economic development.[9]

This awesome sense of responsibility is clearly present in many of the youth-led actions that form the bulk of this research, from keeping politicians 'on their toes' by systematically correcting their grammatical errors on Twitter or in organizing large scale election monitoring campaigns such as GuinéeVote, at the heart of this dissertation's third chapter. 'Generation consciente's sense of auto-responsibility and Do-It-Yourself ethos is in many ways mirrored or finds echo in social networking technologies' injunction to participate, which I detail in chapter three. As agentic moves, the creation of a hashtag also contains within the hashtag's very design particular invitation to take part and act, something that resonates uniquely with the current political mood and moment for Guinean youth.

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[9] http://www.guineepresse.info/index.php?aid=11523

My second goal in using the term 'conscious bits' is to make a reference to the hip hop term 'conscious beats', a term that designates politically engaged rap. My appeal to hip hop terminology is not entirely innocent here. Hip hop in fact has in recent years been increasingly theorized as a force being youth mobilization across West Africa. In a recent article entitled 'The Old Man is Dead: Hip Hop and the Arts of Citizenship of Senegalese Youth' (2014), for instance, Fredericks has explored hip hop culture as a 'locus of political identity formation' for Senegalese youth, one strongly linked to the 'Y'en a Marre' or 'We'Re Fed Up' movement that has swept the Senegalese political scene in recent years. In Guinea, similar links between hip hop culture and youth political mobilization can be drawn. Phillips, for instance, has noted how hip hop works as a key medium of protest for Guinean 'ghetto youth' behind the so-called 'axis of Evil' in Conakry, a group of contiguous neighborhoods in the capital that have in recent years earn a solid reputation as the hotbed of youth protest in the Guinean capital (2013). Many of my research participants cited the old-school beats of Guinean rap pioneers Kill Point or 'conscious beats' of more recent groups such as Methodik, Degg J Force 3 or Masta G as one of their favorite music genre. Two of them had musical ambitions of their own, raping in hip hop bands. One performed hip hop inspired slam poetry. For them and many of the other youth that took part in this research, hip hop was an important cultural referent that shaped their political sensitivities. The lyrics of Masta G's underground brand of hip hop were some of the most widely listened to during my fieldwork in 2015 and 2016. His songs constantly oscillate between virulent and brutally realistic denunciations of the political system in Guinea and more appeased calls to work together to promote economic prosperity and democracy in Guinea. For the 2015

presidential elections, for instance, he released a song entitled 'Nouvelle Guinée' (French for 'New Guinea') in which he called onto Guinean youth to 'build a new Guinea, onto the ruins of the past'. Yet, even in these more appeased songs, there is a sense that Guinean youth are 'fed up', 'have had enough' and 'will not be silenced any more'. The anger at the current political situation and desire to see things start to change as soon as possible which many youths channeled through hip hop, also found echo in the emergent 'digital society'. For instance, fed up and angered at the way International Women's Day, typically celebrated in Conakry, was unlikely to bring about any change or even address issues they felt strongly about such as Female Genital Mutilations or equal access to work opportunities, a group of young women decided to take to social networking sites. In less than two weeks, they organized one of the largest online campaigns in Guinea to date, #guineennedu21esiecle, as I explore in detail in chapter three. Similarly, when one of my research participant was angered to find children struggling to make a living on the street selling models made out of scrap metal, he took to Twitter and posted on the Education Minister's Twitter feed directly. He wanted a clear answer to this problem, immediately and that seemed the best way to do this. Within hours, the Minister replied. This changed sense of time and demand for immediate results is worth dwelling on a little more. It points to a further difference between 'digital society' and both 'civil' and 'political society'. As Chatterjee notes, in 'civil society', time is organized according the logic of what he terms 'empty homogenous time', which he defines as the standardized 'time of capital'. And given that in the postcolonial world, very few people live according to this highly regulated time of industry and capital, Chatterjee calls this time 'utopian'. By contrast, he argues 'political society' is organized

around 'real time', the flexible relation to time that is necessary for activities within the informal sector to operate (2011: 138). My contention here is that within 'digital society' yet another logic of time operates, one that is characterized by 'immediacy'. In other words, the time of 'digital society' is immediate time, something I explore in more detail in chapter three.

Finally, in using the phrase 'conscious bits' rather than 'conscious generation' for instance, I aim to shed light on the role of digital technologies – the 'bits' of binary code – as agents that shape political life with 'digital society'. As I argue in chapter two, the supposedly neutral chains of binary codes – literally 0s and 1s – that make up Internet Protocols such as Internet Protocol (IP) addresses and International Mobile Subscriber Numbers take on new meanings within the Guinean context. In Guinea, where most streets do not have names or numbers, these protocols form an emergent addressing infrastructure at the heart of new forms of governmentality and control. They are for instance at the heart of new modes of identification and location of the fiscal subject in Guinea. Similarly, hashtags as they are used by Guinean youths are not simply extensions of their collective agency, but rather, in many ways, shape the forms of that agency, inviting participative—collective but also highly uncertain forms of youth agency.

By exploring the ways in which the emergence of the 'digital society' in Guinea intersects with youth understood as a changing social category in Guinea, I hope to trace the changing contours of youth, and capture something of the current political moment for youth. 'Conscious bits' is my attempt at navigating this effort across multiple registers and genres, thus mirroring the rapidly changing assemblage of youth that is increasingly taking shaping in the interstices of Facebook and Twitter, understood as

Guinean social networking sites.

Youthful assemblages: Thinking through the changing contours of youth and politics

      This dissertation is based on 12 months of ethnographic research that took place online between July 2015 and July 2016. This digital ethnography included three basic elements: participant observation, photo-elicitation and interviews. Given my research focus on the politics of youth as realized and enacted on social networking sites, the entirety of the research activities took place online, on two social networking sites: Facebook and Twitter. These were chosen for both practical and tactical reasons: Facebook is by far the most used social network platform by youth in Guinea. At the end of 2015, Facebook was adding over 25,000 new users from Guinea per month. Over 50% of these new users were between the ages of 18 and 24 and over 80% are between the ages 16 and 34[10], an age group that represented approximately 35% of the population as a whole. When I started fieldwork in July 2015, Twitter was the third most used site after Facebook and WhatsApp, although it has now been overtaken by Instagram according to some recent accounts[11]. WhatsApp, although a popular application in Guinea, was not selected because it focuses primarily on peer-to-peer instant messaging and voice calls over the Internet. It did not offer the micro-blogging functions and public discussion tools that would allow me to immerse myself within the social worlds and everyday lives of Guinean youth online. It was used almost exclusively for texting and making cheaper voice calls. I selected Twitter instead both because of its popularity and for strategic reasons. As a micro-blogging site used primarily for sharing information and public

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[10] See www.socialbakers.org
[11] See www.socialbakers.org

discussions it offered a unique opportunity to immerse myself within the social worlds of my youth participants online. What is more, Twitter in Guinea – as in many other countries – tends to be favored for political discussions. This is due to the more public nature of Twitter feeds, which are by default accessible to anyone, unlike Facebook where users need to first send a request known as 'friend request' before being manually added by the user. Twitter also limits publications to 140 characters ensuring that messages are brief. This design specification means that the focus is on sharing information rapidly and widely. This emphasis on brevity and circulation enables users to follow a greater number of accounts, and has also made the platform one of the preferred platforms for 'public figures', including Guinean politicians and government officials. I felt this platform would be useful in exploring the 'politics of youth' providing me with more opportunities to observe the interactions between Guinean youth and politicians and government officials including top-ranking Ministers and the President himself, who were just starting to make their forays into social media on Twitter at the time. As such, Twitter was chosen in part practically and in part strategically.

From a more theoretical point of view, this research and its methods were informed by a desire to reflect theoretically on the concept of political agency as it is affected and affects the digitalization of politics in Guinea. At the heart of this line of questioning, is a desire to reflect on how existing theories of youth political agency, not only in Guinea but more generally, are affected by the ubiquity of new information technologies and perhaps more specific by young people's internalization of the digital

practices in their experience of everyday politics. More specifically, it was animated by a

desire to explore how theories of assemblage as they have in recent years been used in

urban studies, and which I had explored in two previous publications (Bergère and Silver,

2015; Bergère, 2016) might be mobilized to account for the everyday experiences of

youth and politics on Guinean social media. By assemblage, here, I specifically refer to

Deleuze and Guattari's work and conceptualization of assemblage as:

> […] co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. It is never filiations which
>
> are important but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but
>
> contagions, epidemics, the wind. (2007 [1977]: 42)

The impetus behind taking such an approach was in part at least personal and

experimental. I had used the approach to analyze data collected as part of a research

project on street corners as sites of youth socialization in Guinea, and found it useful in

drawing attention to the coming together of youth bodies, objects, historical forces and

policies that shapes the unique trajectories of these self-organized youth spaces. In

addition, the approach seemed particularly promising in guiding my engagement with

social networks, research fields that seemed in many ways exemplified by the

juxtaposition of multiple registers. In the present work, the approach had two main

consequences: one organizational and one analytical. Organizationally, adopting a lens

guided by assemblage theory challenged me to stay away from a linear engagement with

the field, clearly defining a problem and group of participants that could be followed in

their everyday activities online. As a result, this study is not a study of a small group of

'web-activists' for instance. The participants in this research instead represent a much more diverse group of Guinean youths, a kind of 'motley crew' of youth that include hip-hop artists, students, unemployed youth and web-activists. Some youth posted information on social networks every day and were very vocal, others posted very rarely, preferring instead to use the private messaging functions of Facebook or Twitter. They represented many different ethnic, class and gender groups. Still, they were not intended to be a 'representative' sample, statistically selected, but rather a group assembled for both practical reasons within my existing networks and 'purposely' by approaching people such as web-activists who might offer unique insights or positions (Maxwell, 205: 87). Using an assemblage sensibility also forced me to constantly shift my perspective and consider both a range of different scales and different registers, including fine-grained ethnographic data, visual evidence as well as technical and policy analysis, perhaps most obviously in chapter two, which offers a detailed and at times technical account of Internet Protocols and identification as they become realized in Guinea. As a result, this dissertation, like different aspects of a prism, offers a 'rhizomatic' view, shifting lenses, scales and registers in order to hone in on a central driving question: how are the politics of youth realized or mediated on social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter? And reversely, how do these technologies realize or mediate youth and their politics? The approach taken is designed to mirror assemblage theory and take seriously its emphasis on disregarding the primacy of registers in order to follow lines of flight and coming together. As Deleuze and Guattari explain thinking in terms of assemblage emphasizes circulation over static systems, something captured by the image of the 'rhizome':

Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any points to any other point, and

its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play

very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. ([1980] 2004: 23)

From a methodological point of view, this means that my interest was not so

much in preparing a set of systematic interventions with a view to pinpoint what may be

lying behind i.e. the determinants of certain actions. Rather I decided to take seriously

Deleuze and Guattari's injunction to 'make a map not a tracing' ([1980] 2004: 1). As a

result, the account presented here is at times dizzying and often dissonant. It, to quote

Janet Roitman in her conclusion to *Fiscal Disobedience*, '[spins] many threads, all of

which do not come together in a synthetic weave' (2005: 200). But rather than

accidental, this is in many ways strategic and welcomed. It mirrors the 'rhizomatic'

experiences of the political agency and the fragmented subjectivities of the young social

users that I follow in this dissertation. Concretely, what this does is move the analysis

away from trying to understand the determinant factors, lines of filiation or ethnic,

familial, generational or class affiliations and forms of belonging that might explain

regularities of actions on social media. Rather, the focus of analysis is on the moment of

encounter, on the specific arrangements and relations of power created 'in between', in

the flow of information, desires, histories and technical operations that occur in the

various events under scrutiny here. Assemblages are never pre-determined, but rather

take shape in the moment of encounter. Understood in this way, hashtags, as they are

used by Guinean youth in the pursuit of various political goals, become agentic moves.

But they are also agentic movers that take a life of their own, and need to be understood in their exteriority and excess. As a metadata label that instantly binds information together, hashtags are not simply new tools of youth agency but rather set in motion unique and unpredictable arrangements. For youth, that often means that they become bets hedged onto disjointed histories and uncertain futures. And this can be risky business as the #5000cbon campaign exemplifies. Once the campaign became 'hijacked' by historical forces and older political formations, youth complained and moaned, but also had to concede. The only alternative would have been to go down in the streets and risk potentially deadly violence and military force. On this occasion, this did not seem a worthy risk to take on.

In July 2015, after receiving approval from the Rutgers Internal Review Board (IRB), I began recruiting participants. Just as the rest of this project's research activities, this took place entirely online. In a first for the Rutgers IRB, they agreed for consent to be obtained digitally using an online form. This greatly facilitated the process. In recruiting participants, I used what Maxwell calls a 'purposeful selection' (2005: 87). Having been going to Guinea from nearly twenty years at the start of this research, I was already friends with over fifty youth on Facebook and connected to about forty on Twitter. In order to facilitate entry, I began by drawing on these existing networks, reaching out to them with a clear description of the research goals and project. Recruiting from these existing connections was easy. Some of the youths I approached I had known since the late nineties, since they were children as young as two or three. Others, I had met in person during subsequent visits to Guinea. I also approached some

youth whom I did not know in person, but to whom I had personal connections through friends or their families. As such they did not necessarily know me in person, but either knew of me, or could see that I knew some of their friends or relatives. This greatly facilitated access, establishing an immediate level of trust rather than me approaching strangers on social media. This was especially important since once they accepted to take part in the research they would allow me to have access to their timelines, being able to read posts and information which at least in the case of Facebook they tended to reserve to friends and family. It was also important since I was a male in my late 30s as my Facebook profile made clear. It was extremely easy to recruit ten participants to take part in the research using this approach. Yet, I was also keen to recruit outside of my immediate networks. Using a snowball sampling approach, I recruited another ten youths from two other milieus. I approached three youth, who were active members of the hip hop scenes in Conakry and Labé, and as such were followed by a number of my own friends. I was particularly keen to recruit from the hip hop scene in Conakry in particular, as I knew that scene was ethnically more diverse than my own networks, who included many youths of Fulani origin. In addition, several of the people I approached were involved in a recent documentary project called Foniké, for which I had done some informal work helping them apply for grants. The project aimed at documenting the vibrant hip hop scene in Conakry. Foniké means youth in Sussu, one of the main languages in Conakry, and the title reflected the group's interests in issues related the 'youth', which provided a nice entry point for my project. I felt that our joint interest in youth might entice them into taking part in this research. The other avenue I pursued was recruiting from a group of young web-activists, who were at the time beginning to gain

more visibility on social networks, and Twitter in particular. From this informal network of young web-activists, I recruited eight youths. In recruiting these youths, I had a few selection criteria: they had to be 'legal adults' i.e. over eighteen years-old. This was necessary from an ethical point-of-view since obtaining the written consent from parents would prove too difficult. They also had to self-identify as youth, which I broadly took to mean that they had to be between the ages of eighteen and thirty. Although this might seem 'old' for youth, this reflects the widely-documented expansion of the category of 'youth' across Africa (Durham, 2004; Cole, 2010). Given the difficulties in accessing the social markers of adulthood – a stable employment, marriage, a house – many young Africans remain social juniors longer. Since this was the group I was particularly keen on studying, I made sure that they self-identified as youth, i.e. that they felt that they still belonged to that social category. I also made sure that my research participants lived either in Conakry or Labé, the two cities in Guinea that I knew well and were I had lived. As such, I knew the neighborhoods, schools and streets where many of these youths live, which proved useful when participating in their daily lives on social networks. It helped me make sense of some of their publications. For instance, I knew the kinds of ethnic or economic status, which they associated with certain neighborhoods. Finally, I made sure that I had roughly equal numbers of male and female participants, ending up with eleven young men and nine young women. This was not meant to be statistically representative in any systematic way, but still allow for a certain diversity of points of views and experiences. Recruiting outside of my immediate networks proved a little more difficult and some of my initial requests were met with various degrees of suspicion. One of my first message to one of the rappers I was keen to have as a participant was, for instance,

met with deep suspicion. In reply to my introductory Facebook message, which detailed

the aims of the study and the process for preserving participants' anonymity, he replied:

> Salut Clovis, Au fait, je ne comprend pas comment votre enquete me concernerasi et ca me rapporterais quoi ce genre de statistiqué? Bon, je ne sais que dire Man, sans vous vexer. [Hi Clovis, I don't understand how your study has anything to do with me, and what would I gain from this kind of statistics? Well, I don't know what to say man, without wanting to offend you.]

I replied by explaining that my approach was not statistical and that I approached

the research more as a collaboration with my participants rather than as a way to collect

statistical data. Besides, since I knew we had a common acquaintance, a French

videographer who had worked with him on the Foniké project, I figured this may help

alleviate some of his fears and decided to mention our shared acquaintance as a way to

reassure him.   This approach somewhat backfired when I learned that he had felt

betrayed by our shared acquaintance, who he felt had decided to focus more exclusively

on one of his friend's hip hop projects rather than his. As he noted, he felt betrayed and

'didn't trust anyone easily anymore' adding in English 'Sorry!' Still, he also noted that

he liked some aspects of the project, explaining his reasons as follows:

> 1.C'est Anonyme=unknown Temoin. 2. La Place De La Jeunesse 3.Axes De Tes Blablabla Pour Lesquels Je Bandes. [1. It's Anonymous=Unknown Witness. 2. The Place of Youth 3. The Angles of Your Blablablah Which Excite Me [ed. Literally which give me an erection]

He finally decided to get onboard after I answered his questions about the

specifics of the study. Interestingly, when I approached the young web-activists with the

same initial introductory message, I received one of two responses: either they were very

keen to join the research and to share their views on topics such as youth and social media that were so important to them, or I was met with some degree of suspicion. Several for instance noted how as web activists prone to exposing the actions of the political figures they couldn't trust people they didn't know online. But in the end, noting that we had friends in common or that the study was anonymous was enough for all to want to participate.

As noted above, this research was entirely conducted online. Therefore, my field site was the social networking sites used by Guinea urban youth, Facebook and Twitter more specifically. In further conceptualizing the scope of my field site, I drew on Boelstroff et al. (2012)'s definition of a field site as 'an assemblage of actors, places, practices, and artifacts that can be physical, virtual, or a combination of both' (60). Yet what I had access to was in some sense unique. The actors I interacted with were the actors, as they were mediated by either Facebook or Twitter. Although the majority went by their real names, several used only pseudonyms or nicknames. My interactions with them were always 'screened'. I had no access to smells, no access to environmental details such as temperatures or humidity – other than my own environment. The places that I saw and that we discussed, I could only see as they appeared on my screen. So, for instance, when a youth in Conakry posted a photograph of himself – a selfie – under a tree next to a wall, noting that he was 'sous l'arbre de la 2ieme cellule de Gouantanamo'[under the tree in the 2nd cell at Guantanamo] , I was indeed able to verify with him that he was referring to a 'bureau' or informal youth meeting place known as 'Guantanamo' (See figure 1) [INSERT FIGURE ONE].   Yet, I was not able to

experience the space directly, outside of the photograph at it was posted on Facebook. From a methodological point-of-view, this did two things: First, it focused my attention on the online space exclusively, bringing questions of representation, circulation and mediation to the fore. This greatly informed my reflection on the role of the technologies as agents of youth. But, second, and this was I think a little more unexpected from my own perspective, it also made my own memories of living in Conakry and Labé, more prominent in the research process. Looking at photographs such as Figure 1 or any other of the thousands of photographs which I came across on Facebook or Twitter during my fieldwork did in fact bring up smells and experiences of places, even sounds and emotions. But these were in part at least, based on my own memory of living in Guinea and spending time in similar places– yet, also clearly different – from the '2nd cell in Guantanamo', which conditioned my own experience of the social media images which I observed on the screens of my laptop and smartphone as part of this fieldwork. Given the complexities of the ways in which memory operates, it is clearly difficult if not impossible to know exactly how this affected my experience of fieldwork. How researchers' personal experiences and memories affect the process of cyber-ethnography is an area of research methods that has not to date been theorized. Yet, given the current boom in digital ethnographic approaches, it might be an important avenue to further reflect on. From the point-of-view of this present study, this constant process of recalling memories of my own time in Guinea brought up my particular affect in the research process in at least two ways. First, it confirmed that knowing Guinea, and more specifically Conakry and Labe, where my research participants were based, was important to successfully conducting this research. When I saw photographs with

comments such as 'under the tree in the 2nd cell at Guantananmo' such as the one shared

in figure 1 I could immediately identify it as referring to an informal meeting place,

which I was then able to confirm with my research participant. Without that prior

knowledge of similar places, which provided me with a shared knowledge base with my

research participants, it may have been difficult to even begin making sense of the

significance of the photograph and post. Second, my own experience of these two

Guinean cities spans nearly twenty years, having first lived in Guinea for twelve months

in 1996 and 1997, and last visiting in 2010. My memories of these spaces in Guinea,

which I recollected on a daily basis during my fieldwork, were then memories of a

different time. As much as similarities and shared experience, these memories also

highlighted difference and change. So, the informal meeting place in Figure 1 has been

nicknamed 'Guantanamo', an ironic reference to the infamous American prison in Cuba.

This kind of sarcastic reworking of current affairs into nicknames is something I clearly

recall from living in Guinea, where it is part and parcel of youth cultures. Yet, my

friends tended to be nicknamed, 'Al Gore' or 'Saddam Hussein', places would be

'Bagdad' or 'Beirut'. Beyond personal memories, having this longer-term engagement

with Guinea became important in this research bringing my own attention to the unique

characteristics that define the current moment for Guinea youth. My own positionality

was important to arguing for the emergence of a new domain of political life, which I

term 'digital society'. As I note in several places in this dissertation, the advent of

democratic elections has for instance resulted in a greatly changed experience of politics

for youth, one that as I show is defined by a dual process of simultaneous opening and

foreclosing of possibilities in part as a result of the digitalization of political life in

Guinea.

Participant observation conducted online was one of the three research activities

undertaken as part of this study. Since I was concerned with the cultural mediation of

youth as shaped by the current widespread adoption of social networking, this required

close attention to the processes of cultural mediation, to the meanings and affective

investments that attach themselves to the mundane, everyday practice of social

networking. Ethnography allows researchers to immerse themselves within the social

frame of daily activities in order to provide an intimate view of 'substance and meaning'

(Boelstroff *et al.*, 2012: 65). It, therefore, stood out as the most appropriate methodology

for my proposed study. This included participant observation, which Boelstroff *et al.*

(2012) term the 'cornerstone of ethnography' (65). In order to immerse myself as what

Boelstroff terms a 'consequential social actor' (ibid) within the participants' lives online,

I made sure to check into Facebook and Twitter every day for the duration of the

fieldwork. In Facebook, I would log into the site, and first check my 'notifications' tab.

This would immediately alert me of any important activities on the part of my research

participants, birthdays, new posts especially if they had received a lot of attention,

attracting Facebook defines 'notifications' as 'updates about activity'. Under this vague

description in actual fact lies a complex algorithmic calculation that takes into account

which accounts a user is most connected with, the average time of posts, etc. It is beyond

the scope of this study or methodology chapter to explore how Facebook's algorithm

might be shaping my fieldwork, although building on recent work on the social

implications of algorithms[12] would be an avenue worth pursuing. Still, aware of the potential limitations of the 'notifications' tab, I made sure to check all of my research participants' pages on a regular basis so as not to miss out on any of their posts. I also checked any messages I might have from my research participants. I followed a similar process on Twitter, although direct messages tended a little more infrequent, most people preferring the convenience of 'Facebook messenger' for private messaging. During every session, I took field notes, recording any notable events as well as my impressions. My notes included my own memories of Guinea mentioned above, and these memories were regularly noted.

It is worth taking a little time to reflect on the process of conducting participant observation online. The process is both similar and different to participant observation in physical space. It is similar in the sense that it involved immersing myself in the everyday lives of my research participants as they unfolded on Facebook and Twitter. This requires spending many hours on a regular basis in my field sites, making myself known to my research participants and taking part in daily activities. As such I read posts, replied to posts, shared posts and engaged in discussions as they were taking place. I wished them happiness on their birthdays, commented on the latest news to the extent that I could, hoping pre-electoral demonstrations remained peaceful or wished them good travels when they set out to visit family in Conakry. I sent my condolences when they lost a loved one. And we laughed about the many different ways to prepare mangos during the mango season, when this fruit becomes a staple of most meals and I shared their frustration at the state of roads, particularly during the rainy seasons when many of them turn into giant mud baths. One of the particularities of conducting fieldwork online

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[12] See Cardon (2016) for instance.

is the vast amount of information that can be recorded and collected at the click of a button. Using the 'copy and save' command on my computer, I was able to save every conversation I deemed relevant. Hitting the 'print screen' button on my computer or smartphone I could save entire screenshots including all text and images. The ease with which I was able to collect that information meant that I ended up collecting vast amounts of data. What is more this data could very easily be transferred to a format such as a Word document where it could be added to my fieldnotes or used directly, cutting out the need to transcribe audio files for instance. What is more, in addition to the process of recording data which includes a process of selecting – hence deciding – what is relevant, significant or important, my interactions with research participants as well as their activities outside of these direct interactions with me were also recorded and permanently stored by Facebook and Twitter. This meant that all of their actions were retrievable and searchable at any point in time. Whilst the process of recording and selecting was important given the vast amount of information and data produced, the ability to go back to these moments as they unfolded online at a later date, provided ways to triangulate information, going back to look at the context of the interactions or noting how other participants had reacted to similar pieces of news for instance. So for instance, when voting was under way for the October 11th, 2015 presidential elections, I spent most of that day following and taking notes on the GuinéeVote monitoring process as it unfolded on Twitter and Facebook, spending a large amount of my time observing the activities and accounts of my research participants who were directly involved in the campaign. I was also able to go back to my other participants' accounts the next day and see how they had reacted to the elections online. So that when I noted that most of my

other research participants – including several who typically posted comments on current affairs and politics – remained purposely quiet on the day of the elections, I could feel some of the tension of the day. Most later confirmed that they had purposely avoided any comments on politics given the highly volatile atmosphere in Guinea, and had for the most part stayed home on that day. This provided additional context from which to make sense of the #GuinéeVote campaign, further its significance and the risks involved.

Conducting fieldwork online presented two further specificities as compared to fieldwork in 'physical' space, both of which also had to do with my position in the field. On social media, fieldwork becomes not somewhere one goes to, a clearly defined space such as a school or a social center, but somewhere that is constantly available. One of my aims in conducting fieldwork was to access Facebook and Twitter on my smartphone as much as possible. In doing so, I was responding to Boelstroff's notion that technologies matter and that as much as possible digital ethnographers should be 'in step' technologically with their research participants (Boelstroff *et al.*, 2012: 12). Most of my research participants primarily access the Internet via their smartphones which prompted me to tried and do the same during my fieldwork. This also meant that my field sites were constantly available and with me, thus blurring the boundaries between my fieldwork and non-research life. Many times, I did fieldwork, took notes and collected data on the train, at the park with my family or late at night. This is both highly convenient and highly inconvenient. On the one hand, it entirely removes the need to spend time travelling somewhere, or arrange with research participants for mutually convenient times to meet for instance. Fieldwork can be entered into and left at the click of a button. On the other, it also meant that I felt I had to be constantly available, and

leaving fieldwork entirely was often impossible. But beyond assessing the convenience

or inconvenience of digital fields – every field sites presents such challenges and

opportunities -, this feeling of carrying fieldwork with me at all times, and of needing to

be constantly available to my participants was part and parcel of the experience of

conducting fieldwork online. It led me to reflect on social networking sites as agents

structuring and reshaping my own, and thus, my research participants' relation to time, a

key aspect of what I call 'digital society'.

Beyond this digitally mediated experience of time in the field, conducting

fieldwork on Facebook and Twitter also brought my personal life into the field new and

interesting ways. The blurring of the personal and professional is in many ways an

unavoidable aspect of conducting ethnographic research. In a recent book chapter, Lauren

Silver and myself use phenomenology to reflect on our experiences of conducting

fieldwork with youth, noting how our engagements with the field necessarily go beyond

our systematic processes for collecting data. Our sensorial engagements with the field, as

well as unforeseen incidents – both happy or tragic – often precipitate our field

experiences in new directions, which at times move us into the lives of our research

participants in ways we had not anticipated or vice versa. Although no major incidents

happened during this fieldwork, operating on social networking and on Facebook in

particular did mean that my research participants became instantly connected to parts of

my life that under other circumstances I may not have revealed. Alcohol consumption

for instance is a touchy topic in Guinea, a Muslim majority country.   Whilst many young

Guineans consume alcohol on a regular basis, not many would admit doing so, especially

not in a semi-public domain such as Facebook or Twitter. When I posted photographs of

my experiments with home brewing or noted how my four-year-old daughter had answered her teacher's Monday morning circle time enquiry about how she had spent her weekend, by excitedly reporting that she had 'gone to the liquor store with [her] dad!'a few laughed, but most politely ignored the posts. As noted in chapter two, 'Mi Fanki' [In Fulani 'I remain silent'] is often the preferred response in Fulani culture when conversations take uncomfortable turns. In this context, instant messaging, a function integrated into the Facebook platform, became a quite different space for conducting fieldwork. In fact, it was for some a preferred mode of communication. One of my research participants for instance infrequently posted on his Facebook timeline, although he would connect to his account daily and engaged in instant messaging with his friends. During the twelve months of my fieldwork, he posted three times in total although he was logged into his account almost daily. As he noted, he felt uncomfortable sharing information on his timeline knowing that his 'uncles' would be able to see that information too. On Facebook messenger, the tone of conversations often changed. It was generally a lot more casual. Some who had used the polite form of address 'vous' in French, switched to using the more familiar 'tu' form. Some would start to openly talk about alcohol. One mentioned his ambitions to start a 'blunt paper' importing business, noting how these papers using for smoking marijuana were hard to find in Guinea and would retail for quite a lot of money. A girl whose Facebook page consisted almost exclusively of inspirational quotes and photographs of herself and her friends wishing each other happy birthdays, praising their latest looks and hairstyles, began telling me how she 'hated the army' who made her 'enraged by the injustices they commit on a daily basis'. Observing how people operated across these different domains and being

able to compare interactions across what Miller and Madianou call 'polymedia' (2012: 169) provided opportunities to further reflect on processes of self-policing and the conditions of governmentality as they played out on social networking sites.

In addition to participant observation, I also organized a visual research activity consisting of image-making and photo-elicitation. My idea in conducting these more 'participatory' visual research elements was it would provide a 'fun' and engaging activity which I could conduct quite early on in the fieldwork as a useful exercise to build relations with my participants and for us to get to know each other. I was also interested in using visual methods, and asking my research participants to take photographs in particular, because I had in the past used a similar approach which I found useful in bringing my attention as a researcher to topics or issues which I had not foreseen (Bergere, 2016). I also knew that other researchers such as Young & Barrett (2001) for instance, had used a similar approach with youth in Africa as a way to get access to places, which might otherwise prove difficult to access for them as white adult researchers. Although my original plan was to conduct this activity early on in the fieldwork, my planned start date was slightly delayed due to the extended Internet Review Board approval process needed for this research. By the time I began fieldwork in July 2015, the presidential elections occupied such an important place in discussions on social media in ways that I had not anticipated. In order to respond to this general mood and focus on these discussions, I decided to wait until after the elections to organize the visual research. As such, by the time the component of the research took place, in November 2015, I had already been in the field for three or four months, and it couldn't exactly be used as a 'getting to know' each other exercise any more.

Nonetheless, in November 2015, I asked the youths taking part in this research to send me a few photographs (3 to 5) that 'documented their online lives'. As my brief note specified:

> The topic is very open. The idea is to show in a few photographs the role of new technologies in your daily life. This could include showing the kinds of devices you use, places where you connect or anything else that comes to your mind when thinking about new information technologies. It doesn't need to be complicated and can be very spontaneous. The idea is more to start a conversation. Once you send them to me, I will send you some questions and we can talk about it in more details.

Not all my research participants took part in the exercise. One mentioned that he didn't have access to a digital camera on his phone, and connected to the Internet most using his friends' laptop. Several offered to do this, but simply did not return any photographs. Still, I collected over forty photographs. These included photographs of smartphones, images of a phone charging station, photographs of the menu of 'Internet pass' options available from market vendors. One sent me photographs of her class schedule for the semester. She was studying for a three-years university-level course in finance and international business in Conakry at a campus operated by the Moroccan business school. This was an opportunity for her to show me how she was now using the Internet as part of her studies, to conduct research for her class work. This led to a discussion of her studies, how she was proud of her school, and how she had achieved well in accounting, but was struggling with other topics such as finance. Another sent me photographs of nightmarish Conakry traffic jams. These photographs again led the direction to several topics that were otherwise outside of the scope of this study such as the struggles of the street vendors that circulated through these traffic jams in hope to sell

some plastic pouches filled with water or oranges.

Some of the most surprising photographs, which at first seemed the most outside of the scope of the project often led to very interesting discussions, and helped me orient my research questions to topics of importance to my research participants. Photographs of army soldiers, or of children attending rallies and standing next to dangerous-looking security guards confirmed the prevalence of political tension and strong-handed military tactics in these young people's lives. This provided context to my focus on youth politics and the significance of 'digital society'. As I discuss in chapter one, some of the photographs taken as part of this fieldwork to show me the resourcefulness of young Guinean entrepreneurs resulted in these young Guinean children meeting the Education Minister. Being part of this process and observing it as it unfolded online provided me with unique insights into the changing relationships between Guinean youth and politicians as mediated by social media.   Conducting this visual research component confirmed my previous experience working with participatory image-making in Guinea. The medium often yielded surprising results and brought up topics that seemed to stand outside of the scope of the research process. As such, it could in no way be a substitute for the daily discussions and engagements that formed the bulk of participant observation. Still, the process of asking youth to take photographs often led the research interactions down surprising avenues, and the more creative and nonverbal expression enabled some research participants to bring my attention to topics which they wanted to talk about. Some of these proved to be highly valuable insights into their lives, and provided rich context to other elements of the research.

Towards the end of fieldwork, in June and July 2016, I conducted interviews with

each of my research participants. These interviews were conducted on Skype or via

IMO, a free app that allows users to make wireless voice calls from their cellphones.

This option was sometimes preferred as it tended to often a better audio quality especially

over lower bandwidths. The interviews lasted between twenty and forty-five minutes.

They were audio recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed. I used a 'semi-

structured' format, which included a list of pre-written questions and topics that I wanted

to explore during the interviews. However, once the interviews began I did not

necessarily follow the order of the questions, and generally preferred to let myself be

guided by the flow of the conversation. This allowed for a more conversational tone,

which I felt was more conducive to creating a relaxed feel, developing rapport and

encouraging a more open discussion. The interviews allowed me to explore my research

participants' social media histories and the trajectories of their engagement with social

media. I typically started the interviews with questions relating to how they had first

heard about social media, how long they had been using them, which sites they used and

why. I also asked them described a typical session on Facebook and/ or Twitter. These

initial conversations yielded some interesting results, including information I had not

previously known about my research participants' personal histories with social media.

Several revealed that they had had previous accounts, which they had to close as their

activities on social media changed. One for instance explained how she had to change

her name on Facebook, and stop using a previous account because her original account

was focused mostly on joking around with her friends. As a result, it included content

such as crude jokes and 'goofing around' with her friends that she would not feeling

comfortable sharing anymore, now that she had a more public profile both as a web-

activist and because more of her family now had accounts. The rest of the interviews covered areas which had come up during fieldwork including the role of technologies during the presidential elections, politics more generally, as well as questions related to literacy, the focus of chapter one. Having spent twelve months immersed in these young Guineans' online lives by the time I carried out the interviews, I was able to draw on significant moments from fieldwork and re-explore these moments with each of these participants. For instance, I was able to revisit a moment several months prior when one of my research participants was barred from following the Guinean president's Twitter account because she had pointed out some grammatical errors in his Tweets. Revisiting that incident with her in an interview setting, I was able to further explore the significance of correcting these errors for her.

Questions related to ethics are a constant consideration during ethnographic fieldwork and ones that clearly extend well beyond the scope covered by the Internal Review Board approval process. Daily in the field we are confronted with decisions that could potentially affect the lives of our participants, exposing them to unnecessary and unwanted risks or harm. This research with young adults which consisted primarily of immersing myself into their daily lives online on Facebook and Twitter presented relatively low inherent risk of physical or emotional harm that could have directly resulted from the research activities. These were all consenting adults who already spent a significant portion of their time online. I did not ask them to modify their behaviors in any particular ways, simply to let me follow them on Twitter or become connected on Facebook something they did with a broad range of people, including friends, family, classmates and colleagues or more distant acquaintances. Nonetheless ethical questions

are an integral part of fieldwork, and a number of questions arose including some that are specifically related to the digital nature of this fieldwork. For instance, information shared over online social networking sites varies in the degree to which it can be deemed public or private. Most information posted and shared on Twitter and on blogs can be considered public to the extent that it is freely available for anyone to view. Information shared with 'friends' (research participants were asked to add me as a 'friend' on Facebook) on Facebook is different. It is a kind of hybrid between public and private, the assumption being that only people that one has personally added to one's network (so-called 'friends') are able to view the information. In Guinea, Facebook 'friends' are typically a mixture of 'real-life' friends, family members, friends of friends or friends' relatives, professional connections and others who might simply share common interests (in a music genre or sports' club). It is however the owner of the Facebook account's sole and personal choice to add and remove friends from his or her network. As noted above, and as further explored in chapter two, as a result of this public or semi-public aspect of social networking sites, the young Guineans that took part in this research exercised a great deal of self-control and restraint when exchanging information on these forums.

Yet, when we chatted using instant messaging some of these restraints changed and some shared more personal information including things that they would not want shared or discussed on the public portion of the sites. Whilst this indicated that they trusted me at least enough to share information that could potentially be deemed personal in nature, I also had to make sure to handle this information with care and make sure that we reverted to a more formal and restraint mode of conversation when on the public

portion of the site. Several of my research participants mentioned the notion of 'netiquette' as a kind of underwritten code of conduct online, and that became an informal guide for ensuring that interactions online followed general social codes of Guinean youth on social networking sites. This was in some ways easy and part of immersing myself in their worlds. Issues of confidentiality online are however broader and complicated by the fact that confidentiality can only be guaranteed to the extent it is possible given the technologies. In other words, even when chatting privately with one research participant, I could only assure them that the conversation was private to the level permitted by the technologies. I had no way of insuring that a third party, including a governmental agency was not intercepting our conversation. Although this was for most part not an issue that was a potential risk in Guinea especially given the activism of some of my research participants and the repression that those who make vocal critiques of the state can sometimes face. I made this issue clear at the start of fieldwork as part of the consent process. Most of my research participants understood the risks; some used Tor browsers and other encoding technologies when accessing the Internet. Although I was always prepared to remind them of that potential if I felt the information they shared would be of a compromising nature, no such issue arose during fieldwork.

One further potential risk with information shared online is that it is traceable and retrievable once it is published on Facebook or Twitter. This raised a particular issue with regards to using the data in the writing process. Unlike a conversation in 'physical' space, anonymity could not be guaranteed by simply using pseudonyms. The quotes could still potentially be traced using the social networking sites' search functions. This was particularly problematic on Facebook where the information shared in posts were not

intended to be public beyond the author's immediate circle of Facebook 'friends'. For these quotes, I therefore decided to paraphrase them in a way that would keep the meaning but made it difficult to trace them using the sites' search function. Although the public nature of Twitter information remains a debated issue, I decided to go with the accepted notion that users of the sites given its focus on public discussion and sharing information rather than personal discussions assume that it is a publicly accessible micro-blog (Luvass, 2016). Therefore, after checking in with my research participants who were active on Twitter, I decided for quotes from Twitter to treat them as public and did not attempt to anonymize them in any way, following a similar approach to Luvass (2016).

Although I had not initial planned to conduct research entirely online, this proved to be a productive challenge. Not only was it often enjoyable, it also raised a number of practical and theoretical questions with regards to the process of digital ethnographic research including with regards to the role of technologies in shaping fieldwork interactions or specific ethical questions which I hope to continue exploring beyond this dissertation.

"She's trans-generational": Digital boundary work and the figure of the 'analphabet'

On July 1st, 2015, Guinean social networking sites (SNS), Twitter and Facebook in particular, went ablaze with comments. At the center of the storm, which included over 1,500 comments, was the coming into force of a new law, instigating a new tax on all telephone communications including fixed, cellphone, texting and roaming charges. The 'Taxe sur les Communications Téléphoniques' or 'Telephone Communications Tax' required Guinea's four telecommunications operators[13] to collect a tax on all communications, thus instantly raising the cost of all telephone-based communications by one Guinean Franc (1 GNF) per second, or the equivalent of 0.00013 US$ per second.[14] The introduction of this new tax, and new form of taxation, is highly significant in Guinea, a country where collecting taxes has tended to be a rather chaotic process (Afrobarometer, 2013), and I discuss the tax's significance in greater details in the next chapter. However, what really caught the attention of young Guineans on Facebook or Twitter on that July morning was not so much the tax itself – although that was certainly a part of it - but a particular sentence in the official press release issued by the Minister of Mail Services, Telecommunications and New Information Technologies in order to announce the signing of the new law and tax. The sentence in French read:

Le Ministre d'Etat en charge des Postes, Télécommunications et des Nouvelles

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[13] As of august 2016, these companies are: Orange-Guinee; Mtn-Guinee; Cellcom and Intercell

[14] In Guinea, a bread costs 1,500GNF a piece, rice costs 4,000GNF a kilo and vegetables such as onions cost 250GNF a piece. So although the tax was dismissed as insignificant by the Minister, a four-minute phone call would cost you near 240GNF or almost enough to buy one onion under this new tax. An hour on the phone would require the tax equivalent of nearly one kilogram of rice, a significant amount given that Guinea is ranked 179th out of 188 countries according the 2013 Human Development Index.

Technologies sait compter sur la compréhension des populations qui ont toujours su faire preuve d'acte de suivisme (*sic*) pour l'intérêt supérieur de la nation Guinéenne

This roughly translates as:

The State Minister in charge of Posts, Telecommunications and New Information Technologies knows he can count on the understanding of local populations, who have always proved to act with followership *(sic)* for the higher interest of the Guinean nation. (All translations are my own)

What really irked Guinean commentators on social networks was that the intended French word for 'civism' or 'good citizenship' – 'civisme' – had been mistakenly replaced by its near homophone 'suivisme' which translates as 'followership', 'blind conformity' or 'herd spirit'. The mistake, which had clearly escaped the scrutiny of the Minister - who signed the letter - and his communications office - that presumably wrote the press release in the first place - was immediately spotted by a young Guinean. Within minutes of the letter's release on the Ministry's website, the youth posted the letter on his Facebook profile, calling attention to the unfortunate or revelatory mistake – depending on how you choose to view it. He ended his Facebook post with a clear 'we will not follow you like sheep'. Instantly the message started circulating online. For instance, Fode Kouyate, the young head of the Association des Blogueurs de Guinée (ABLOGUI) or Guinean Bloggers' Association, relayed the message on both Twitter and Facebook, adding the hashtag #TaxeDeSuivisme[15] to his post. This instantly linked all commentary on the press release and thus, significantly raised young commentators' public presence and profile. Within the span of a few hours, the message was relayed

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[15] #TaxeDeSuivisme translates as #FollowershipTax or #HerdSpiritTax.

over a thousand times and became the subject of banter and pointed criticism on both

Facebook and Twitter. A number of Guinean news sites picked up the story, and by the

next day on July 2nd, the press release had been replaced on the Ministry's website by a

corrected version.

Although this example is particularly fascinating given the rather auspicious – and

clearly ironic– nature of the mistake in the press release, this story is not an isolated

incident. Rather it forms part of a broader trend through which young Guinean Internet-

users mobilize social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter to highlight and relay

mistakes, typos and other grammatical errors made in French in published documents,

official press releases or news articles. In this chapter, I begin by analyzing this trend as

part of what Nick Couldry calls 'unauthorized commentary'(2012: 41). This is the ability

afforded by social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter for previously voiceless

people to generate content in order to expose acts by public figures that are deemed

illegitimate or simply show acts that would have otherwise remained invisible (*ibid*: 47).

My argument here is that within the strongly gerontocratic Guinean context, which places

a particular emphasis on the links between age, power and knowledge, correcting

grammatical errors and uses of the French language on social media affords young

Guineans a new and unique opportunity to challenge traditional forms of power. Whilst

this would seem to broadly fit in with dominant understandings of the Internet, and social

media in particular, as a series of horizontally organized networks reflecting a more

democratic mode and participatory form of power (Couldry, 2012: 109), a closer look

reveals a rather more complex interplay of changing intergenerational power dynamics.

As Couldry explains, we need to go beyond thinking about the technological affordances offered by media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook in general or in the abstract. Instead, we need to explore these media platforms as practice, shifting our attention from theorizing about social networking sites as objects to asking what are people in specific contexts doing in relation to these new media. In this particular instance, I focus on the ways in which young Guinean social media users mobilize both traditional and digital forms of literacy in order to challenge dominant forms of gerontocratic authority. Within social media environments, the ability to read and write French correctly or navigate data-rich digital networks become key skills upon which commentators gain legitimacy and connected urban youth insert themselves within political discussions in Guinea.

In other words, within the Guinean context, marked by some of the worst literacy rates in the world,[16] the ability to read and write – a necessary requirement of social media activity – becomes a key articulation against which social media practices need to be understood. Correcting errors in French, here, emerges as one part of a broader exercise in social differentiation, a 'new way of acting [that] brings with it new forms of differentiation' to echo Couldry's quote reproduced above at the opening of this chapter (2012: 45). Drawing on Lamont's concept of 'boundary work' (1992; 2007), I argue that at stake is a process of digitally mediated symbolic struggle involving multiple forms of moral, socio-economic and cultural distinctions that crystalize around the figure of the 'analphabet' – or illiterate to use the more commonly used word in English.

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[16] Estimated in 2015 at 30.4% literacy amongst the population aged 15 and older in Guinea is amongst the ten lowest in the world (ISU/UNESCO REF).

Age, knowledge and 'unauthorized commentary' online

This chapter opened with an example of Guinean youth mobilizing social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter in particular, in order to expose an error made in French in an official document, in this case a press release issued by the Ministry of Mail Services, Telecommunications and New Information Technologies. Although significant enough to have warranted its own hashtag, #TaxeDeSuivisme, as already mentioned, this example is far from unique. Rather it forms part of a broader trend whereby young Guineans take to social media platforms in order to expose and correct grammatical, spelling or vocabulary errors made in French in official and public documents. A more recent example, for instance, includes an article on Guineenews.org, Guinea's largest online news outlet, published on November 1st, 2015 which mistakenly replaced the words 'en cavale' meaning 'on the run' with the words 'en canal' which can either mean 'in the canal' or 'on the channel'. This led to a series of word plays on both Twitter and Facebook. Some users wondering whether they were witnessing a 'carnival' – 'carnaval' in French – of errors, playing on the similarities between the word 'carnaval' and 'canal'. Following a similar play on words, another young Guinean asked whether this would happen on 'Canal +', the name of a major French cable TV channel available in most parts of West Africa, where it positions itself as the leading francophone television network in the region. Again, the error was quickly corrected.

In fact, references to authority figures' ability to correctly write in French is a constant source of banter and indignation on Guinean social media. One of the most followed and popular Guinean accounts on Twitter is a 'fake' account purporting to the

Guinean President Dr. Alpha Conde. The account uses the 'fake' register common on Twitter, and people who follow the account are aware that it is not in any way affiliated with the Guinean President, something made clear in the account's short profile description as well as in the highly satiric and humoristic tone of the tweets. On this account, references to other people's ability to spell and write French correctly is a constant source of discussion. For instance, a recent tweet from the account exposes the ex-Minister Mme Domani Dore's poor grammatical record on Twitter noting in a purportedly obfuscated tone:

Walaï, bilaï, @domani_dore, tu as quand même été mon Ministre. Pas normal d'avoir des fautes dans chacun de tes 16 tweets. J'aime pas ça goo

Which translates as:

Walaï, bilaï, @domani_dore, when you have even been my minister. Not normal to have mistakes in each of your 16 tweets. I don't like that boo

In another recent tweet, the anonymous author of this 'fake' account reacted to a typo made by a journalist and radio personality on Twitter, who wrote 'nous réalités' instead of 'nos réalités' as follows:

"A nous réalités"? J'avais dit et je confirme ici, la priorité de mon 3e mandat sera la formation @lamineguirassy

Which translates as:

'To we (sic) realities?' I had said and I confirm here, the priority of my 3rd term

on office will be education @lamineguirassy

The satire here works on several levels. On one level, the tweet is mocking the

error made in French by the journalist who wrote 'we realities' instead or 'our realities'

in the original tweet quoted. But the 'fake' Alpha Conde also makes reference to his 3rd

term in office, a highly controversial issue in Guinea. The current President Dr. Alpha

Conde is in fact serving his second term, which is technically his last given that the

Guinean constitution only allows Presidents to serve two consecutive times. However, he

has recently made public his desire to change the constitution before the end of his

current term to allow serving Guinean Presidents to run for a third time. The author of

the 'fake' account is therefore using this tweet not only to mock a journalist on his use of

French but also to deride the President's efforts at staying in power beyond his second

term.

The significance of the practice of using social media in order to expose errors

made in French by authority figures in Guinea was further highlighted to me about seven

months into my fieldwork. Early in my fieldwork, I noticed the practice and started

collecting all the examples I came across on Guinean Facebook or Twitter. Yet, although

I collected nearly a dozen examples of youth correcting errors in French in just the space

of a few months, these were just a collection of seemingly unrelated examples and I had

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I collected nearly a dozen examples of youth correcting errors in French in just the space

of a few months, these were just a collection of seemingly unrelated examples and I had

not come across any mention of the practice as a thing, as a cohesive practice or even a

deliberate strategy, until twenty-five-year-old Guinean blogger, Diakite, wrote a piece in

December 2015 describing the practice in great details. The post begins by noting that

Guinean bloggers have been exposing the 'serious and intolerable' mistakes in official

government documents, press releases, posters and flyers for quite some time now.

Diakite then highlights two recent incidents including when a young Guinean blogger in

her early twenties was barred from following the official Twitter account of the Guinean

president, Dr. Alpha Conde, for having noted a spelling mistake in one of his tweets.

This clearly highlights the contentious nature of the practice and perhaps more

particularly the role of gender and age, as the incident involves a young female blogger

contesting a powerful older male figure such as the Guinea president. Clearly, the

president viewed the correcting of the typo in this case as a sign of disrespect. Secondly,

the blog post proceeds to analyze the video of Dr. Alpha Conde's speech at the recent

Climate Conference – COP 21 – in Paris in December 2015, listing all of the linguistic

and grammatical errors in the first five minutes of the president's presentation.

When I asked one of my research participants about this phenomenon, a media-

savvy 23-year female blogger from Conakry explained the importance of holding public

officials accountable to high standards of French:

When you have an official body, I mean the President, whether it'd be the
President, the Minister or whoever… as long as it's official, these are people who
represent Guinea as a whole, these are people who… these are people who
represent us outside, so when you, you see that these press releases are really
sloppy, with huge mistakes, in the tweets or whatever, so and so says whatever,
you tell yourself yes it would be good if you corrected it, and you re-post the

tweet correcting the error at the bottom, even if you know that the guys will not do it, you know it will be read but… In fact I think it's a way at least because it's public to show that not all Guineans are useless, that it is them that do this, I think it's a way to… At least I think that Guineans do this a lot because they would like that people on the outside who see these people communicate with loads of mistakes, that they also see Guineans who distance themselves from these mistakes, who know that this is not how you write it, that it doesn't work… That this is not the correct spelling, so I think it's really this willingness to show… that we know that this is not how it is written, that they… they are not cultured, they don't know how you write it, but we do. (My translation from French.)

Strong feelings about the importance of writing French correctly on social media was echoed in several other conversations I had with Guinean youth, including one that insisted that he would 'de-friend' – i.e. bar you – from his Facebook account if you made too many typos and grammatical errors. This and the passage above are significant on several levels. First, it highlights the visibility of online communication to a perceived 'outside' and the centrality of Guineans' relationship to this outside for online communication, something I come back to in a later chapter. Second, it places literacy and the ability to write French correctly at the center of relations between young Guineans, who form the overwhelming majority of Facebook and Twitter users, and the powerful elites, elected officials, Ministers and the President. In order to grasp the relevance of this dynamic, it is important to understand the cultural context of Guinea that places knowledge at the heart of traditional understandings of age-based relations of power. In other words, within the highly gerontocratic Guinean society, elders maintain power with their knowledge in very specific ways. These involve not only traditional forms of knowledge such as being able to recount legends and tales[17], but also highly-orchestrated 'teasing' or 'insulting' rights. Within Fulani society, as many other West

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[17] Amadou Hampâté Bâ (1993) offers a detailed account of the ways in which young Fulani learn how to re-tell folk tales such as Kaidara, a process that involves being able to master increasingly complex notions and symbolic images (246).

African cultures, the right of tease or insult lies at the heart of social relations. As

Reismann explains, seniors have a right to 'insult' those who are junior to them, in this

gerontocratic society, juniors cannot return the favor, and need to accept the insult. In

this context, insults always involve the sexual organs or anus of one's father or mother

('latiol babaa ma' or 'nyammu yaaye ma'). The logic behind this is that the person

making the insult is conferred this right because he or she might have had knowledge of

things he or she is talking about: being of the same generation as one's parents he may

have played or even had sexual relations with them prior to their marriage. The fact that

Guinean youth are making a point of demonstrating their superior knowledge of French

language is therefore both highly significant and contentious. Reismann's classic

ethnographic of Fulani life is helpful in further appreciating the cultural resonance of the

practice. As he explains, in Fulani society, the largest ethnic group in Guinea, as opposed

to many other African societies such as among the Tallensi, for instance, older

generations' authority does not come from their positioning as closer to the ancestors

who administer the cult because there is no ancestor cult per se in Fulani society (1973:

76). Rather, amongst the Fulani:

> […] the importance of a person's age is a matter not of being close to death but of his (*sic*) being far from birth. The child is born uncivilized; he does not even have a name. […] He is naked and he does not even know what he is doing. […] The problem of authority never arises in the relation of the child with those around him but exists only after the child has grown, has left behind this life unworthy of a true Fulani. The fact that the child has grown, however, and is beginning to work, does not mean that those who are older have forgotten how he began in life. On the contrary, they know all the foolish things he has done, and thus they know things about him which he does not know himself." (1973: 76)

What is particularly interesting in Reisman's analysis of authority and what he

terms 'social distance' within Fulani society is the extent to which in this context power is related to what one knows. As he makes clear, generational authority is not conferred to older Fulani by their position within the life course, as closer the ancestor. Rather, their authority comes both from having lived longer and thus having 'learned' more and from knowing things about the younger generations that they do not – and cannot – know about themselves. Fascinatingly, such an approach to age-related authority also introduces an incredible amount of flexibility. And, as Reisman notes, 'social distance' between say a Father and a son, or between an older and younger Fulani varies during the life course, to the extent that if people from different generations live long enough to both be of retirement age, they then shift to associate with the same age-based group. The 'social distance' and its related authority, between these two generations are then seriously diminished. Equally, when young Guinean social media users go on Facebook or Twitter to correct errors made in French by their elders, thereby showing that they have more knowledge of French than these figures of authority do, they dig right at the heart of gerontocratic power in Guinea.

The third sense in which the examples and quotes shared above are significant is the extent to which they shed light on of the role of social media platforms and SNS such as Facebook or Twitter in particular as agents in the mediation of relations of power in Guinea. As one of my respondent, a 24-year-old male student from Labe, explained when I asked me how he thought social networks were changing the relationship between Guineans and politicians:

Social media break down the barriers that existed between politicians and the population because before to have a discussion with a politician you had no choice but to make an appointment, to request an audience, but nowadays, with the politician who has an account on Facebook or Twitter… very easily he will respond to you, it's very convivial. You can be in Labe where I am currently and write to any politician on social media. It totally breaks down the need for protocol. It becomes very easy… It also helps bring those that govern closer… to those they are first responsible to… It helps their work… You can also ask a question directly if you have any concerns… We are starting to see an active citizenry on social media because before this was impossible.

Similar views of the role of social media in breaking down barriers and protocol between politicians and the general population were expressed by several of my respondents. Another one for instance explained when I asked her how she felt that social networks were changing the relationship between politicians and youth in Guinea:

Yes, it is obvious that there is today a totally new relationship with politicians, with politics whether it be in Guinea or Africa… We saw it during GuinéeVote (*ed*: a recent monitoring campaign during the last presidential election). I mean it is very much the social network… the social tool… the social networks as tool which enabled this monitoring so, clearly yes, there is not even the shadow of a doubt that until recently… already…. Already we have to recognize two things: there is a banalization of access to information, we can access information easier because today the Guinean government had the ingenuity, and I congratulate them, they now have a communications office so we get things directly, we know what happened… after a cabinet meeting we get a small report, so we see this innovation, to have information instantaneously online no need to wait, so it necessarily has consequences… no need to go to the Ministry. We have everything in front of us so necessarily this has positive consequences, one of them is precisely this desacralizing of politicians' words (the fact of saying yes the Minister is always right)-check quote. Also make sure you check grammar throughout translations.

Clearly not all my respondents shared the same positive view of the outcome brought on by social media. Two of them for instance noted that although you could now post a comment on a politician's Facebook or Twitter account, you rarely got a reply,

which made it somewhat pointless to them. Yet, all recognized the qualitative difference in the relationship between youth and politicians facilitated by social networking sites, in terms that broadly fit within the notion of 'desacralization' described in the interview quote above. This adheres with analyses of social media elsewhere. For Couldry, this can be understood as 'unauthorized commentary' (2012: 41), which is the ability offered by social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter for previously voiceless people to generate content in order to expose acts by public figures that are deemed illegitimate or simply show acts that would have otherwise remained invisible (*ibid*: 47). This is clearly reflected in the comments above about the desacralization of the politicians' words through social networks. Further, youth understand how social networking as a tool breaks down pre-existing barriers and protocols between politicians and the general public. What is particularly interesting when thinking about 'unauthorized commentary' is the many forms that it takes. The 'fake' account posting as the Guinean President Dr. Alpha Conde is here a case in point. The account, which has the handle @Prof_Alpha_Conde has over 10,500 followers,[18] has tweeted over 3,800 times and has been in service since September 2012. This compares to 4,382 followers for @PresAlphaConde – the official twitter of the Guinean president – which has tweeted a total of 189 times since being opened in June 2015. The tweets on the 'fake' account, which are highly sarcastic and humorous in tone, always respond to events in the news. As such it provides a unique avenue for raising difficult questions – always through humor – about the actions of the president. Posting as the Guinean president, under the parodic guise offered by the 'fake' genre, allows the anonymous author of this account to expose actions from the actual Guinean president that he or she deems illegitimate, thus

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[18] As of July, 25th, 2016 at the time of writing.

practicing 'unauthorized commentary' as defined by Couldry. The humoristic register affords him or her a freedom of tone that is rarely seen on Guinean social media. With over 3,800 tweets emanating from the @Prof_AlphaConde account – the 'fake' account – examples are far too many to explore in any detail, but hashtags such as the recent #LesDuosMagiquesDeKoro[19] and #UnTailleurUneMachine provide illustrations of the ways in which humor and parody have become powerful vehicles for political critique on Guinean social media sites such as Twitter or Facebook. The hashtag #UnTailleurUneMachine – which translates in English as #ATailorAMachine - is based on the slogan 'Un Tailleur Une Machine' which the Ministry of Youth Affairs recently created in order to promote a new campaign to help young tailors become more financially autonomous. This program focused largely on training and professional development, but also claimed to offer a complementary sewing machine to all who would complete the program, hence the catch phrase slogan used on the publicity posters produced for the occasion. Unfortunately, the slogan 'Un Tailleur, Une Machine' was far too reminiscent of another recent slogan, 'Un Etudiant, Une Tablette' or in English 'A Student, A Tablet'. With this slogan, the president Dr. Alpha Conde promised during his last presidential election campaign in 2010 that if elected he would give every Guinean student a free electronic tablet, something that has yet to happen five years later at the time of this writing.

The similarity between the two slogans led to a series of humoristic exchanges on social media, led in large part by disabused Guinean youth, still waiting for their

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[19] #LesDuosMagiquesDeKoro is written in French and translates in English as #TheMagicDuetsofKoro. Koro is the nickname of President Alpha Conde. The hashtag then mocks his ability to communicate every policy initiatives through a word 'duo' such as 'a student, a tablet' or 'a tailor, a [sawing] machine'. The word 'magic' here works on several levels, first it ridicules the supposedly lyrical nature of these slogans, second it pokes fun at the notion that somehow creating a simple slogan will solve long-standing and complex issues as if by 'magic'.

promised tablets. This mostly took the form of young Guineans posting parodic and

often highly sarcastic comments on Facebook and Twitter, imitating the slogans' format.

For instance, a young blogger proposed 'Une manifestation annoncée, Un voyage decide'

('A demonstration announced, A trip decided') thereby commenting on the decision by

Alpha Conde to travel abroad at a time conveniently coinciding with a planned

demonstration by the main opposition party. Another example included 'Un voleur, Une

immunité' ('A thief, An immunity'), a comment on the perceived widespread impunity,

which corrupt officials enjoy in Guinea. A rough count of parodic slogans created over

the space of a few days showed well over two hundred slogans created and linked to the

#UnTailleurUneMachine, once again forcing the Minister in charge to respond, providing

a lengthy clarification of the program's aims.

Adding another layer of humoristic banter, the 'fake' Twitter account posting

under the handle @Prof_AlphaConde created a parallel hashtag

#LesDuosMagiquesDeKoro (#TheMagicDuetsofKoro) which turned the posting of

'duets' or slogans based on the 'A x, A x' format into a kind of lyrical game. Pertaining

to the issue of literacy, spontaneous outbursts of political parody and banter on social

media that include the creation of hashtags such as #UnTailleurUneMachine or draw on

the 'fake' genre on Twitter rely on particular mastery of not just reading and writing, but

of an expanded meaning of literacy that also include the ability to be digitally literate. In

order to participate fully in the practice, one needs to be able to use hashtags or to

distinguish between the 'fake' and official accounts of Dr. Alpha Conde on Twitter. In

fact, during the recent president election in the Fall 2015, the young head of the Guinean

Bloggers Association felt compelled to issue clarification showing the two accounts next

to each other (See Figure 2) [INSERT FIGURE TWO]. To understand the account, you must be in the know.

This expanded meaning of literacy is in many ways more in line with recent definitions of literacy in mainstream policy documents issued by major international organizations such as the World Bank or Unesco (Unesco, 2005). As we have seen, within the gerontocratic Guinean context the ability of young Guineans – who form the overwhelming majority of Internet users – to generate content that expose acts by powerful political figures takes on a particular signification. Within this context of digital communication, literacy, understood as the ability to write grammatically correct French and to navigate increasingly intricate and multi-layered social networks, acts as a kind of social glue from which collective forms of contestations can be organized. As these first examples show, by placing knowledge at the center of digital practices, literacy provides a stepping stone from which authoritarian forms of gerontocratic power can be challenged. Yet, no matter how much such assertions of power need to be celebrated, we also need to move beyond thinking of this as a simple story of youth challenging elders' authority thanks to the possibility offered by new media technologies. Just as social networking practices operate on multiple levels – as straightforward communication or parody – so does the making of claims mediated on these platforms. It is for instance crucial to explore the class-based politics and digitally-mediated processes of social differentiation at play at the intersections of literacy, youth and class. This represented for youth a means to mobilize humor and digital literacy as ways to re-work hegemonic discourse against politicians, and assert their own hegemonic tendencies. Tracing the complex contours of contestation operating at the intersections of youth, literacy and

social networking is what I turn to now.

Digital 'boundary work' and the figure of the analphabet

As Couldry explains, in order to understand media as practice, we need to go beyond thinking about the technological affordances offered by media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook in general, in order to explore what people are doing in relation to media across a range of specific situations and contexts (*ibid*: 37). Here, the focus on exposing errors made in the mastery of French written language in the examples presented above is significant in an additional way. It places literacy and the ability to write French correctly as a key notion through which new identities and forms of authority are articulated on Guinean social networking sites.

In the next part of this chapter, I explore how literacy and particularly what I term the figure of the 'analphabet' act as a site of symbolic struggle for literate Guinean youths who form the bulk of social media users in Guinea[20]. Explored through the conceptual lens of 'boundary work', a term borrowed from Lamont (1992), the 'analphabet' emerges as a key reference group in relation to which young literate Guineans articulate a number of cultural, socio-economic and moral orientations. These orientations not only form part of struggles over boundaries that distinguish them from the 'analphabets' both 'below' and 'above' them, but invite us to consider the ways they mobilize social media and literacy in order to compose and contest social relations between various constituent

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[20] According to social media analytics site Socialbakers, over 50% of Facebook users based in Guinea are between the ages of 18 and 24 and over 80% are between the ages 16 and 34.

groups within Guinean society. 'Boundary work' in the digital sphere forces us to consider the role of social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter in particular, as socio-technical agents in the symbolic struggles over the remaking of youth, and in this case literate youth, as a major constituent group in Guinea. By including both an 'above' and a 'below' – as I will show -the figure of the 'analphabet' also crystalizes young literate Guineans' efforts to constitute themselves as an 'in-between' category, an emergent 'middle-class' distinct from both discredited political elites and impoverished illiterate masses. Here, social media platforms emerge as key sites through which this 'middle' social space can be constituted as a valuable, productive and a desirable 'middle' ground.

As noted above, one of the most surprising features of conducting fieldwork on Guinean social networks, and on Facebook and Twitter most specifically, is how much the practice of online social networking is articulated in relation to the notion of literacy. When I asked him how important it was nowadays for young people in Guinea to have a presence online, one of my research participants, a young hip-hop artist from Conakry, explained: "Illiteracy rates are not an issue anymore, since most of the youth population is on Facebook now" (fieldnotes). In a heartfelt rant on Facebook about the futility of the platform, which he viewed as filled with 'voyeurs and exhibitionists', another youth explained: "it's clear that Facebook has changed mentalities: now idiots and Internet's illiterates don't hide anymore! They have their own site [i.e. Facebook] to gloat about!" (fieldnotes). In fact, references to literacy are quite common in discussions on and about social media. For some Guineans Internet-users, social media is allowing even the illiterate to participate in public discussion and access information in new ways

(fieldnotes). For others, the assumption is often that 'you are not illiterate', since you are on Facebook even though your ability to read and write might be extremely limited. The diversity of ways in which literacy is understood in these examples clearly illustrate the expanded concept of literacy as it is used to describe activities on social media. But perhaps more importantly here is the fact that while unsolicited, Guineans youth repeatedly mobilized the notion of literacy in order to make sense of their everyday online practices.

In many ways, the fact that young Guineans on Facebook or Twitter make frequent reference to literacy is not surprising *per se*. Indeed, with some of the world's lowest literacy rates, the ability to read and write remains today in Guinea the purview of a privileged few, and at the heart of continued forms of domination and entrenched social inequalities. A closer look at literacy statistics in Guinea is quite telling. Estimated in 2015 at 30.4%, literacy amongst the population aged 15 and older is amongst the ten lowest in the world (www.uis.unesco.org). This overall figure also hides a number of disparities. Whereas literacy rates amongst those aged 15 to 24 rose to – a still dismal – 45.2%, it was estimated to be as low as 8.6% for the elderly population aged 65 and over (*ibid*). Estimates based on a recent household survey also point to key gender differences with an estimated 88% of women aged 15 to 49 ranked as illiterate versus 63% for men in the same age bracket[21]. Similarly, whereas an estimated 89.4% of the rural population was thought to be illiterate, this proportion fell to 50.8% for Guinea's urban population. According to that same survey, poverty was in fact the surest predictor of illiteracy with an estimated 94.3% illiteracy rate amongst the poorest quintile of the country's

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[21] See cres.revues.org/2288 for more details

population aged 15 to 49, compared to 47.3% for the richest quintile (*ibid*). Clearly,

estimates of literacy rates, particularly in countries characterized by high levels of

uncertainty, do include a fair amount of imprecision, in part linked to data collection

methods or wide-ranging definitions of literacy that compromise potential comparisons

between surveys, for instance. Besides, in Guinea where over 85% of the population

identifies as Muslim, the ability to read the Arabic alphabet is not counted in most

indicators. Nonetheless, by any measure, Guinea has some of the lowest rates of literacy

in the world. It even has a government ministry dedicated to combatting it.

When I asked young research participants how they felt that the continued

problem of illiteracy was affecting the development of social media in Guinea, almost all

shared a similar story. Invariably that story involved a friend or a family member,

someone in their close social circles, who was finding ways to access Facebook[22] despite

being illiterate. Although each was sharing a slightly different story about a different

person, the stories all shared many points in common. I share three examples, starting

with a young man, an intern in a logistics company in Conakry:

> 70% of the population is illiterate in this country, there are people who cannot read or write who use Facebook… It's in relation to images… they get taught more or less how to connect and that's it… where you need to click… They already develop with touchscreen phone… they already develop a certain sense of how to use the phone… so after that to use Facebook with a few… a few lessons or supervision from a friend they manage to connect, yes of course... […] I have a [friend] who is analphabet (*ed.:* illiterate) he speaks French but he can't write, well if I tell you he is analphabet he can still write… count up to one hundred, maybe write two or three words but in general he has never been to school but he is not illiterate to the point of not being able to write at all that's impossible… If I

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[22] Twitter is seen as more difficult to use and therefore out of reach for most 'analphabets'. As one of my respondent put it 'Twitter is for intellectuals'.

send him a message and he doesn't understand it he tries to see someone who speaks French well so that person can translate for him but that doesn't happen very often, mostly he sticks to images.

When I asked the same question to a 19-year-old student from Labe, who now lives in Conakry, she explained in a chat discussion on Facebook:

> For analphabets, I can say that they also have access to the Internet these days with help from literates. Only they don't have the same advantages. I can take the example of my grandma who has never been to school. Currently, she has a telephone with all the different apps viber imo whatsapp[23] installed on it. You just need to activate the connection for her and when someone calls her she can pick up. When she wants to call we can dial the number for her and she can communicate with others. So the fact that she communicates through these apps means that she also has access to the Internet.

Another youth from Conakry in his late twenties, explained to me:

> I meet a lot of analphabets who use Facebook. I tell myself since it is a tool it's an app the more you touch it the more you learn… […] An app you click if you don't know you come, you ask someone: 'how do I see my messages?" he tells you it's there, how to reply to a comment he tells you where things are you practice a couple of times and that's it you learn little by little and tomorrow you will do it on your own even if you haven't been to school.

As these interview excerpts illustrate, there was amongst the literate youth I spoke to a general sense that illiterate populations in Guinea could and were indeed accessing social media platforms. The reason I chose to share three excerpts instead of one was to illustrate the fact that the ways in which my research participants recounted their experience of illiterate Guineans around them using social media tended to share a

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[23] Viber©; IMO© and WhatsApp© are what are known as instant messaging client for smartphones. These free applications use the Internet to send text messages, documents, images, video, user location and audio messages.

number of similarities. Although they all positively reported that they knew within their immediate circles illiterate Guineans who were social media users, when I pressed them on how many they could think of, the numbers in fact tended to be rather small, often limited to only a single friend or family member. This may be an indication that despite the positive stories of social media technologies as a democratizing force in Guinea, issues of compromised access remain for those in the population who cannot read or write. It also means that social media platforms remain largely literate spaces. There was also a sense amongst literate youth that it would be impossible for someone with a total inability to read or write or at least recognize written numbers to use social networking sites. This was clearly expressed in the first excerpt shared here: 'he is not illiterate to the point of not being able to write at all. That's impossible'. This points to the large range of abilities and literacy levels included in the category of 'analphabet'. Most recent studies of literacy support much broader definitions and understandings of literacy than in the past (Unesco, 2005: 22). My research participants also noted some restrictions in which platforms illiterate populations could use.

For instance, most agreed that Twitter was largely out of reach for 'analphabets' due to this platform's focus on sharing large amounts of written content in a highly-condensed form. By comparison, Facebook was seen as more user-friendly and accessible for Guineans with limited literacy skills. This was in part due to the ease with which the platform enables users to share images and videos – content that was deemed much more easily accessible to 'analphabets' – and also because the architecture of the platform focused on 'friends' as opposed to 'followers'. Facebook tends to foster content focused keeping in touch with friends and family as opposed to focusing on current

affairs and news – as Twitter does. Those such as the grandmother mentioned in the second example who had never been to school and was not able to recognize written numbers, tended to gravitate towards other applications such as Viber, IMO or WhatsApp, which are often used as ways to make and receive free phone calls over the Internet, although presumably they could also use the application to receive images for instance.

But, beyond the purely technical limitations that illiteracy places in regards to specific platforms such as Twitter for instance, what emerges from looking at these examples taken together is a process whereby literacy becomes the practical and symbolic referent through which educated youth mobilize social networks as socio-technical sites in order to assert their positions as a constituent group in contemporary Guinean society. In other words, it becomes the basis on which hegemonic discourse can be challenged and moral authority contested. This becomes particularly clear when thinking about another, and in some ways diametrically opposite way in which literacy was mobilized by youth on social networking sites; calling powerful individuals, almost exclusively men, 'analphabets'. In this usage, as I will illustrate, 'analphabet' worked as an insult that had little to do with one's actual ability to read and write. It applied undiscriminatingly to individuals who indeed may have had limited formal education and others who had received advanced degrees. It did however group these typically highly literate men together with the poor majority, who form the bulk of actual illiterates in Guinea, under what I call the 'figure of the analphabet', a cultural category at the heart of processes of social distinction in Guinea. Indeed, what I found most surprising about the ways in which the notion of literacy featured in conversations with my research

participants on Facebook or Twitter, and in online conversations which they were having amongst themselves, was that they were not simply discussing the facts of literacy, or the issues linked to the continued trend of illiteracy in Guinea. Rather, literacy was often mobilized in discussions that centered on either social networking as a growing practice in Guinea or on the state of youth today, in order to articulate or refract a range of complex ideas about these two topics, rather than literacy and its eradication for instance. In fact, most of the time the notion of literacy featured in these online exchanges, both in private instant messages and semi-public online discussions, was through the figure of the 'illiterate' rather than directly as a social fact. In other words, the figure of the illiterate seems to have emerged in recent years as a key icon or 'cultural representation' (Ferguson, 2001: 78) through which young Guineans make sense not only of the practice of social networking itself, but of the changing social subjectivities of youth that are occasioned by these new forms of literacies.

In this context 'illiterate' – the French word 'analphabète' – has become both a term and a point of reference in relation to which young Guineans navigate their social worlds. The term ceases to simply denote an ability to read or write but becomes imbued with meanings regarding modes of being or social subjectivities. Young Guinean M.O.U.D. (@moudjames)'s tweet provides here a good example of the disassociation between the literal meaning of illiteracy and what it connotes in online discussions amongst Guinean youth. Posted on October, 11th, 2015, it reads:

> Le grand problème en Guinée c'est que les intello (*sic*) sont plus analphabètes que les illettrés

Which in English, reads:

The big problem in Guinea is that intellectuals are more analphabet than the

illiterates

Such vehement condemnations of political elites – people who could clearly read

and write – as analphabets despite their belonging to the 'intellectual' class were

regularly echoed and shared online by Guinean youth. A recent comment by Guinean

blogger jokingly exhorting Guineans to lodge an official complaint against the Sorbonne

where the current Guinean President Dr. Alpha Conde received his doctorate degree and

was a professor for many years is here a case in point.   In response to an error in

conjugation made by the President in one of his public speeches, the comment reads:

> les Guinéens devraient déposer une plainte à Paris contre l'université de la
> Sorbonne: elle a formé pendant plus de 10 ans un cadre africain pour un diplôme
> de président de la république et ne lui a même pas correctement appris la
> conjugaison française.

Which translates as:

> Guineans should lodge a complaint in Paris against the University of the
> Sorbonne: it trained for more than 10 years an African executive officer for a
> diploma as Head of State and didn't even correctly teach him how to conjugate in
> French.

The terminology here is important. Although the French word 'analphabète' is

typically translated as 'illiterate', the word 'illettré', a direct translation of illiterate also exists in French – as does the word 'analphabet' in English, although it is rarely used. Despite both 'analphabète' and 'illettré' being used to denote an incapacity to read or write, there are subtle differences between the two. Whereas 'illettré' connotes someone who is not cultured, 'analphabète' specifically implies that the person has not received any formal education. So being called an 'analphabet' does not necessarily have anything to do with one's ability to read or write, as the rant about 'Internet's illiterates' and M.O.U.D.'s tweet quoted above illustrate. In order to grasp the significance of intellectuals and authority figures including people such as the President who hold advanced degrees from prestigious French universities being designated as analphabets, it is important to understand the role that Western education and French literacy came to play in changing articulations of social distinctions in the postcolonial period in Guinea. McGovern's work on changing relations to modernity, identity-making and state-building efforts in the period immediately following Independence in 1958 in Guinea is particularly instructive. Without going into too much details about the unique blend of scientific Socialism and Pan-Africanism that informed the often violently iconoclastic policies of the post-Independent era under Sékou Touré,[24] his work is important in historicizing the role of literacy and modern education within changing notions of identity and social distinction in Guinea. McGovern shows the historical links that exist in Guinea between literacy and political legitimacy, and how these have long been at the heart of struggle around power between youth and their elders. For instance, he noted with regards to the Fulani Jihadist ideology that resulted in the seventeenth century holy war and establishment of the theocratic empire in the Futa Jallon area of Guinea:

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[24] Sekou Toure's totalitarian regime lasted from 1958 until his death in 1984.

It was an ideology that was not modernist, as was Sékou Touré's Marxism, yet it shared a number of orientations, particularly that it validated education and literacy as sources of wisdom and the basis for legitimate leadership. This system emphasized acquired skills and knowledge over noble descent, and it signaled a shift in notions about personhood and power that presaged the modernist revolution to come in twentieth-century Guinea. It also tapped into structural tensions that existed in the region, such as those between elders and youth and between those of royal descent and the ambitious, competent slaves who sometimes usurped their positions.

When I asked my research participants what ideas they attached to the word 'analphabet' when it was used to refer to authority figures such as the President who are clearly literate, they often describe this kind of analphabet as 'toto', a fictional character at the heart of many jokes in Guinea. Several Facebook groups are dedicated to 'toto' jokes. As it was explained to me, 'toto' is akin to the 'village idiot', a reactionary male figure that 'girls like to ridicule'. That the figure of the analphabet was associated with the 'toto' when used in relation to authority figures was exemplified in a blog post that described ex-Presidents Lansana Conte and Sékou Touré as analphabets indicating in brackets next to that term that they meant 'toto'. Invariably, 'toto' in this context connoted someone that is 'unsophisticated', 'uncultured' and 'traditionalist'. This was for instance indicated in the extract from my conversation with the young female blogger quoted above where she explained that in part young Guineans' motivation for correcting errors made in French was to show that unlike these figures of authority, they were cultured.

Literacy here again becomes a kind of social glue, or common basis from which to orient digitally mediated forms of contestations against a discredited established social and political order. The 'figure of the analphabet' – as opposed to the actual illiterate –

acts here as a focal point around which a number of historically significant forms of

social distinctions can be contested and reworked. As a common basis or 'practice of

commonality' (Simone, 2010), literacy then opens up a possible avenue for youth to

claim moral authority and transcend more historical forms of social ties such as family,

locality or ethnicity. In today's volatile political climate in Guinea, the potential to forge

ties that extended beyond ethnic affiliations was one that took on particular urgency.

Here again, literacy was at the heart of the articulations of claims with regards to ethnic

discourse on Guinean social networking sites. One young Guinean, in a post that was

echoed several times over the course of my fieldwork, for instance noted:

> Que des analphabètes soient ethnocentriques soit !!! Mais que des personnes qui
> ont fait les bancs le soit nous interpelle sur notre système éducatif. Dépassionnons
> les débats, Arrêtons les injures et la victimisation. Faisons plutôt une politique
> positive et constructive.

> Which translates as:

> That illiterates are ethnocentric, fine!!! But that people who have been to school
> are too really calls our education system into question. Let's take passions out of
> debates. Stop insults and victimization. Let's practice positive and constructive
> politics.

The link between ethnic discourse and literacy was further highlighted to me in an

interview with a young blogger from Labe. When I asked him what things he didn't like

on Facebook, he explained:

> I don't like talking about regionalism, ethnicization, the ethnicization of things, or
> to promote a political party, I don't do that either. I don't defend a cause I do not

find just and when I see a person that doesn't fit in with my own beliefs or that only publishes images or that butchers French, even though I am not really good at French, but still you have to respect French language because it is the one we use to express ourselves even though it is not our language, we are trying to put aside our different languages to communicate, but if you make too many mistakes, it isn't right.

Thinking back to the notion of boundary as conceived by Lamont, what we see here is a cultural boundary – a person's ability to read and write (which is typically linked to that person's education level) – also becomes a moral boundary. The implication indeed is that literate Guineans have a particular moral responsibility with regards to ethnic discourse in Guinea, they shouldn't take part in the promotion of ethnic strife in Guinea. Young people's literacy is mobilized in order to build a moral community amongst literate youth as a process of claiming political authority and control of hegemonic discourse in Guinea.

What these stories, and others like these which I heard from my respondents, show is how illiterate Guineans invariably depended on literate Guineans in order to access social networking sites, including those deemed easier to use such as Facebook, Viber, IMO or WhatsApp. Beyond access, literacy also acted as the basis onto which moral legitimacy and the right to fully participate in political discussions was pinned. In the ways the stories were told, my research participants whose education levels ranged from first year in school (the equivalent of ninth grade) to university graduates including four out of twenty who had graduated with four years of university education always positioned themselves or people with similar levels of literacy as intermediaries. This drew a clear line, a boundary to use Lamont's word, between themselves, educated and linguistically proficient youth, and those which they included in the category of

'analphabet'. Within these stories not only did analphabets work as a reference group, a social category against which young educated Guineans clarified their own social locations, but they also invariably came out on top, as the enablers, the facilitators who were able to help analphabets access the Internet whilst reserving the right to make legitimate claims online. This was further highlighted to me in another episode of fieldwork. As part of an effort to use photo-elicitation methods, I organized a small image-making intervention. I asked the young participants in my research to use their smartphones in order to take between three and five images that captured something about their online lives. This approached was based on an earlier research project I conducted in 2010 and 2011 which explored street corners as sites of youth sociability in Guinea[25]. I liked the approach because in addition to engaging the youth in the production of visual materials to reflect on their social worlds, it usually generated surprising results that provided a rich basis for subsequent discussions. One such example of a surprising result, one that at first doesn't quite seem to fit in with the question at hand, came when in response to my brief I received the three pictures shown here in figure 3 [INSERT FIGURE THREE]. The pictures sent to me via Facebook were accompanied by a short note explaining that:

> these are young Guineans who make these models. Amongst them only one has
> been to school and also not on a technical track.

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[25] A book chapter based on this research project entitled 'Remaking street corners as 'bureaux': DIY youth spaces and shifting urban ontologies in Guinea' will appear in Day, Amber (ed.) *DIY Utopias*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, currently in press and due out in December 2016.

Intrigued by the images, which had seemingly nothing to do with the brief in which I had asked youth to document their online lives in images, I asked what this had to do with social networking. To which the youth, a 24-year student from Labé, responded:

> I am currently trying to help them out. I tweeted about them, and it got a lot of reactions. The CEO of Espace TV. He is supposed to send a team of reporters. And I am gonna go to Conakry with them for some interviews, and we will certainly go to the ministry in charge of youth affairs

From those pictures being posted online on this youth's Twitter account, these young model makers from Labe, all of whom were analphabets, received media attention. As I found out in the next few days, they travelled to Conakry and were received by the Youth Minister who had seen the tweet and the buzz it received. The minister offered the youth a grant to study and further their craft on the condition that they stay in Guinea to study rather than migrate to Europe as they had first said they were interested. Here again we can see that access to social media is a key differentiating factor that places literate youth such as the university student who participated in my research in the position of being an intermediary or facilitator. It is important to note here that I am not in any way arguing that educated youth thought themselves to be better or in way superior to analphabets. Quite to the contrary, every time they talked about people who couldn't read or write it was typically with a lot of compassion and desire to help, and their own situations involved many challenges including for some of them difficulties putting food on the table that were at least as great as these young analphabets. Rather, at stake here is the fact that in the way they recounted how analphabets use social media and

the role they played in this process, these educated youths envisioned themselves as

mediators or facilitators. Fuh's notion of youth as 'urban fixers' is here helpful in

thinking about implications of this within the African urban polity. As he explains:

> By fixing, I refer specifically to the act of 'patching-up', mending, repairing or
> making right. This is a tri-chordal theoretical, conceptual and methodological
> approach in analyzing youth as established architects of personal biographies,
> collective life histories and urban actuality. Youth are thus forgers, masons or
> smiths actively, "forging" a concrete future for themselves in the midst of
> fractures. (Fuh, 2012: 503)

What is important here is perhaps not so much the somewhat sensational language

used by Fuh, but rather the implications of his research on youth as 'fixers' in the city of

Bamenda, Cameroon. As he explains, faced with incredible economic hardships and

foreclosed social mobility, youth invest significant time and resources presenting

themselves and making themselves available as connectors, people able to help forge new

connections and alliances outside of traditional forms of associations. By working as

'fixers', youth in Bamenda are for Fuh able to participate in what he calls a 'prestige

economy', that is a form of social capital accumulation based on social recognition and

self-styling. Going back to Lamont's concept of 'boundary work', which invites us to

think about the differences between cultural, socio-economic and moral boundaries, what

we start to see here is that by drawing clear cultural boundaries between themselves as

educated youth and those with limited ability to read or write, literate urban youth in

Guinea are also drawing socio-economic boundaries. This allows them to insert

themselves as 'fixers' turning their abilities to 'repair' or 'patch up' individual

biographies and forge new connections between analphabets and those active on social

media into a basis for the accumulation of social recognition. Fuh pushes the argument by

proposing that by presenting themselves as 'fixers', as people able to take care of things

and others, youth in Bamenda have reversed the terms of age-based social relations to the

point of becoming what he terms 'gerontocratic youth'. As he explains:

> Given the absence of financial possibility, imaginations of the self as a veteran
> offers a sense of refulfilment, as well as a means to be recognized and respected
> by the community and other associations, together with the government as
> accomplished. (2012: 524)

Whether we are prepared to follow Fuh in thinking about the role of educated

Guinean youth in facilitating analphabets' access to social networking sites as a form of

gerontocratic youth is in some ways beside the point. Still, Fuh's work invites us to

appreciate the extent to which practices of 'fixing', whether they involve helping one's

grandmother go online, show a friend how to view a message or accompany young

analphabets to Conakry, have to do with re-drawing the contours of youth, a process that

necessarily involve multiple context articulations and struggles of self-definition and

recognition. Lamont's work on 'boundary work' invites us to think about the various

dimensions of boundaries, i.e. cultural, socio-economic and moral. For Lamont, moral

boundaries are:

> […] drawn on the basis of moral character, they are centered around such
>
> qualities as honesty, work ethic, personal integrity and consideration for others.
>
> (1992: 4)

As we have seen, literacy and what I have termed the 'figure of the analphabet' operate on Guinean social media as cultural referents upon which processes of social distinctions are articulated. This can be understood as a process of digital 'boundary work' on the part of an emergent educated and connected youth class, an increasingly visible constituent group in Guinea. It is however important to situate this process of boundary making within the broader Guinean socio-economic context. Just as social media need to be understood as a Guinean phenomenon, so does 'boundary work'. This is necessary in order to appreciate the complex and dynamic nature of 'boundary work' in Guinea, and the extent to which using this concept within a context such as Guinea also challenges us to expand its meaning and original focus. Of particular significance here is the fact that economic necessity in Guinea dictates that social categories such as class, age or gender are constantly transcended in order to make ends meet. Most of my research participants had several occupations at the same time. Most students had little schemes to make money on the side, helping out a relative at the market or providing small services such as repairing computers, picking up children from school or going on errands. Nearly all worked at some point during the year in the family's fields in the country, helping during busy agricultural seasons such as harvest. Several took on unpaid internship with shipping companies or the local electricity supplier in the hope that they might be hired one day. Others had run side businesses in the entertainment business or promotions. One ran a t-shirt printing business as a way to complement his main income in a call center for a major telecommunications company. As one of my research participants, currently working as an unpaid intern in Electricité De Guineé (EDG) – the national electricity company – and who had previously worked as a transport

operative, moving goods and people around Guinea and Mali as well as stint as a

classroom help, explained:

> T: "I am currently working as a repairman for EDG."
>
> Me: "Woaw, you are so versatile"
>
> T: "You need to live. Here, specialization is not seen as a strong point. You need
>
> to dip into anything and everything."

This required them to 'circulate' between classes, reinventing themselves as

drivers, IT specialists, farmers, teachers or political operatives as well as 'age classes',

acting in turn as juniors doing an internship or traineeship or projecting the image of

seniority necessary for working as a tutor, teacher or running a business. On occasions,

girls took on roles traditionally seen as male – working as mechanics or driving taxis –

and vice versa. Working with youth in Douala, Cameroon, Simone describes a similar

process of 'urban circulation'. As he explains:

> As youth in Douala frequently remark, the ability to 'become someone' is directly
> linked to the ability to 'move around', and so circulation is also about acquiring a
> facility to operate everywhere, and to not be known as a specific son or daughter
> of a specific family coming from a specific place with specific ethnic origins and
> professions. (2005: 520)

The ability to circulate, 'steer the road' or simply keep one's options open and

oneself ready to seize the next available opportunity is perhaps most crucial for the

economically marginalized youth at the center of the study, who may have 'middle-class'

aspirations but remain technically within the poor majority when defined through hard

economic measures such as surviving on less than two dollars per day. What is

particularly fascinating in the Guinean context is that the same demands placed on youth

to keep all channels open become reproduced online on social networks. As Couldry

notes with regards to social media:

> While it is literally impossible to be open to everything, the demand to 'be available' shapes an emerging practice, recognizably different from earlier modes of media consumption based on intermittent communication and a clear distinction between mass media and interpersonal media. Keeping all channels open means permanently orienting oneself to the world beyond one's private space and the media that are circulated within it. (2012: 55)

Practices such as helping one's illiterate grandmother access social media then

need to be understood simultaneously as a process of social distinction, a cultural

'boundary work', and an action that might also signify a desire to remain involved in the

lives of older generations, in building bridges. The example of economic boundary work

shared above also illustrates this point. The direct economic returns from posting these

photos online and taking these youth Conakry may not be immediately clear, and may in

fact require some investment of time and money. For Fuh, this is an investment into what

he calls the 'prestige economy' described above (2012: 503). But as Simone's analysis

also points out, it may also be a much more practical economic calculation. Meeting the

minister is indeed a potentially worthy investment, economically speaking. The unclarity

of the future and employment pathways is what requires this double-edge work: the

necessity of working at boundaries and working at the heels of power relations whilst at

the same time 'keeping channels open' both IRL and digitally.

The necessity to both reaffirm and simultaneously be constantly prepared to

transcend boundaries was further highlighted to me in a series of posts that regularly featured amongst youth from Labé. The posts consisted of photographs taken by the youth of an older woman who is known to have mental health issues and is commonly seen roaming the streets of Labé wearing different and often extravagant makeshift outfits. One photograph for instance showed her wearing a bright pink wig, others included her in army uniform or wearing large sunglasses. What was particularly significant about these posts was not so much that the youths would post pictures of her as a way to highlight her idiosyncratic ways or draw a clear boundary between them as young, males[26], digitally literate and her as perhaps the epitome of an 'analphabet', but rather the extent to which the youth wanted to be seen with her. Several posts included selfies taken by her side. And despite the humoristic tone of the posts, the jokes always remain full of genuine affection of Koumba or Comba as she is known. One for instance included a caption above the photograph that read 'Combatiquement vôtre', a take on the expression 'Cordialement vôtre' which means 'Sincerely yours' or 'Yours truly'. One of the selfies mentioned above included the note that read 'Avec mon Amiral Komba' or 'With my Admiral Komba, a reference of her army clothes, but also a clear expression of wanting to transcend the differences that may seem obvious at first, and perhaps a desire to claim a piece of what she represents. It is unclear what exactly is to be gained immediately from this, perhaps 'street creds' or simply projecting the image that one 'circulates'. Yet clearly the exercise has something to do with transcending social categories. When I asked one of my research participants about her, he explained that 'She is very famous amongst all social classes, she is like a local mascot, and she is trans-

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[26] Although the young women who participated in my research from Labé knew of her, I did not witness any posting picture of her online.

generational'. Although not the center of analysis here, the gender dynamics in this example, as in several others shared in this chapter are highly significant. It is also worth noting that I am suggesting that youth worked to maintain porous social boundaries with other ordinary Guineans and with the politicians. The necessity to remain available at all times, and re-invent oneself across social affiliations extended to all including politicians. Not matter how critical of politicians, when an opportunity arose that required youth to work with political figures, most tended to do it. The example of the young model makers above is a case in point. The first tweet was intended to criticize the government's inability to support these young innovators and expose the failure of the government. Yet, when invited to meet the Minister all obliged and as they noted on social media afterwards, they were honored and happy to do so. But, beyond that, what we see here are the ways in which social media are mobilized by young educated Guineans in order to simultaneously work at creating boundaries between them and social orientation that is at least in part contained within what I have termed the 'figure of the analphabet' and make sure these boundaries remain porous and permeable so as to allow for the social circulation needed to get by.

Digital literacy and the mediation of youth

As we have seen, literacy lies at the heart of complex and historical processes of social distinctions and struggles over gerontocratic power is Guinea. Exploring social networking as a Guinean practice forces us to consider the role of social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter in the symbolic contests over education, moral values and

accumulation in Guinean cities today. By necessitating the need to read and write, social media technologies foreground literacy – now expanded to include digital literacy – as a key mode of articulation of complex and historical forms of social distinctions in Guinea. This provides educated Guinean youth, who form the large majority of social media users in Guinea, with new opportunities for asserting their collective identities and biographies within Guinean society. As we have seen this process hinges in crucial ways on creating a distance between themselves and analphabets. In this context, the category of analphabet has emerged as both a reality and continued social ill and the figure imbued with multiple and relationally-defined cultural, socio-economic and moral values. As McGovern noted in relation to a different but equally versatile context, that of post-Independent Socialist-era Guinea:

> […] progress is an imaginary construct that can only exist within a field of distinctions. There is no avant-garde if there are no stragglers. No one is progressive except by comparison with those who are backward. (2013: 134)

Yet, although we can draw clear links between questions of youth and social distinctions during the period immediately following Independence in 1958 and today, our discussion of digitally-mediated 'boundary work' on the part of educated urban youth also point to key differences. As McGovern notes, at the moment of Independence, Guinea only had eleven university-educated government officials in the entire country (2013: 220). The situation is very different today, despite continuing glaring inequalities. The post-Independence forms of social distinctions described by McGovern drew a single

boundary – no matter how multifaceted – between the nascent elite and the rest of the population. By highlighting the double-ness of the figure of the analphabet as it is articulated in relation to digital practices, my fieldwork and discussions with literate Guinean youth also invite us to consider the emergence of a middle-class. Symbolic struggles surrounding youth and digital literacy then need to be seen as indicators of changing forms of social stratifications, which are in part in line with recent discussions on the middle-class in Africa (Lentz, 2015; Mains, 2011). The African Development Bank defines as 'middle-class' anyone who spends between 2 and 20 US $ per capita per day (Lentz, 2015: 1). According to this criteria, only 10.6% of the Guinean population[27], and none of my research participants, can claim to belong the middle-class. But these criteria are notoriously too narrow and simplistic, and the kinds of symbolic struggles presented in this chapter in part attest to that. The kinds of cultural, socio-economic and moral investments that young educated Guineans in relation to the figure of the analphabet include both an 'above' and a 'below', as well as a 'middle'. Yet within the Guinean context, characterized by a lack of clear economic pathways, the work of drawing those boundaries seems to operate in several directions at once: as an injunction to both rearticulate social stratification around literacy and to 'keep all channels' open. In other words, social networking as an everyday practice opens up for digitally literate educated Guinean youth new possibilities of working at challenging gerontocratic power. A process that also requires being 'trans-generational.'

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[27] This compares to 46% in Ghana for instance (Lentz, 2016: 1).

"Sucked like an Orange": Digital infrastructure, fiscal subjectivity and the shifting contours of youth governmentality in Guinea

Quand mon peuple se fait sucer comme 1 orange. #Guinée coût des appels désormais 1fgn / seconde #TaxeDeSuivisme oblige. #Ablogui #kebetu

[When my people are getting sucked like an orange. #Guinea cost of calls now 1GNF/ second Due to #TaxeDeSuivisme (#FollowershipTax). #Ablogui #kebetu (#Twitter)]

In thinking about the relationship between youth and taxation in Guinea today, I would like to hold young Guinean web-activist and 'twittos' Gata Dore's tweet above as a kind of metaphor or conceptual platform from which to explore the changing nature of governmentality in Guinea. In particular, I would like to put this young Guinean's quote in conversation with Janet Roitman's assertion that:

> […] economic concepts and institutions, such as tax and price, are political technologies that serve to constitute 'that which is to be governed' […]. Such political technologies are mechanisms that render aspects of social life both intelligible and governable. They are thus not simply instrumental methods for obtaining or assuring power; they are, rather, the very material form of power itself. (2005: 3)

Considering taxes as 'political technologies' that need to be understood as the 'very material form of power itself leads me to ask: How do the new taxes on Internet data in Guinea constitute their fiscal subjects, i.e. 'that which is to be governed' to use

Roitman's expression? And, given that the overwhelming majority of Internet-users in

Guinea are young, how are youth positioned within these new forms of regulatory power?

Or perhaps to put it in the terms presented by Gata Dore: what can we learn about the

material form of power in Guinea today through the metaphor of an orange being sucked?

The metaphor is particularly apt in this Guinean context because Orange is the name of

the French multinational telecommunications company that is also the first provider of

Internet services in Guinea. What does this metaphor capture about the changing

contours of governmentality as they intersect with youth and the deepening reach of the

digital infrastructure in Guinea today?

In answering these several interrelated questions, I begin by exploring in detail the

specificities of the taxes introduced as part of the March 2015 Law known as

L/2015/N002/AN, a law which introduced a new tax on all telephone communications

including cellphone communications, roaming, interconnection and all Internet data as

well as Short Messaging Service (SMS). Of particular interest are the implications for

'governmentality' of having an IP address within the context of Guinea, a postcolonial

setting where having a physical postal address in the Western modernist sense has never

been a clearly defined thing or reliable basis for fiscal regulation. As I argue, digital

technologies have in Guinea created the ground for new conditions of governmentality

that profoundly transform the terms of relations between Guineans and their government.

Building on Chatterjee's distinction between 'civil' and 'political society', I argue that

the current changes need to be understood not simply as an extension of these two

domains of political life, but as indicative of the emergence of an entirely new domain,

which I call 'digital society'. Within the domain of 'digital society', Internet-based technologies and social networking sites in particular, become powerful, and often invisible, agents in the remaking of Guinean political subjects. Although new possibilities for political subjects are opened up within 'digital society', many are also 'sucked out' of political life as relations between Guinean people and the state become increasingly managed and regulated by the actions of their digital devices. I spend the remainder of the chapter exploring examples from my fieldwork to reflect on the unique bearings of 'digital society' on Guinean youth. As the digitalization of public life deepens in Guinea, youth find themselves the target of new forms of regulation and governmentality, that involve new alliances between the gerontocratic forces of neighborhood and state institutions.

'*the air we breathe': Taxing the Internet in Guinea*

On June 26th, 2015, a few days before the official announcement of the new 'Taxe sur les Communications Téléphoniques' – or 'Telephone Communications Tax' -, La Voix Peuhle tweeted:

Peut-être que la 'taxe sur l'air respiré serait en phase d'élaboration #Guinée #CorruptGuinea #Pauvreté

Which in English translates as:

A 'tax on the air we breathe' might be in preparation #Guinea #CorruptGuinea #Poverty

As noted earlier (See chapter one), the announcement of the new law and tax on all telecommunications in Guinea was met with thousands of outraged messages on social media, Twitter and Facebook in particular (www.visionguinee.info). Most of the initial reaction focused on an error made in French in the press release issued by the Ministry in charge of Mail Services, Telecommunications and New Information Technologies to announce the law. In the press release, the word 'civisme' or 'civic spirit' had inadvertently been replaced by 'suivisme' or 'herd spirit' (See chapter one for a full discussion of the implications of this error). The discussion of the new law on social media, however, did not confine itself to this orthographic error, no matter how much it provided young Guinean bloggers with a unique opportunity to chide the Guinean government. In fact, discussions online quickly turned to the content of the law itself. Dozens of messages, for example, denounced the extra financial burden placed on ordinary people by this new tax, whose cost would be (and was) immediately passed on to the already cash-strapped Guinean telecom consumer.

Boubacar, for instance, a Guinean youth in his twenties, noted on Twitter that 'This #TaxeDeSuivisme doesn't take into account the socio-economic status of the [Guinean] population', adding that 'The government doesn't give a damn about it'. A similar feeling that the Guinean government was insensitive to the extra burden represented by this tax was echoed many times over on Twitter and Facebook, including

several dozens of angry comments about the Minister's remarks that '[an extra Guinean Franc per second of communication] represented absolutely nothing for the Guinean consumer'. Within Guinea's incredibly bleak economic landscape, where as one of my research participant noted 'the quasi-totality of youth is unemployed and struggling to get by', the 5% increase in the cost of Internet connection might not seem like much to the Minister in charge, but to the youth I spoke to, this clearly felt like a 'squeeze' to go back to the metaphor of the orange proposed above. For many of my research participants, this even slight increase was not something their budget could absorb in any way, and invariably resulted in a reduction of the amount of time spent online. Several for instance began waiting one extra day before 'topping up' their internet passes or purchased cheaper 'Facebook' only passes instead of passes that allowed them to connect to the Internet and access any websites, thus greatly limiting their experience of the world-wide web. This is particularly significant since taxing the Internet is banned in most parts of the world, on the grounds that it limits access to what it now seen as a 'global resource'.

In the United States, for instance, direct taxation of the Internet has been banned under the 1998 Internet Tax Freedom Act- with a few exceptions made in states with limited pre-existing Internet-based forms of taxation. The move to prohibit the taxation of the Internet has been reinforced in the United States with the 2016 Permanent Internet Tax Freedom Act. Under these laws, most forms of Internet taxes are either seriously limited or banned. Taxes that are based on Internet usage and do not discriminate between telephony, data, voice, images and other content – in effect the Guinean system – are clearly banned, because they are Internet-specific taxes as opposed to a tax on sale of Internet provision service. At the heart of these Internet Tax Freedom laws in the

United States are concerns with preserving access to the Internet seen as a 'public' good rather than an optional object of consumption. The issue of the public good was particularly evident in the recent and often virulent debates that ensued following Hungary's proposal to start taxing the Internet. The proposal to start taxing Internet data in Hungary had to be withdrawn in October 2014 following mass protests in the streets of the Hungarian capital Bucharest, as well as strong recriminations from the European Union. Ryan Heath, the European Commission's Spokesman, for instance, described the proposal as a 'terrible idea' that would limit Hungarians' access to the Internet, which he described as a 'global common resource'. Within the Hungarian context at the time, the proposed tax was seen as an attempt on the part of the government to limit freedom and access to information. Beyond notions of rights and access to a 'global common resource', Internet taxes are also often contested on grounds of fairness. In the US, for instance, opponents to telecommunications taxes have noted the fairness issues with these kinds of taxes as they effect certain users disproportionately, particularly in the case of systems that offer distinct taxes for different modes of communications (landline phones, cable, wireless, SMS, data users).

Issues of fairness are particularly relevant to the Guinean context where Internet users are overwhelmingly young even compared to the country's youthful population. Although numbers are hard to ascertain, young people are clearly at the forefront of this revolution in telecommunication. Facebook, for instance, is currently adding over 25,000 new users from Guinea per month; over 50% are between the ages of 18 and 24 and over 80% are between the ages 16 and 34 (www.socialbakers.org), which compares to less than 35% for the same age group in the overall population (UN, World Population

Prospects 2004). In other words, young people find themselves disproportionately

affected or 'squeezed' by the current changes in taxation.

Another overwhelming feeling on social media following the announcement of

this new tax was that there was no way for Guinean citizens to trust that the funds raised

would not be misused or end up in the pockets of corrupt officials, as many previous

taxes had. Dieretou D, for instance, a young Guinean blogger from Conakry, noted:

Ou alors taxez moi MAIS assurez le minimum derrière. Un droit pour un devoir.
#TaxeDeSuivisme #GouvernementPicoreurDeMénages #Guinée

Which translates in English as:

Or just tax me BUT back that up with clear assurances. A right for a duty.
#TaxeDeSuivisme #GovernmentPeckingInHouselholdsPocket #Guinea

Her tweet was echoed many times over - 794 times on Twitter and over a

thousand times on Facebook to be exact. Boubbah, for instance, sarcastically noted that

this was done 'as if it had ever benefited us in this country. That the government's coffers

are full'. The commentary on the introduction of the new taxation offered above raises

important issues with regard to the specific relations of fiscality contained in the new tax

and how they relate to the broader historical context of taxation in Guinea. At the heart

of these complaints about the new tax is a sentiment that the fiscal relation between the

state and subjects of taxation cannot simply be extractive. As Chatterjee notes, one of the

impetuses behind the rise of political society in India was the advent of the

'developmental state' (2011: 210). Under this revised agenda, tax collection can no

longer simply be a matter of raising revenues. It also needs to be counter-balanced with

the provision of services. As Chatterjee notes:

> The spread of governmental technologies in India in the last three decades, as a
> result of the deepening of the developmental state under conditions of electoral
> democracy, has meant that the state is no longer an external entity to the peasant
> community. Governmental agencies distributing education, health services, food,
> roadways, water, electricity, agricultural technology, emergency relief, and
> dozens of other welfare services have penetrated deep into the interior of everyday
> peasant life. Not only are peasants dependent on state agencies for these services,
> they have also acquired considerable skill, albeit to varying degrees in the
> different regions, in manipulating and pressurizing these agencies to deliver these
> benefits. (*ibid*)

This ability to pressurize government agencies is precisely what constitutes the

terms of relations between the state and Indian people within the domain of 'political

society'. As Chatterjee explains: "Those in political society make their claims on

government, and are in turn governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally

defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable

arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations" (*ibid: 219*). Although in

the paragraph quoted above, he focuses his argument on the rural poor, he also

throughout his work extends the distinction between the formal domain of 'civil society'

and the more flexible and contingent domain of 'political society' to many other

marginalized populations, the urban poor and illegal squatters in particular. He has also

been keen to explore the applicability and relevance of his work to other parts of the

postcolonial world outside of India, and most particular in Africa (2011: 18). His notion

of 'political society' as a domain in which marginalized populations find a way to make claims and 'pressurize' government agencies outside of the formal institutions of 'civil society' seem indeed relevant to political life in Guinea.

The recent tax protests that took place in the Daka market, in the northern part of Labé, in 2014 provide here a useful example. In the summer of 2014, the market sellers, a population that includes a large proportion of rural women who make the daily trek from local villages to sell their produce as well as urban residents and local youths trying to make a living selling anything from second clothes, cookware, and traditional fabrics to cellphones, Internet passes and consumer electronics, grew increasingly fed up with the lack of hygiene and insalubrity that resulted from the market authorities failing to regularly clean the market. The growing mounds of trash not only blocked the deep gutters that surround the market, but also resulted in a particularly severe cholera outbreak[28]. Angered by the lack of services provided by the local government agencies in charge of the market, the market sellers also knew that using the official or 'proper' channels, such as contacting their local elected representatives or lodging an official complaint was unlikely to yield results. Indeed, local elections had not been held in nearly a decade, and official complaints rarely went anywhere, and certainly not within a reasonable timeframe given the urgency of the matter. The sellers of Daka market, therefore, resorted to making their demands heard using means of 'pressurizing' government which Chatterjee associates with the domain of 'political society': they stopped paying their market tax. Some also started hurling insults on a regular basis at market officials going on their daily rounds of the market. Faced with a loss of revenue

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[28]See http://guineeactu.info/debats-discussions/chroniques/4651-labe-aussi-insalubre-que-la-capitale-conakry.html

and barrage of insults, market officials felt compelled to respond and resume the regular upkeep of the market. Cleary, the market sellers' strategy for making their claim on the local government agencies was not the official or even 'proper' channel for lodging a complaint about the services they expected in return for their market tax. Yet, as most market sellers very well knew, official complaints were highly unlikely to result in any meaningful change, and in any case would likely take far too long. Given the urgency of the matter, they resorted to using the means of negotiating and engaging with authorities available to them within the domain of 'political society'.

As noted above, one of the characteristics of 'political society' as conceived by Chatterjee is that it allows groups, and particularly marginalized populations, to enter into 'direct political negotiations' within government agencies. This is particularly important for groups who do not normally have access to the formal institutions of 'civil society' or whose claims within those 'proper' channels could easily be ignored. The tax protests in Daka market provides an example of the potential benefits of entering into direct negotiations and bypassing the formal channels of civil society, when these are unlikely to yield results. This ability to make claims directly within political society seems even more important within the Guinean context compared to the Indian context as described by Chatterjee. As he notes, within the Indian context, the institutions of 'civil society', the formally organized domain of Western-style legal institutions and representative democracy, works not just 'on paper' or in theory, but can in fact be accessed by certain privileged populations, and the urban middle and upper classes in particular. In Guinea, the problem is slightly different since these formal institutions are not just inaccessible to

large segments of the population, they are largely dysfunctional. In the example of the Daka market protest, for instance, it was not just that the market sellers did not have access to local elected representatives who could champion their claims, but rather that these local representatives did not exist all together, thus making the ability to operate within the informal channels of 'political society' even more crucial.

Yet, this capacity to negotiate and constitute oneself as a population to be reckoned with within the terms of political society becomes greatly reduced when the relations between citizens and government take place entirely through the exchange of digital information between wirelessly connected devices. My contention here is that comparing the relations of power and capacities to both make claims, and in turned be governed, at play in the Daka market tax protest and those at play in the introduction of the new Internet tax in Guinea point to a redefinition of the conditions of governmentality, which I characterize as the emergence of a new domain of political life. I call this domain 'digital society', and contend that it is at the heart of new forms of governmentality in Guinea. These changed relations between Guineans and their government as they become mediated by digital technologies have particular bearings on certain groups of digital technology users, and Guinean youth in particular. In order to represent the full extent of this argument, it is necessary to explore in some details the technological aspects of the emergent digital infrastructure in Guinea. This is necessary since within 'digital society', these digital technologies become non-human agents that increasingly shape the interactions between the Guinean state and youth disproportionately. My goal in providing these details is in what it reveals about the fiscal that is being constructed along and in between these socio-technical circuits and in

between the exchanges of wireless and electrical signals. Somewhere in the bits of zeros and ones a new fiscal subject is created in Guinea, and as I will further explore in the later part of this chapter, youth are in the prime this digitalized fiscal subject.

The new tax, announced on January 25th, 2016 as part of Loi N°/2016/001/AN article 15 and taking effect on February 1st, 2016, extended the provisions of the March 2015 Law known as L/2015/N002/AN to now also include a tax on all Internet DATA and SMS. The new article imposes a 5 percent charge on all Internet data, based on consumption, as well as a 10GNF charge on all text messages, or the equivalent of a seventh of a US cent. In Guinea, where the smallest bill of 25GNF[29] is now rarely used given both the inflationary context and continued devaluation of the Guinean franc, 10GNF might not seem like much and certainly couldn't buy you even a box of matches. However, for someone using text regularly, the price of the tax could quickly add up, and start eating into the price of daily necessities such as bread (1,500GNF a piece), rice (4,000GNF a kilo) or vegetables such as onions (250GNF a piece).

Of particular significance for thinking about the relations of power and fiscality embedded in the tax is the fact that the object of taxation within this new law is defined as the 'user of communication'. In Article 15, the new 'DATA' tax is specified as a tax equivalent to '5% of the price of the Internet pass' or 'pass Internet' in French, using the English term for designating the contractual permission to access the Internet. Embedded in the law is therefore the provision that the tax can be linked to Internet consumption. This requires both identifying the 'user' and tracking her or his consumption to know when the 'pass' has run out. This procedure is accomplished through a technical process

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[29] Bills in Guinea range from 25GNF (the lowest) to 20,000GNF (the highest). However, due to rampant and rapid inflation the two smallest bills (25GNF and 50GNF) are now rarely used. In response to the rising cost of living, the Guinean government recently introduced the 20,000GNF bills in May 2015.

that involves wireless communications between Internet-connected devices, which is useful to explore in some details here. In Guinea, where Internet is primarily accessed with a smartphone, users are identified, located and their consumption tracked by a technical infrastructure that is likely to include a Subscriber Identification Module or SIM card which stores a unique International Mobile Subscriber Identify (IMSI) number and its key. IMSI numbers conforms to numerical standards set by the International Telecommunication Union, a United Nations specialized agency. IMSI numbers contain a 'mobile country code' (MCC), which identify the 'home' country of subscriber, that is where the SIM card is registered, a 'mobile network code' (MNC) which identifies the mobile carrier (such as Orange, NTM, Cellcom Guinee or Intercell[30]). Together, the mobile country and mobile network codes form what is known as the 'Home Network Identity' of the subscriber. The MCC and MNC codes are then followed by a 'mobile subscription identification number' (MSIN) which is what we generally recognize a 10-digit cellphone number.   Each IMSI number is entered into a Home Location Register (HLR), a central database that contains details of each mobile phone subscriber that is authorized to use the network. Significantly for the purposes of thinking about political subjectivities in Guinea, connected to International Mobile Subscriber Identification and Home Location Registers are a number of more or less directly related functions including a billing center that keep a tool of usage to generate a bill, multimedia and voicemail services as well as lawful interceptions functions. These give the relevant government, in this case the Guinean government, the right to monitor Internet activities and calls.

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[30] These are the four mobile network operators currently offering services in Guinea. Sotelgui, the public service operator owned by the Guinean government, stopped its operations in 2013.

In addition to IMSI and HLR, which identify a subscriber to the mobile network, devices such as smartphones identify themselves to other devices in order to exchange information over the Internet.   This is done using an Internet Protocol or IP address. Internet Protocol addressing is – as IMSI - a global addressing system. It serves to identity and locate devices as they exchange information packages – known as datagrams – over a collection of interconnected networks, that together form the Internet.

The IP address itself is a numerical label assigned to each device – computer, laptop, smartphone, printer, etc. – participating in a network that uses the Internet Protocol for communicating. First established in 1981, through a document know as Request For Comments (RFC) 791, IP addresses today take on two forms: the original Internet Protocol version 4 known as IPv4, which consist of 32 bits or four times eight bits with a value of either 0 or 1 each, and the newer Internet Protocol version 6 or IPv6 established in 1995 in order to deal with IPv4 address exhaustion, that is the fact that original format did not make enough unique addresses available in order to respond to the exponential growth of Internet communication. The newer IPv6 format consists of 128 bits, thus, providing 2128-? (is this number correct?) unique addresses, an amount deemed large enough for the foreseeable future. Each time an Internet user sends or receives information over the Internet, her or his device request is assigned a unique IP address, typical by a Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP) server. In addition to specifying what information is sought, where it is located and the path to the datagram, IP addresses provide information that can be used for geolocation purposes. Depending on the accuracy of that information and the software used to process it, it can be used to identify a user's physical position within a country, city or neighborhood.

At stake here is the fact that the relations of fiscality between Guinean Internet users and the state are increasingly mediated by digital technologies. As the digital infrastructure's reach deepens and becomes increasingly internal not only to Guineans' everyday lives but the Guinean government's operations as well, new conditions of governmentality emerge. Embedded within new forms of taxation are also new materialities of power (Roitman, 2005:3). Within the emergent domain of 'digital society', the binary codes of digital technologies become non-human agents that increasingly eliminate the need for direct relations between the state and it's governs. Before returning to the implications of this change for the capacity of Guineans to enter into direct negotiations with the government, it is helpful to take some time here to compare the digital addressing infrastructure highlighted above on which the identification of fiscal subject within the new Internet tax rests to the existing 'physical' addressing infrastructure as it currently exists in Guinea. This provides a way to fully grasp the significance of the change and appreciate the particular implications, which the internalization of digital technologies take on with the Guinean postcolonial context.

In Guinea, as in many other parts of Africa, an addressing infrastructure based on the European system of numbering houses and naming street was first introduced by the colonial government in the early part of twentieth century. As Roitman notes, it was part of a number of techniques of classification or 'reordering' that serve to 'fix' the communities and their subjects in order to render them taxable, from a practical point of view (2005: 130). Reordering often mobile populations within fixed, locatable housing units that could be identified through an addressing system that made colonial subjects legible from the colonial government's point of view was not only necessary for asserting

their power within the region, but were part and parcel of the colonial 'material forms of power'. In Guinea, in addition to this logic of enumeration and legibility for the purpose of governmental management, street naming and house numbering practices also followed a different colonial logic, marked by rupture and the separatist logic of the colonial state. In early colonial cities, such as Dakar or Conakry in the late nineteenth century, street naming and house numbering were reserved for the European quarters. As political technologies of colonial power they served to delineate the European city from the 'native town' (Bigon, 2009). Denied names, the streets of the 'native town' were also invariably denied an integral part in the city (ibid: 436).

Ultimately, colonial efforts at developing an addressing infrastructure based on the metropolitan model failed even within the planned European parts of the colonial cities they occupied, largely due to the lack of financial resources and often lax control that characterized the colonial authorities in West Africa (ibid). This has resulted in a situation whereby the vast majority of the urban population belongs to roughly fifty percent of urban residents worldwide whose house isn't locatable used the modernist addressing system based on house numbers and street names. This situation has been described as a 'worrisome predicament' by international bodies in charge of development (Farvacque-Vitkovic et al., 2005: 2). The fact that modern addressing infrastructure which emerged in Europe during the eighteenth century had little to do with orientation or mail distribution but rather with making the urban terrain and its dwellers legible for both military and tax collection purposes lies at the heart of current concerns with the lack of house numbers and street names (Rose-Redwood & Tantner, 2012: 5; Denis, 2012: 87).

I asked a Guinean youth how they could have any official identification within this context and the youth explained that obtaining an official address or legal residence in Guinea is a complicated, time-consuming and cumbersome process. It begins by contacting the 'chef de quarter' or 'neighborhood chief' who has the legal authority to issue a certificate confirming whether you are indeed a resident of the neighborhood. The process can be time consuming and cost 5,000 GNF (roughly equivalent to a kilogram of rice or a whole fish on a Conakry market). The address obtained is typically simply the name of a neighborhood and the sub-division or 'secteur' within this neighborhood where one resides. It doesn't include a street name or house number. But in addition to being somewhat imprecise in terms of geo-location, the process for obtaining the certificate is also deeply fraught. It relies on, and thus invalidates, the authority of the neighborhood or district chiefs, who find in the delivery of these certificates a key function of their official roles. The problem is that these official representatives in Guinea are supposed to be elected and serve a duration of five years. Yet, there haven't been local elections in Guinea since 2005, so that these local-level elected members find themselves continuing to serve these key functions linked to their supposedly elected roles at least six years after their mandates should be officially over.

What is more, for most official purposes, such as applying for a passport, ID card or registering for university for instance, ascertaining one's 'official' identity requires more than residence. Indeed, for most official purposes, one must also justify one's name, a process typically done through producing a birth certificate. But, given that in Guinea, the vast majority of people do not have valid birth certificates, this process is usually done through a 'jugement supplétif' or 'supplementary decision', an official

document through which a court can attribute a legal identity including a date of birth in cases when the actual date of birth is not known for sure. Such a document costs in Guinea 30,000 GNF at the time writing. As we can see, official identity based on clearly defined attributes such as date of birth or address of residence are much patchier categories in the Guinean administrative landscape. Having an address only locates ones' 'secteur' or sub-location within a certain neighborhood. This information is not ascertained through property deeds, tax forms, rental agreements or utility bills as if often the case in France or the United States for instance, but through a certificate obtained from an elected official who is himself or herself in breach of his or official mandate, and who is asked to confirm officially one's place of residence based on his or her supposedly thorough knowledge of the area. From the point of view of governmentality, the process for obtaining an official identification, then, as moved from the domain of 'civil society' to the more informal sphere of 'political society'.

This leaves grey areas and margins of errors or manipulation. What is more, this combines with a broader administrative landscape in which dates of birth are in many cases ascertained retroactively through a court order that attributes an official date of birth that may or may not reflect the actual timing of the birth. It is currently impossible to know what proportion of Guineans hold a birth certificate but anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority does not. All in all, this is not only a rather fluid process but can also be costly. Although obtaining an official ID card, a major official document in Guinea, officially costs only 15,000 GNF (about two dollars or say three kilograms of rice), once other factors such as obtaining a certificate of residence, a supplementary decision in lieu of birth certificate or the official stamp required for the application the

cost spirals to an estimated 62,000 GNF (or over eight US dollars). In a context where the minimum wage is just 60$ per month (www.votresalaire.org), and where the overwhelming majority of young people are unemployed, this can represent a real barrier to obtaining official identification.

Despite these many barriers, one thing that is clear from looking at discussions on Facebook and Twitter of identification is that young people want an official address and identification, something that is essential for many administrative endeavors, including applying and registering for school and for driver licenses, as well as registrations and authorizations to sell in the market for instance. In fact, between December 2014 and May 2016, the Guinean government stopped issuing ID cards entirely pretexting a technical delay in the introduction of new and more secure biometric cards. This led to a successful online campaign on social media spearhead by Guinean youth, which forced the Guinean government to re-start issuing ID cards in May 2016. I explore the significance of this hashtag campaign for Guinean youth in more details in chapter three.

As this discussion highlights, in Guinea, official administrative processes, even as important and central to state operations as providing citizens with official identification, take place outside of the formal channels of 'civil society'. Yet, going back to the detailed account of digital identification provided earlier in the chapter, it is also evident that the processes of identification rolled out as part of the new Internet tax are also qualitatively different. This has a number of key implications for Guinean Internet users. Given the inexistence or unreliability of the physical addressing infrastructure, the new forms of identification become particularly important to people's everyday lives. As one of my research participants noted one day when we were chatting on Facebook:

Mais tu connais ici y a pas d'adresse donc c tjrs pre-payé. vu ke chacun a un num de tel donc c un identifiant [But you know how it is here, there are no [street] addresses so it is always prepaid, since everyone has a cellphone with a number so it is your identification.]

Yet, as Chatterjee notes, the ability to recognize and be recognized is not only necessary to the process of governing, it is also central to people's ability to make demand onto the state. As he notes, whereas in 'civil society', people are recognized by the state on the basis of their status as 'right-bearing citizens', within the domain of 'political society' people are recognized as member of a 'population', which he defines as a group identifiable by virtue of shared characteristics such as geographical origin, ethnic affiliations or economic status. These characteristics are typically defined statistically or according to official classification. In the example shared above of the Daka market tax protest, the vendors become recognized as a 'population' defined by their particular occupation within the market. This is the basis on which they can make a collective demand onto local authorities, and in return, the basis on which their demands are addressed within the domain of 'political society'. So, when Daka market vendors became tired of not being provided with the services they felt entitled to, they were able to 'pressurize' the local government agency in charge of providing these services by refusing to pay their 'market tax' and by hurling insults at the government officials. Within the domain of 'digital society', the conditions under which Guineans can make claims onto the Guinean government are also vastly changed. The example of the Internet tax is here again instructive. As soon as the tax was announced, Guineans took to social media to denounce the tax. Some of the commentary was particularly virulent.

One youth for instance noted how the Guinean government 'doesn't give a damn about [the Guinean population]'. Others included the hashtag #corruptguinea to their tweets. Such reactions and the straight talk which they used were in some ways quite similar to the example of the Daka market vendors hurling insults at market officials. Yet, the differences are also worth noting. First of all, amongst the thousands of tweets generated in response to the announcement of the new law, not one actually included 'insults', at least not of the type that knowing the 'franc parler' and often crude language of market vendors in Guinea can be expected to have been exchanged during the Daka market protests-clarify sentence. In fact, it was clear that most Guineans exhibited a great deal of self-restraint when talking online. One of my research participants described the adhesion to expected norms including the fact of not using insults or swear words online as 'netiquette'. As he noted, for him, 'netiquette est plus qu'une loi' [in French 'it is more than a law']. This illustrates the extent to which he self-policed online. This was particularly the case for relations where a certain level of restraint would be expected, regardless of whether the interaction took place online or 'In Real Life' [IRL], such as in the case of interactions between youth and elders. These interactions in Guinea's gerontocratic society are highly regulated. In Fulani, for instance, there exists a whole different language register, composed of more 'respectful' words that are used when youth interact with older persons. 'Mi Fanki' in Fulani means 'I shut up' or 'I remain silent'. It is sometimes used to refer to the expression 'Fankougol Bhouri' which means 'staying silent is preferable' and is typically used when a conversation starts to sour and take an undesirable turn, in which case one of the interlocutors chooses to cut it short and remain silent. The only time I saw it used on social networking sites was in the following

tweet, when a youth made insinuating comments about an older politician:

> Il paraît que c'est […] un vieux octogénaire ou septuagénaire qui va présider la délégation spéciale de Labé. C'est ça le rajeunissement dans les instances des partis politiques ? #MiFanki. [It seems that it's […] an old in his seventies or eighties who is going to head the special delegation in Labe. Is that the renewal [rejuvenation] of institutions in political parties? #MiFanki]

The hashtag #MiFanki at the end of his tweet added a lot of tension. Reading it, his desire to scream and even hurl insult at the situation can be felt. Yet, in this case he chose to 'shut up' and remain silent presumably to maintain both social etiquette especially as he was publicly attacking the nomination of a person much older than him to lead the local branch of a political party. Yet, as the case of the Daka market protest shows, it is precisely this ability to turn social etiquette on its head and start 'hurling insults' that can at times become a useful tool to exercise pressure and make claims on figures of authority within 'political society'. And, in other arenas such as hip hop lyrics, youth were adept at turning gerontocratic conventions on their heads. A song by one of my research participants, a young rapper from Conakry, for instance, contained the lyrics: 'Silence vieux, je rappe en tant que fonike' [In French and Sussu 'Shut up old man, I am rapping as a youth']. On Facebook or Twitter, spaces regimented by the internalized rules of the 'netiquette,' such outburst against elders would likely attract instant criticism and be the target of collective 'self-policing' on the part of other youths. Although my data only allows me to speculate the reasons for this intense 'self-policing' in the domain of 'digital society', it is likely that the technologies' design played a role of shaping these changing conditions of governmentality. Social networking technologies, for instance, are designed to spread information and circulate as far and wide as possible. This, thus,

by design increased the potential that person whom youth might want to keep unaware of their actions such as family members or government officials would come across it, with little ability for the youth to regulate the access of these elders. This might, for instance, be quite different in the case of hip hop songs since it is quite unlikely that older Guineans listen to hip hop. Also, social networking technologies are designed to keep a record of every posts and publication, which remain accessible and retrievable *ad eternum*. Again, this is quite different from the Daka market example were the ephemeral time-limited nature of the insulting bout might be what makes this break in social etiquette possible.

Secondly, it was not just the ability to 'hurl insult' as a mechanism through which to exercise pressure on government agencies and officials that finds itself greatly suppressed when interactions between Guineans and their government become mediated with digital technologies. Their ability to refuse paying the tax until the services they feel entitled to are rendered is also greatly reduced. As noted above, the fiscal relation between the Internet user and the Guinean government is highly digitalized and managed by the connected devices themselves who identify users and keep track of their consumption on which the tax is based. Whereas in the case of the Daka market, vendors were able to apply direct pressure onto local authorities by refusing to pay the tax until the regular upkeep of the market resumed, such a direct form of negotiation becomes increasingly elusive in the case of the Internet tax. Refusing to pay the tax would require users to stop using the Internet. This would mostly affect them depriving them of access to this global resource, and would also affect the Internet Service Providers who sell them the pass. Yet, as a lever on the Guinean government, it would seem quite ineffective, and

certainly would not hold the same direct effect as refusing to pay the market tax,

presumably one of the main sources of revenue for the local authorities regulating the

market. It is worth noting here that I do not aim to argue that the digitalization of

relations between Guineans and the Guinean state at the heart of what I call 'digital

society' are simply resulting in a much more reduced capacity on the part of Guineans to

make claims onto their government, in Guineans being squeezed 'like an Orange' to go

back to the young Guinean's tweet shared at the start of this chapter. In fact, as the

examples shared in chapter one and three show, new possibilities are also clearly opened

for claims onto the Guinean government to be made. The hashtag campaigns discussed

in chapter three are clearly testament to this distinct openness. Rather, my goal in

exploring the fiscal relations at the heart of the new Internet tax is to show how the

emergence of 'digital society' is both a process of closing up and opening up of the terms

in which Guineans, and particularly youth, relate to their government, and are governed.

'Digital society' is characterized by shifting conditions of governmentality. It is also

worth stressing that just as for Chatterjee the domain of 'political society' did not replace

'civil society' in India, but rather existed in parallel and conjunction to it, the domain of

'digital society' in Guinea, as I am suggesting exists in parallel to both 'civil society' and

'political society'. I believe the Daka market tax protest example illustrates this point. I

now turn to a discussion of the changing terms of surveillance in Guinea, before

considering how youths in Guinea find themselves uniquely positioned within the domain

of 'digital society'.

Although my fieldwork took place over a 12-month period, between July 2015

and July 2016, the changing terms in which digital security and surveillance were

experienced by young Guinean social media users could be clearly felt. At the heart of these growing concerns were a number of widely decried and potentially liberticide governmental actions. In order to give readers a better sense of the change with regard to the both security and surveillance concerns related to the digital locating and identifying of youth, I begin by sharing an extract from a conversation I had with one of my research participant. This is the introductory conversation I had with this twenty-year old web-activist from Labe. At that point we had never met, talked or exchanged online, but I had become aware of his blogging activities and was interested in inviting him to participate in my research. This is a direct translation of the transcript of two private chat sessions that took place in August 2015 on Facebook[31].

CB: Hello! Diarama[32]! I am looking to recruit participants for a social science research on social media in Guinea, and their impact on Guinean youth. I was wondering if you would be interested in participating. It doesn't require a lot of time, simply to take part in an interview (about one hour) and to take some photographs (about fifteen) to document the place of social networking in your daily life. This study is part of my PhD at Rutgers University in the USA, and participation is anonymous and protected by the University's guidelines. I attach a note to this message describing the project in more details. Let me know what you think, and do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or need more information. Clovis

PB: Thank you I will get back to you in a few days

CB: Great! Thanks. super! merci.
I will wait for your response and please don't hesitate if you have any questions, etc.

PB: But you didn't introduce yourself?

CB: ah, sorry!
My name is Clovis Bergere, I am a doctoral student in the USA.
I lived in Labe in 1997, and have visited a few times since.

PB: What is your nationality?

CB: French but I live in the US
https://childhood.camden.rutgers.edu/graduate-program/graduate-students/

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[31] I provide the original transcript in French in the Appendix.
[32] Salutation in Pulaar.

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PB: You know as a web citizen it is difficult for me to respond to an anonymous person, because we know the dangers attached to that. But I saw in your friends list Abdoulaye Bah, I know him?

CB: I completely understand your concerns, I don't know Abdoulaye Bah, only online. But, I have a lot of friends in Labé right now who can confirm my identity and the legitimate nature of my research

PB: I am also in Labé. I am a student pursuing an associate degree in IT and a blogger, you can see I have also taken part in a radio show on the topic for the German station DW.

CB: Excellent!

This conversation was fairly typical on my initial engagements with research participants who either didn't know me directly or through mutual acquaintances or were what Petit Baldé calls 'web citizens' that is actively engaged in web activism or citizen journalism on social media. It is also quite revelatory of the kinds of concerns with regards to identification and locating as well as surveillance contained in social networking that I encountered in the early phase of my fieldwork. Most potential participants I contacted for instance took time, often several days, to download the consent form and read it in great details before accepting to take part. The prime concern for Petit Baldé in our first chat conversation about taking part in the research was that I might be a government official or potentially a fraudster posing as a researcher in order to obtain compromising information. In Guinea where journalists have been arrested for political opposition to the regime, the dangers he refers to might include imprisonment or harassment. As evidenced in this conversation those concerns were however quite easily relieved, most clearly by a mutual acquaintance in our friends list. It is noteworthy that I didn't know that mutual 'friend' having been connected with him for only a short while on Facebook prior to my exchange with Petit Baldé. Still, this mutual connection along

with my offer to have some of my friends in Labé vouch for me gave Petit Baldé the

reassurance about my identity that he needed.

In other words, clearing Petit Baldé's concerns with regards to the veracity or

legitimacy of my request was a fairly simple process. It focused mainly on diffusing the

potential of impersonation that is contained in online pseudonyms. Following Petit

Baldé's social networking activities through a year of ethnographic research, reading and

responding to his posts on Facebook and Twitter and chatting with him on Facebook on a

regular basis, I did however notice a change in the ways in which he thought about

digitally-mediated identification, surveillance and security, even within this short period

of time. Whereas his first concerns were about a government official posing as someone

else, by the end of my fieldwork he was taking secret surveillance and the potential of

geolocation and interception much more seriously. He started regularly posting about

cyber-security and ways to protect oneself against government interception online. In

July 2016, for instance, he wrote:

If you are in Guinea use the Tor Browser to access the government's website

The Tor browser is a freely available software for browsing the Internet that

enables anonymity by encrypting users' IP address. Using a Tor browser to access a

government website for instance allows for greater anonymity by greatly diminishing the

potential for interference, geolocation and data interception. Similar concerns were

expressed by several of my research participants including a discussion on using a Virtual

Private Network, which also greatly reduce the potential of identification and geolocation

when connected to the Internet. This seemed to indicate growing concerns for protecting

one's anonymity and reducing the potential for geolocation and interception.

Significantly, this was taking place at a time when the Guinean government was

significantly increasing its presence and use of web-based technologies and social media

in particular. A late-comer to social media, the Guinean government very rapidly

boosted its online presence around the time of my fieldwork, in part prompted by the

general elections of October 2015. For instance, the government set up an official

account in Twitter in February 2015. At the time, journalist Dieretou Diallo noted that

although the government's presence on social networking sites was welcome, it almost

seemed like young people were not aware of these official accounts, which had very

minimal following (mondoblog 2/23/15). At the time of writing in January 2017, the

account had over 13,000 followers, an almost five-fold increase since Diallo wrote the

article in February 2015. In a recent poll conducted by Jeune Afrique – the largest

Francophone news magazine covering African news -, Guinea came out eight out of

twenty-one African countries for its level of connection and online presence, a

surprisingly high result given where it was just less than two years ago. The poll noted

that a quarter of Guinea's thirty-one ministers were present on Facebook, and fifteen

percent on Twitter.

In parallel to these public forays into social media, the Guinean government is

also rapidly mobilizing the digital infrastructure to develop a growing apparatus of

surveillance, another element of the changing conditions of governmentality within

'digital society'. This follows a pattern increasingly common across West Africa and

more broadly across the continent. At the heart of this growing apparatus of surveillance

are a number of large multinational companies specialized in signals defense and cyber-

security, such as the French Amesys company, a subsidiary of the Bull group, a world

leader in the fields of Big Data, cyber-defense and digital intelligence or Bluecoat, a

cyber-security and networking company based in California and recently sold to Bain

Capital, the private equity and venture capital firm – of Mitt Romney.

These companies have in recent years seen in Africa's Internet boom, their next

big market, and have been extremely active in selling cyber-security to government, with

little regards to their democratic credentials. Bull-Amesys, for instance, a company most

infamous for being accused of complicity to crime against humanity for allegedly

providing the Libyan regime under Khaddafi with cyber-surveillance data used in the

mass elimination of regime opponents, is currently under contract with the Guinean

government – and Gabon – for a number of cyber-security and surveillance solutions

under the code name 'croco', short for crocodile[33]. Although the details of these

contracts are secretly guarded, what is clear is that they are taking place within a legal

context that only minimally guarantees the protection of Guinean Internet-users. In

Guinea, no comprehensive legal framework covering online security issues existed until a

recent proposal for a law on cyber-security and personal data protection – in French '*Loi*

cybersécurité et protection des données personelles . Drafted in May 2016, the proposal

has been criticized by international organizations such as Internet Without Borders and

Amnesty International. In a detailed eight-page commentary on the proposal, for

instance, Internet Without Borders pointed to a number of concerns with the legal

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[33] See for instance: https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2016/05/guinea-new-law-could-abolish-death-penalty-but-repressive-provisions-remain-1/
http://www.agoravox.fr/actualites/politique/article/espionnage-france-et-nsa-meme-142862

framework in its current form. The vagueness with which terms such as 'telecommunication equipment', 'public order' or the repeated use of the conditional tense leave too much open to interpretation, making the law a potential tool for the oppression of regime opponents rather than to protect citizens, its professed purpose. Similarly, the proposed law contradicts a number of international guidelines, including the UN-backed 'International Principles on the Application of Human Rights to Communications Surveillance', mostly notably by failing to place cyber-security surveillance under the purview of a clearly defined judiciary authority. This would leave open the possibility of presidential interference.

The proposal also opens the door for online censorship by instituting what they see as a disproportionate punishment – six months in prison and a fine of up 120 million GNF (or about 17,000 US$) – for 'the emission of insults, offensive phrases, disdainful or abusive terms, not backed with facts', all of which could be interpreted in widely differing terms, including to suppress opinions that aren't in agreement with the alleged victims' sensibility. What is more, articles 70 and 71 asks telecom operators and digital enterprises to act as the agents of such censorship, dispositions that are fundamentally opposed to democratic principles of transparency and accountability. In addition, the proposed text criminalizes potential 'whistleblowers', assimilated to traitors and spies and, thus, incurring hefty punishment. Overall the advocacy group Internet Without Borders agreed that a legal framework for the protection of privacy and security of Guineans online is crucially needed. Yet, they also noted that in its current form the proposed text fails to meet the standards with regards to the protection of human rights, or take into account widely adopted principles such as 'privacy by default' or

extraterritoriality. As a result, the text instead presents little protection for the Guinean

citizen, and in fact, opens the door in several key ways for illegitimate and undemocratic

practices such as censorship, political interference and surveillance (Internet Without

Border, 2016).

Discipline, power and the social location of youth in social networking sites

Guinean youth form the bulk of social network users. For youth, the injunction to be on social networking sites, and Facebook in particular, extends beyond the purely utilitarian. As noted before, to be connected on social networks has in recent years emerged as a key 'marker' of youth. To be young and IN in Guinea, one has to be on Facebook. As one of my research participants, a youth from Conakry, noted: 'Everyone is on Facebook, really every young person. It's my friends who push me to go on Facebook.' This creates particular conditions that extend the potential for surveillance beyond the instances of direct government interception described in the previous section. On Facebook, the locus of governmental power and discipline moves beyond the sole purview of state officials and departments to include a much more diffuse and quotidian array of disciplinary tactics and techniques. This is very much in line with Foucauldian notions of governmentality that emphasize social control and self-monitoring. Within the Guinean context, social networking sites such as Facebook have emerged as sites and techniques of power for the monitoring, surveillance and discipline of youth, an exercise that relied on gerontocratic forms of domination embedded in the traditional institutions of power, the neighborhood and family in particular.

Demonstrations are frequent occurrences in Guinea[34]. The period between July 2015 and July 2016 when my fieldwork took place was particularly marked by repeated demonstrations due the tensions that characterized the lead up to the presidential elections in October 2015 and its direct aftermath. During that period, dozens of demonstrations took place and many led to heavy-handed repression by the Guinean governmental forces, including several instances of demonstrators killed in the violence. As Phillips

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[34] Barry (REF) provides a detailed account of political violence in Guinea.

has shown, young people in Guinea play a particularly active role in demonstrations, instrumentalizing their critical mass, bodies and potential of descending into violence as leverages to assert their collective power (2013). Social media has in recent years provided an increasingly necessary extension of their actions on the street. As such, demonstrations were widely documented and commented on by Guinean youth on Facebook or Twitter, as was the heavy-handed police and military presence on the streets that surrounded these demonstrations. One of the first images I received as part of an image-making activity when I asked a group of Guinean youth to take and send me photographs that represented their online lives was a shot of young children attending an opposition rally in Labé in the wake of the 2015 presidential elections (See figure 4) [INSERT FIGURE FOUR]. In another image, a twenty-year-old girl student from Conakry sent me a photograph she had taken of soldiers patrolling the streets of Conakry (See figure 5) [INSERT FIGURE FIVE]. When I asked her to comment on the picture, she expressed in details how much she hated the army, in quite specific and detailed terms:

> l'armee est bien presente en guinee.je suis vraimen decue par elle et cela a cree un sentiment de haine vis a vis d'elle.g la rage et je sui le plus souven en colere quand je les voi surtt par sn injustice et pour le fait kel ne fai pa bien sa fonction.lol.c vrai kil ne sont pas tous les memes mai bon...

Which translates in English as:

> The army is very present in Guinea. I am really disappointed by it and this has created a feeling of hatred towards it. I'm enraged and I am more often angry when I see them esp. because of its injustice and because it doesn't fulfill its function.lol.it is true they are not all the same but still…

The fact that these youths sent me those photographs of demonstrations and military presence on the streets unsolicited since I had asked them about their online lives is quite revealing of the place these experiences of political tensions and the threat of violence had in their lives. Social networking sites provided a digital platform on which to extend and relay these experiences, and most demonstrations were widely documented and commented on. Although it is hard to quantify, comparing the ways in which the young people who participated in my research discussed two demonstrations, one in Labe in April 2015 and one more recently in Conakry in February 2016 does seem to indicate a greater sense that the Guinean government is using the Internet in order to monitor the activities of potential opponents, especially amongst the youth. The first demonstration took place in Labe, a stronghold of the opposition and the hometown of the then opposition leader Cellou Dalien Diallo, April 23rd, 2015. The demonstration was part of a series of pre-electoral demonstrations on the part of the opposition who saw in the proposed electoral calendar – that postponed local elections until after the planned presidential election – a move to try and manipulate the presidential election results, by relying on a network of pro-government local elected officials who would be in charge of organizing the elections at a local level. As most demonstrations in Guinea, it was met with a strong army presence and quickly turned violent. One youth was killed by the army using real bullets to disperse the demonstrators (www.aminata.org). Photos of the demonstration were widely shared on social networking sites [INSERT FIGURES SIX AND SEVEN]. Amongst my research participants, the event generated 37 photos, 2 videos, 420 likes, 105 comments and the photos were shared a total of 178 times.

One of my research participants in particular was actively involved in the demonstration, sharing pictures of the event as they unfolded. The pictures shared included shots of young people taking part in violent altercations with the police, including shots where youth were seen throwing stones and other objects at the police. One shot also showed a youth, clearly identifiable, being tear-gazed by the police following a presumed altercation.   Although the comments included highly critical concerns about the violent response of the police, including insults and several expletives, no one appeared worried about posting these pictures online. When I asked them if they were worried about government surveillance, none seemed concerned about direct consequences from posting such pictures. One participant, for instance, explained that he was not 'worried at all about posting anything' (fieldnotes). This overall lack of concern for the potential for surveillance of posting images online contrasts quite dramatically with the response generated by the coverage on Facebook of another demonstration, one that took place ten months later in February 2016 in Conakry.

The demonstration was part of a general strike to protest the rising costs of gas, which continued to trade at prohibitive prices despite the global plummeting of petrol, with crude oil barrels exchanging at a historic low of US$27 at the time. Despite the low cost of oil on the global market, Guineans – whose country include some of the world's largest untapped offshore reserves – continued to pay high prices for the commodity which costs 9,000GNF per liter, the equivalent of US$4.2 per gallon (at the same times, gas cost less than US$2 per gallon in most US states). The February 15th demonstration, the organizing for which started online around the hashtag #5000CBon (or #5000Isenough), had an objective to ask for the reduction of the tax of oil in order to

bring down the cost for the Guinean consumer to 5,000GNF (or equivalent to US$2.4).

Images for the demonstration were once again widely circulated on social networking

sites, Facebook and Twitter in particular. An image such as Figure 8, for instance, was

'liked' over 1,700 times, shared 104 times and generated 152 comments. The image

depicts a young demonstrator wearing a black tee-shirt on which the logo of the

opposition party, the Union des Forces Democratiques de Guinee (UFDG) has been

painted. The tee-shirt also has a large white 'G' next to which the number '7' has been

painted. As the caption explains, this youth's nickname is 'G7' which stands for

'Grenade number 7'. He is identified as a 'combatant', a militant youth resident of the

Hamdallaye-Kagbelen corridor, also known as 'l'Axe du Mal' (or the 'Axis of Evil' in

echo to George W. Bush infamous term for Iraq, Iran and North Korea) (See Phillips,

2013). Out of 152 comments, 57 were directly concerned with whether publishing these

photographs could lead to the youth's identification and arrest. Things even got heated

when one commentator threatened to take matters in his own hands, and report the youth.

As he noted:

> Le petit est déjà en recherche paix à son âme on lui conai très bien ya le sairfisi de
> ransahiment aussi dans le cartier le petit est très très reconai ces le vrai enemies de
> pays

Which translates as:

> This youth is already being looked for, bless his soul, we know him very well.

There is enough surveillance in the neighborhood. This youth is very well known. He is part of the real enemies of the country.

His comment was met with a copious amount of insults, threats and taunts to try and come find him. Despite the threats and the photographs, the youth was not arrested on that occasion. His photograph resurfaced on Facebook a few months later when he was wounded by a police-fired gun shot during a subsequent demonstration in May 2016. Yet, the change of tone in the commentary on the two demonstrations on Facebook might indicate a greater feeling that social networking sites form an increasing part of a surveillance apparatus deployed by the Guinean government in an effort to discipline the bodies of what it sees as unruly youth. Although the data at my disposal makes it impossible to ascertain that trend in any quantifiable or reliable way, several of the examples shared here including the quote above regarding the need to use the more secure Tor browser when accessing the government's website gesture toward a broader trend. This was also corroborated in informal discussions with young web-activists. One for instance noted the need for Guinean youth to receive training on user protection and security before engaging in political activities online. It is however worth noting that this is taking place in a context of increased presence and visibility of the Guinean government online. In this case, the neighborhood, a key institution in processes of identification as we have seen before, becomes a key locus of power through which the monitoring of youth takes placed online, extending the reach of power well beyond that of state apparatuses.

Conclusion

What emerges from the discussion above is a rapidly changing assemblage of addressing and identification in Guinea. Within this new digital infrastructure, smartphones, Internet protocols, hyper-flexible prepaid contracts and social media platforms combine in order to identify, locate and ultimately 'fix' the bodies and actions of Guinean youth in new ways. Embedded within the technical language of taxation and new information technologies are political decisions and values that constitute Guinean subjects in new ways. These digitalized 'techniques of power' reconfigure the terms on which Guineans, and Guinean youth in particular, interact with the state, which includes both the avenues opened to them to make claims on the state, and the ways in which they are governed. As I have argued this points to the emergence of a new domain in the Guinean public sphere, which I call the digital society. This new domain exists in Guinea in parallel and conjunction with the domains of 'civil society' and 'political society' which I described using the terms proposed by Chatterjee. Within digital society, Guineans find themselves constituted in new ways. As I illustrated by comparing the recent introduction of a new tax on Internet consumption to market tax protests that took place in Labe in 2014, the possibility for entering into direct negotiations with the Guinean state within 'digital society' have greatly shifted in ways that often feel like Guineans are increasingly being 'sucked like an Orange'. In this process, the digital technologies play key roles and need to be considered as important non-human agents shaped the terms of governmentality. Yet, being connected to social media and having an IP address also provides young people with a social location from which to speak to, or

'address' power in Guinea.

Hashtags, digital circulation and the distribution of youth political agency in Guinea

One of the most widely celebrated recent social media campaigns led by youth in Guinea is the election monitoring campaign known as GuinéeVote. The campaign was launched in August 2015 - preceding the October 2015 presidential elections - by ABLOGUI (Guinean Bloggers' Association) under the auspices of its young president, Fodé Saniyaki Kouyaté and committee made up of young Guinean web activists, several of whom participated in this research. The campaign aimed at giving meaning to political debate in Guinea by providing avenues for ordinary citizens to participate constructively and directly in the expansion of democratic debates in the country. It placed a particular emphasis on youth, which it saw as uniquely placed to use social media technologies in order to advance democracy. Although only a couple paragraphs long, the official initial announcement for the campaign made three references to 'youth', suggesting that the initiative was specifically geared to this constituent group in Guinea[35]. For instance, it ended by calling specifically on Guinean youth to 'have their say' by joining the campaign.

Modeled on similar election-monitoring campaigns, notably one conducted in 2012 in neighboring Senegal, the project revolved around a multimodal participatory web platform that included a website (guineevote.org), a Facebook page (GuinéeVote), Twitter account (@GuineeVote) and a hashtag (#GuineeVote). Although each of these elements were essential components of the campaign, the hashtag stood out as perhaps the most visible component. Specifically, it enabled all the activities generated as part of

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[35] I provide a translation of the announcement in Appendix 1 to further highlight the singular ways in which youth, Internet-based technologies and the advancement of democracy are connected in this announcement and ABLOGUI's mission more generally.

the campaign to be instantly connected, hyperlinked and thus, amalgamated into one

searchable and easily retrievable whole. As such it echoes what media scholar Nick

Couldry as noted with regards to hashtags: they are one of the main ways through which

the millions of daily messages created on social media platforms such as Twitter are

organized and assembled into coherent collective actions rather than leading to a

'cacophony of jumbled, decontextualized messages' (2012: 41). As he explains:

> Groups can cohere around a particular Twitter address or hashtag, to which
> commentary (or other information) can be sent: if successful, this becomes a form
> of *presencing* for groups without previous identity or social capital. (*ibid*,
> emphasis in the original)

As the emphasis suggests, presencing is here a particularly important concept for

Couldry, which he defines as:

> A whole set of media-enhanced ways in which individuals, groups and institutions
>
> put into circulation information about, and representations of, themselves for the
>
> wider purpose of sustaining a public presence. (*ibid*: 50)

This chapter compares the trajectories of four recent hashtags campaigns led by

youth in order to reflect on the intersection of social media and the constitution – or

'presencing' – of youth as political agents in Guinea. Specifically, this chapter explores

hashtags as technical and symbolic devices of social composition that both mediate and

are mediated by the movements of youth as a political constituency in Guinea. How do

hashtags circulate young people's political agency in Guinea? How do youth mobilize

hashtags in order to effect political change in Guinea? And how do hashtags constitute youth as a collective political agent in Guinea? What emerges from the case studies is a sense that hashtags invite particular forms of political agency that tend to be both collective and participatory. A detailed exploration of the logistics behind the planning and implementation of #GuineeVote, the largest recent 'hashtag' campaign, however, also challenges understandings of digital forms of political participation as necessarily more horizontal modes of democratic power that reflect the technologies' 'networked' architecture. Instead, hashtags as loci for collective political action require considerable amounts of maintenance as well as information control and hierarchization that often reflect not a multitude of individualized desires but rather specific collective values and objectives.

What is more, comparing the two near simultaneous campaigns, #5000cbon and #DroitALIdentite, forces to further call into question understandings of digital political agency as simply 'networked' in order to consider the ways in which hashtags become instances through which youth political agency finds itself 'distributed' across complex socio-historical assemblages. As I show, once launched hashtags do not just link together information on and across social media platforms but also specific assemblages of bodies, desires, spaces, histories, policies and technologies that ultimately shape the contours of each campaigns, understood not as an example of a new kind of agency, but as a unique agentic instance or moment. The final part of this chapter returns to notion of 'presencing' using the #Guineenedu21esiecle campaign in order to explore hashtags as devices for assembling collective presence, a process shaped by both ruptures and continuities. The conclusion argues that as collective agentic acts, hashtag campaigns,

become akin to bets hedged against complex socio-historical assemblages. Within Guinea's often volatile context and discordant times, hashtags work as devices for piecing together a collective presence i.e. constituting oneself as a collective political agent. This does not simply extend youth agency but re-assembles it. The interstices of this assemblage creates new possibilities for youth agency, as they find themselves opened and foreclosed. As examples of the changing terms of political action within the domain of digital society, hashtags point to a different relation to the Guinean state. Whereas in political society, groups become instantiated as 'populations' defined by shared statistically measurable characteristics, in digital society, groups assembled or rather 'presenced' online become the locus of power. As I show, this indicates the emergence of a new temporality of political life in Guinea, based not on 'utopian time' as in civil society or 'real time' as in political society but in a time that is made more pressing organized around the principle of instantaneity. Yet, at the same information online gains a certain permanence, actions are instantaneously turned into observable and retrievable archives. I briefly explore the consequences of this change in the final section of this chapter.

#GuineeVote: hashtags as acts of political agency

As noted above the GuineeVote campaign included several elements: a website (guineevote.org), a Facebook page (GuinéeVote), Twitter account (@GuinéeVote) and a hashtag (#GuineeVote). Although the website was a key element of the pre-election day activities of the campaign, providing a platform for sharing details about the eight

candidates' programs or logistical information with regards to the voting process, the hashtag was central to the election monitoring activities during polling. In particular, it offered to link in real-time updates on election day generated by trained e-observers and ordinary citizens across the countries' over five hundred polling stations. Through this hashtag, any message across both Facebook and Twitter containing the label #GuineeVote was instantaneously linked, forming an easily searchable archive. Over a twenty-hour period, the campaign generated over eight thousand linked messages, the most any hashtag campaigns have generated to date. In the next section, I use the election monitoring activities linked to the campaign as they occurred on social media, Facebook and Twitter, on October, 11th, 2015 as a way to explore the circulation and assembling of information enabled by hashtags. This offers an opportunity to reflect upon the ways in which youth in Guinea mobilize hashtags for political change and activism, and the circulation of political agency more generally.

The GuinéeVote campaign and hashtag #GuineeVote were launched in August 2015. In the months and weeks leading up to the presidential election on October, 11th, 2015, the eight candidates' projects, proposals and declarations were relayed through the campaign's various channels on Facebook, Twitter and through its website in order to invite Guinean electors to make informed choices, rather than fall into a pattern of voting exclusively along familial or ethnic lines. Information about registration and the electoral calendar were also shared and explained. In addition, ABLOGUI worked with several regional and international non-profit organizations, most notably the Open Society Initiative in West Africa or OSIWA, a grant-making and capacity-building organization working for the advancement of democracy in West Africa, to train approximately 215

'e-observers'. These trained observers were deployed in polling stations across the country with the objective of providing on-the-ground, real-time, citizen-led monitoring of the electoral process.

Starting the evening before the elections, on October 10th, ordinary Guineans and trained 'e-observers' began using the hashtag #GuineeVote to publish, share and circulate content linked to the polling process. Many e-observers began posting pictures of their new t-shirts marked with the hashtag #GuineeVote, noting that they were ready for the 'big day'. As the flow of messages started to grow, many Guineans started tagging their messages with the hashtag. Many wishing and praying for a 'peaceful electoral process without exactions or violence'. Photographs of sporadic episodes of violence, including violent scuffles in Madina, Conakry's largest market as well as burnt cars in Conakry's outskirts and other large cities, began circulating. These invariably were met by more calls for a peaceful process. One of the most widely circulated post, included a photomontage of four images, depicting bags of rice being distributed to households in the middle of the night on the eve of the elections. These were immediately recognized as efforts on the part of the main parties to 'buy out votes' and 'consciences' by young Guineans accustomed to spotting suspect activities. This immediately included the instantaneous live exposure of potential exactions in the electoral process (see figure 9). The flows of messages tagged with the hashtag #GuineeVote grew exponentially on the day of the elections itself. [INSERT FIGURE THIRTEEN] As noted above, over eight thousand messages were published, shared and circulated on Twitter over a thirteen-hour

period between 7 a.m. when the polls opened and 8 p.m. when they closed[36]. Nearly as many were also tagged on Facebook. Searching for #GuineeVote in Twitter, on the morning of the election, instantly returned a constant flow of messages and commentary on events taking place at more than 370 polling stations across Guinea. This included photographs, short messages due to Twitter's 140 characters limit per message and re-posting of messages emanating from remote rural regions, secondary urban centers, mining towns or Conakry. In addition, Guineans living abroad could vote at polling stations located in embassies and other community centers in locations as diverse as Rotterdam, Dakar, Paris, Lyon, New York or nearby Kanifing in Gambia to name but a few. Messages and photographs from these locales also began to appear on social media, as Guinean voters across the globe used the hashtag. Messages varied greatly in content and style.

The trained e-observers, for instance, had been trained to report any operational, fraudulent or efficient operations in specific ways, noting detailed location including the polling station's unique identifying number as well as exact time of the events reported. As one of my informant explained, it was important to produce 'high quality information'. As a member of the campaign, for instance, he posted a message which read 'clearly describe your messages (location, polling station, city) #GuineeVote', making this his temporary profile picture on election day. Yet, looking at Twitter messages on that day, it was clear that not everyone stuck to this format. Many so-called 'ordinary citizens' who had not been trained as 'e-observers' for instance began using the hashtag in order to post photographs of their inked fingers with a short commentary

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[36] Originally scheduled to close at 6 p.m. many polling stations stayed opened until 8 p.m. to make up for widespread delays and logistical difficulties.

simply noting that they had 'voted' or 'done their duty', the ink on the finger being the

indelible ink that voters received as proof once they voted, to prevent repeat voting.

Many voters also used social media to comment on the weather, excessive heat or rain

that plague different parts of the country. The appearance of a rainbow following the

morning rain in Conakry led to a vibrant discussion after one young Conakry voter joked

that the rainbow was a clear sign that the so-called 'rainbow' party – the incumbent

president's party which uses a rainbow as its logo and symbol - was set to win. Technical

and logistical difficulties were the focus of what seemed to be the majority of messages

on Twitter and Facebook. E-observers denounced the issues with the papers voter

registers, many of which had not been organized alphabetically, at dozens of polling

stations. Many complemented their messages with a photograph illustrated the long lines

that resulted (See figure 10) [INSERT FIGURE TEN].   One of the most commented on

photographs depicted polling stations set up in improvised facilities such as an old bus or

at a gas stations as illustrated in figure 5. This photograph led to a series of dismayed

comments denouncing the 'sub-standard' and clearly inadequate conditions under which

many Guineans had to vote. As one commentator noted on Twitter in reply to the

photograph in figure 5, 'how can voter privacy be guaranteed under these

circumstances?'. E-observers also noted several instances of voter misbehavior including

a group of drunken voters 'going after e-observers'. Young Guinean 'twittos' posted

videos footage of scuffles and brawling in several polling stations in Conakry. They also

posted pictures and commentaries highlighting instances of fraud or fraud attempts.

Originally posted by one of the e-observers, a photomontage including four headshots of

two teenagers, visibly under the age of eighteen, holding voter cards outside a polling

station, become one of the most widely circulated photograph using the hashtag #GuineeVote. The montage appeared on the timelines of several of my informants, and also was published by several online new outlets in Guinea. For commentators, it highlighted the potential of fraud and how easily voter registers could be abused in a country where official identification remains a rather tenuous process (See chapter two for a more detailed discussion). One e-observer posted a photograph showing a polling station officials – recognizable by his government-issued 'polling agent' jacket - leaning into the polling booth. For the e-observer, and the dozens of Twitter users who re-posted the image, this was not only against the rules regulating 'polling agents' behavior, it also clearly indicated a blatant effort at influencing this seemingly older woman's vote. This coercion was confirmed by the e-observer present in the polling station.

Once the counting of ballots begun, the hashtag #GuinéeVote was used by e-observers to confirm when counting had begun at their respective polling stations, and publish the results as soon as they were available. Figure 5, for instance, is a photograph of the results at a polling station in Conakry published on Twitter by an e-observer as soon as the counting of votes had ended. The written ballot counts at hundreds of polling stations were thus reported by publishing photographs on Twitter and Facebook as soon as the counting had ended, typically late in the night on October 11th. As Fode Kouyate, the young head of ABLOGUI, explained:

> Every time the ballots had been opened and counted, and the official count posted outside of the polling station, [our e-observers] would take a picture of it, they would either send it to us or post it directly on Twitter, so it really was an extraordinary thing, especially as we were in a situation where traditional media was not allowed to publish the results whether partial or not. We were able to anticipate, and as soon as an official count was posted outside of a polling station,

> it was already photographed and published on social networking sites so that people who were following us were able to know what was happening in nearly five hundred polling stations. (El Pais, 8/4/2016)

Several points are raised in this quote that are relevant to understanding the modes of digital circulation that animated the campaign, and their implications for the constitution of youth as pollical agents in Guinea. First of all, it places social networking technologies, Twitter in particular, at the heart of the campaign's operation. As noted in the quote, and as further confirmed when talking to some of the youth who took part in the campaign, GuinéeVote relied on simple and widely available technologies: smartphones equipped with a camera and connected to the internet, a hashtag and accounts of Twitter and Facebook. Clearly, the need to have a smartphone equipped with a camera and Internet connection meant that not everyone in Guinea could take part in the campaign. Yet, the communication landscape is rapidly changing in Guinea, where the official regulators estimated over 12 million cellphones in the country in 2015, which is slightly more than the total population (ARDT, 2015). The report did not specify how many of these were Internet-ready or had a camera, but it is still clear that a significant proportion of the Guinean population has today access to a smartphone, particularly amongst the young, the campaign's primary target. Hashtags are forms of metadata labelling that first appeared on Twitter in 2007. Although the practice of creating a digital label by using a pound or hash sign (#) originated much earlier in the 1970s when it was used in programming languages such as C, the practice of grouping social media posts using a hashtag is widely associated with Twitter. On this platform, using hashtags has become part of a new writing style associated with Twitter that also included short messages limited by the platforms' design to 140 characters per post. The mention of

Twitter in the interview excerpt above, and the dozens of photographs of t-shirts bearing

the hashtag #GuineeVote noted in the descriptions above, make it a central part of the

operation, both practically and symbolically.

Practically, people 'following' the campaign for instance needed to search for the

hashtag on Twitter or Facebook in order to display the flow of messaged associated with

it. Symbolically, the hashtag become the recognizable logo for the campaign as

evidenced by the t-shirts for instance. Creating a hashtag as way to 'give meaning to

political debate in Guinea and advance democracy' – some of the stated aims of the

campaign – is a particular kind of agentic act. Built into the design of hashtags as they

operate on Twitter or Facebook are specific ideas about participation and collective

action. Once launched on Twitter or Facebook, hashtags do not only group together all

the posts that contain them, but also offer a kind of invitation to participate. And as the

largest online campaign to date, with as noted above over 8,000 tweets generated, it does

seem that many Guineans, and youth in particular, did respond to the invitation to take

part. For some of my research participants who took an active part in the campaign, it

was in fact a key moment, a 'watershed' moment or turning when they realized that for

the first time, a relatively small group of dedicated young activists without access to large

financial means or support from traditional civil society groups or trade unions, could put

together a highly visible campaign. As one, a university student from Conakry named

Alpha, explained to me:

> Well, for the first time, we initially took part with the project GuinéeVote, which
> aimed at using new media, that is social networking sites, to monitor the
> presidential elections of 2015. This, it really was a high success because the
> Guinean civil society didn't used to have the capacity to undertake such an

initiative, so it was the first time in this country. It really was, it galvanized us, it really gave us courage.

What is clear from this quote is the sense amongst young web-activists that social media technologies are enabling new forms of political actions, giving capacities to act in ways they 'didn't used to have'. The celebration of new media technologies as fundamentally transforming the political landscape in Guinea was further corroborated by several other youths. A few days after the elections, for instance, three youths who took part in my research posted a statistical representation of the campaign's 'reach. Produced using the freely available online tool Topsy, the four statistical representations including a line graphs, 'bubble' chart and bar chart, present data such as 'reach', 'exposure' or 'activity' based on a randomly selected sample of one hundred tweets containing the hashtag #GuinéeVote. Following the hashtag across the trajectory of these one hundred tweets, Topsy then determined that an impressive 36,721 accounts were 'reached' by these one hundred tweets and even more impressively that 343,190 'Twitter impressions' had been left, these being calculated by adding the number of followers each follower has and multiplying by the number of tweets containing the hashtag which they send. Although the significance of these statistical calculations is somewhat questionable given that it is impossible to ascertain how many of the owners of the 36,721 accounts actually read or even saw the tweets within their constantly updated Twitter feeds, they contribute to a narrative of social networking sites as not only 'novel' or also 'powerful' tools of democratization. When I asked the three youths about the numbers in the images shared above, one noted that these 'numbers speak for themselves', adding that they demonstrate the power of 'SNS in case anyone doubted'. This celebration of new media technologies

as heralding a new kind of democratic participation has often been misinterpreted within academic literature as being proof that new information technologies are inherently linked to the emergence of not only new ways of communicating but perhaps more fundamentally new models of social formations.

This approach is perhaps most famously contained in Castells' theorization of the 'networked society', which he sees as defined by the 'emergence of a new form of social organization based on networking' (Castells, 2005: 3).   In his latest book, for instance, *Network of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (2012), Castells uses maps generated from Facebook and listserv data, similar to the table shared above, to trace the speed at which the recent Occupy movement spread across American cities (164). As is now widely noted, the anti-authoritarian assumptions and techno-deterministic theorization of the impact of new information technologies in both Castells' work and others such as Hardt and Negri are problematic[37]. They rest on the notion that social media technologies not only facilitate the process of social organization but that they also shape the structure of contemporary social organizations, one that is inherent more 'spontaneous', 'leaderless' and 'horizontal' to use Castles' terms (2012). A closer look at the logistics behind the GuineeVote campaign greatly complicates reading it as 'spontaneous and leaderless'.   In fact, the GuineeVote initiative required a significant level of operational planning and logistical coordination. In the months preceding the elections, members of ABLOGUI traveled to Senegal to meet with representatives of OSIWA, a regional organization that provided funding and training to support the operation. Through OSIWA, training days were organized in Conakry, and 215 e-observers were recruited and trained on how what to expect on the day, what information

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[37] See Gerbaudo (2012), Barassi (2015) or Kraidy (2016) for instance.

to report, and how to stay safe. Even, on the day of the election most of the campaign's

seemingly spontaneous activity on Twitter and Facebook was carefully planned and

coordinated from the organization's 'control room' in Conakry. The #GuineeVote

hashtag did encourage citizen participation well beyond the 'official' and trained e-

observers. Anyone could and many did take part of documenting the voting process on

social media, in what could be described as a 'horizontally' organized conversation and

knowledge production process. Yet, not all messages received equal attention. Only

certain messages, cautioned and vetted by ABLOGUI members, were re-tweeted and

shared to their followers, thus achieving a much wider reach and impact. But, perhaps

more fundamentally, going to Fode Kouyate's quote from his interview with El Pais

shared above also moves us beyond any universalist understanding of new technologies

to consider more specifically the Guinea context and GuinéeVote campaign. As Fode

Kouyate makes clear the mass of information produced as part of the campaign and

relayed on Twitter using the hashtag #GuineeVote offered an alternative to 'traditional'

media whose actions were curtailed by the government in order not to published the

results immediately. Within the Guinean context where traditional media outlets where

not allowed to publish results until given permission to do so by the government, a

process that can often take days, the participants in the GuinéeVote campaign, both

trained e-observers and others, were able to constitute themselves as an alternative

constituent group, one capable to circumventing the limitations imposed by the

government. As an agentic act then creating the hashtag was central to creating a

collective online presence. This critical mass provided visibility that circumvented the

Guinean government's ability to react.

Interpretations of social media as 'networked' social forms or 'swarm intelligence' emphasize individuated forms of agency with individual users connecting to form the 'network' or 'multitude' (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 91). Yet, the political agent being 'presenced' here is not an individual member of a 'varied multiplicity' whose differences in terms age, sex, class, sexuality and so forth have ceased to matter, as Hardt and Negri insist for instance (*ibid*). The fact that youth as a social category is not only overwhelmingly represented amongst the campaign's participants but is also uniquely position within the campaign's rhetoric and official documents as noted in the introduction calls this individuated interpretation of agency into question. In this case, the agent being 'presenced' using the hashtag #GuineeVote is not only collective but also marked or perhaps more appropriately in this case 'tagged' as young. As we can see here, the 'invitation' contained in the hashtag's design or functions cannot be substituted for or allowed to stand in with the range of processes of social construction and negotiation that take place when people start using the hashtag.

Despite the wide range of irregularities that were documented during the campaign and some initial foot-dragging, the results of the elections were accepted by the main political parties as overall valid, in part under the impetus of the international community worried about the potential of violence, and Professor Alpha Condé was easily re-elected with 58% of the votes. The GuinéeVote campaign was widely celebrated as a success and was reported on in several major international news outlets including Jeune Afrique (8/4/2016), El Pais (8/15/2015), France24, Radio France International and the Nouvel Observateur. Circling back to thinking about the ways in which hashtags constitute youth' political agency in Guinea, it is significant that in these

news reports the success of the campaign was typically measured by the number of tweets it generated. Jeune Afrique, for instance, noted with regards to GuinéeVote: 'The project generated 8,000 tweets. A success!' Clearly, measuring how much more informed the 'Guinean citizenry' had been or how much more transparent the electoral process as a result of the campaign is a difficult thing to do, although some of the evidence shared here attest somewhat anecdotally to the content generated by the campaign. Yet, equating success to the number of tweets generated by the campaign also has a number of key implications with regards to what political agency might mean in case. More than ability to effect change, 'presencing' defined as the ability to cohere around a particular hashtag and attain a certain recognition or visibility, becomes the determinant factor. Media accounts of the campaign that focused primarily on 'presencing' rather than the kind of information produced and its capacity to meet the aims of the campaign are clearly supportive and helpful to the campaign, particularly with regards to gaining further recognition and visibility. Yet, for the purpose of an academic study such as this, it is also necessary to go beyond accounts of agency as digital 'presencing' and as Barassi suggests account for social networking and hashtag technologies as 'complex processes of human construction and negotiation' (Barassi, 2013: 54).

What is interesting when thinking of hashtags not as determinants of political agency but as embedded within complex processes of social negotiation is how contested the links between youth, political agency and new technologies are, despite running as a given in many accounts. Young Guineans tended to offer a wide range of interpretations of the impact of social media campaigns and their ability to make a difference in

Guinea's democratic process. As one of my research participants, for instance, made it clear when I asked about the hashtag campaign #GuineeVote: "It didn't change a thing, my brother." For him, a youth from Conakry, in his twenties, who had at one point been a member of a gang in Conakry, and was now scraping by doing unpaid internships, participating in an election monitoring campaign on social media using a hashtag to coordinate action was unlikely to yield any results, and as such he prefers not to get involved. But, even youths who followed the hashtag #GuineeVote, and turned to social media in order to monitor the electoral process, they expressed similarly dystopian interpretations of the impact of such campaigns. As one, Ismael, a youth from the suburbs of Conakry, currently working for a transport and logistics company, noted:

> Yes of course I look [at hashtag campaigns] but I know it won't change a thing because what goes on, well just goes on, whether they publish it online or not. The problem is that these publications can be intoxications, lies just as they can be real. For example, I can publish a photo from Congo, Congo and Guinea have very similar regions that really look alike, I can put them together and say 'look this is taking place in Guinea', the fraud and what not. It happens that some information is verifiable, is real, but you really need to check.

Interestingly, in this quote, Ismael raises not only questions the hashtag campaign's ability to change things, but also the fact that information published on social media can easily be manipulated. As such, he didn't feel he could rely on the information about electoral fraud shared as part of the GuinéeVote campaign. So, although he chose to follow the #GuineeVote hashtag, this youth remained skeptical with regards to the information circulated. In other words, for him, hashtags allow for information to circulate, but the information's legitimacy in the first place needs to be seriously called into question. What is interesting with regards to hashtags as mediating political agency

in Guinea is that by following the hashtag and campaign on Facebook or Twitter, Ismael's social media presence adds to the campaign's momentum and impact, measured as 'presencing'. Clearly, the details of Ismael's engagement with the campaign's activities, including his highly skeptical take on the information's reliability do not get counted in these aggregate measures, even though these measures are often taken to represent the changing structures of increasingly 'networked' and 'diffused' political actions. Studying hashtags as 'complex processes of human construction and negotiation' rather than determinant structures sheds light not simply on the connections they allow but also on the specific arrangements of affect and power that traverse them. For instance, GuinéeVote is clearly the largest, more publicized and widely recognized 'hashtag campaign' in Guinea to date. Yet, when I asked young web-activists who had taken part in GuinéeVote which campaign had made the most impact on them as young web-activists, none cited GuinéeVote. Alpha, for instance, readily recognized GuinéeVote as a 'watershed' moment with significant impact but also noted:

> The campaign that impacted me the most is the recent campaign we put together which is the campaign for a right to identity, to ask the government to start again, or at least to find a solution so that Guineans have identification documents in Guinea and internationally, since we have fellow citizens living abroad. Well, I must admit that when we launched this campaign, I really thought that we wouldn't get there. But we launched it for a week, then a month and the government responded via its Interior Ministry, the Citizenship Minister, Kalifa Gassama Diaby, met with us and we gave him our various proposals to re-start the issuing of ID cards. The government had first decided not to re-start issuing ID cards but because the pressure on social medias, we were ultimately successful.

For Alpha, then, rather than reach or exposure - #DroitALidentite generated less than half the number of tweets as #GuineeVote -, it was the fact that what started as a

relatively small-scale effort on the part of a handful of Guinean youths was able to influence the actions of the Guinean government. Mariama, a young female blogger from Conakry, who had played a key role in the GuinéeVote initiative, noted a different campaign #Guineennedu21siecle as the one that impacted her more. Explaining why this campaign had particularly impacted her, she noted:

There are instances when what happens on social networks materializes on the ground. So when we launched #Guineennedu21siecle on social networks it was a purely social media thing I mean if you are not on social media, you can be in Madina[38] but you have no idea it is going on. But what happened? Some people who were on social media in Kankan[39] went and talked about it with some women, telling them that currently on the Internet there is something called #Guineennedu21siecle, it is to defend us and there is a way to take part by holding a sheet of paper with '#guineennedu21siecle' written on it, and so these women who don't have a connection wanted their pictures to appear online to show that they are interested that young women like them are doing this online.

What is clear from these examples is that it wasn't necessarily the biggest, largest or more technologically complex campaigns that mattered to these young Guineans the most. GuinéeVote was clearly the largest and could be recognized as a 'watershed' moment but that didn't necessarily mean that it was the campaign closest to their heart or that had impacted them the most. Thinking back the notion of youth political agency, Mariama's quote also raises questions with regards to the configurations of social media

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[38] Guinea's largest market located near Conakry's downtown areas.
[39] Guinea's third largest city located in Eastern Guinea approximately 345 miles from Conakry.

technologies, street-based politics and youth activism that shaped the possibilities for

action available to youth. Here David Oswell's notion of childhood agency as a 'problem

space' can be useful for thinking of youth agency. As he explains:

> I am not so much considering children's agency as it might ordinarily be thought
> of in the sociology of childhood as thinking through the agencements or
> assemblages or arrangements within which children in some form or other find
> themselves. In this sense, agency is always relational and never a property; it is
> always in-between and interstitial; and the capacity to do and to make a difference
> is necessarily dispersed across an arrangement. Moreover, children's agency
> constitutes a problem space, which is composed of questions, investigations and
> methods of analysis, but which also invites questions, investigations and analyses.
> (2013: 270)

As 'problem spaces', the agentic moves of Guinea youth as 'distributed' through

hashtags then highlight the need for devices that allow political agency to be expanded

across digital networks or through new forms of political action but rather as digital

agents that distribute youth's agency across unique assemblages, the form of which

cannot be pre-determined. As McFarlane explains, thinking in terms of assemblage as

opposed to 'networks' for instance orients our academic attention in specific and

potentially useful ways. For instance, assemblage as an orientation or sensibility forces

us to consider not just the relations or connections that can be found between sites and

actors, but also to pay attention to the depth or potentiality of these connections, to the

labor required in maintaining them or their particular histories (2011: 667). McFarlane

points out, what is key about assemblage it not only points to the structures and

infrastructures that underpin the connections between people and things, but also to the

fact that relations always exceed those structures and entail the potential to 'become

otherwise' (*ibid*). Exploring hashtag campaigns as assemblage and instance of

'distributed' agency then provides a unique lens for thinking about the circulation of youth agency in Guinea. I now turn to three recent examples of hashtag campaigns led by youth in Guinea to further illustrate my point.

#5000cbon vs. #DroitALidentité: From Choreographing to Re-Assembling 'Assembly'

#5000cbon translates in English as #5000isenough. The #5000cbon campaign was launched in February 2016 by young Guinea web-activists working under the umbrella organization ABLOGUI. The campaign had for objective to demand the reduction of a liter of gasoline from 8,000 GNF – equivalent to 1US$ - to 5,000 GNF – equivalent to 0.60US$ -. The impetus behind this campaign was a growing frustration with the Guinean government purposely maintain high as prices despite record low prices for oil in the global market. It is worth noting that at the time when the #5000cbon campaign was launched, Guineans were paying in excess of 8,000 Guinean Francs (GNF) for a liter of gas or the equivalent of nearly 4US$ per gallon, as compared to less than 2US$ in most US states. Not only did this make gas one of the main expenses for households, the rising cost became increasingly intolerable within a global economic context characterized by some of the lowest oil prices in recent history, with the price of one oil barrel hovering around 29US$. Fed up by what they saw as the government predatory tactics for raising revenue, a number of youth started posted commentary on Twitter and Facebook using the hashtag #5000cbon. I share several of these messages as examples of the campaign's content, aims and tone below:

The barrel costs $22. For months, you have been testing the tolerance of

Guineans. Damn! Lower the price of a liter. #5000isenough[40]

Our @GouvGN [the Guinean government's official Twitter handle] must

understand that very counts for the survival of millions of ordinary Guineans.

#Guinea #5000isenough[41]

I also agree that 'falling prices on a global level' must imply that the price is

lowered for the people of #Guinea #5000isenough[42]

#DroitALidentité translates in English as #RightToIdentification. This campaign

was launched in March 2016 by young web-activists working under the umbrella

organization ABLOGUI, almost immediately after the #5000cbon had ended. Many of

the youth who led #5000cbon, also led the #DroitALidentité campaign. Its specific goal

was to demand that the Guinean government restart issuing national ID cards for

Guineans in Guinea and passports for those living abroad. Pretexting security issues with

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[40] Translation is mine. The original message reads:

> Le baril est à 22 $ .Depuis des mois, vous êtes là a abusé de la tolérance des guinéens. Merde !
> Baissez le prix du litre. #5000Cbon

[41] Translation is mine. The original message reads:

> Notre @GouvGN doit comprendre que chaque jour compte pour la survie des millions de
> guinéens lambda. #Guinée #5000CBon

[42] Translation is mine. The original message reads:

> je dis aussi qu'une "dimunition du prix au niveau mondial" valide que le prix soit revu à la baisse
> pour le peuple #Guinee #5000cbon

the ID cards and passports as well as technical difficulties in producing their biometrics

replacements, the Guinean government had stopped issuing official identification

documents altogether for approximately 18 months when the viral campaign was

launched in March 2016. This incapacity and unwillingness of the Guinean government

to issue ID cards and passports was causing vast administrative and legal difficulties to

Guineans at home and abroad. Difficulties included receiving fines for not being able to

produce current valid documentation when stopped for routine checks by police,

impossibility to renew one's work permit or student visas for those leaving abroad, many

who suddenly found themselves unable to maintain legal residence in the countries where

they lived. Guinean youth faced extra difficulties such as not being able to register for

university both in Guinea and abroad. Figure one provides an illustration of the initial

tweet sent out by ABLOGUI to launch the campaign. It reads:

> We will continue demanding our right to a national identity card in #guinea and
>
> passport abroad #DroitALidentité.

Comparing what happened to these two campaigns after they were launched

exemplifies some of the specific dynamics involved with the coming together of youth,

technologies, bodies and streets that animate them. Both campaigns were led by youth –

including three of my research participants - and both campaigns used exactly similar

social media strategies which included coming up with a hashtag and, launching it

simultaneously on Twitter and Facebook and then posting on both sites in order to create

a buzz. Yet, their trajectories and the attentions the campaigns received were very

different.

Within a few days after its launch, and as the viral 'buzz' on social media started to gather momentum, the #5000cbon campaign caught the attention of several constituent groups with a stake in lowering the cost of gas, transportation and workers' unions in particular. Organized under the umbrella organization known as 'Inter Centrale', the two main unions – the Confederation Nationale des Travailleurs de Guinee (CNTG) and the Union Syndicale des Travailleurs de Guinee (USTG) – saw an opportunity in the campaign. Rapidly, these two historical organizations in Guinee, with ties to the Independence movement of 1958 and the Sékou Touré regime for the CNTG, redirected the campaign. Using 'traditional' methods of protest on the ground, they organized a general strike and demonstrations, which put the country in a standstill for four days between February 15th and February 19th, 2016. Sitting down at the negotiating table with the Guinean government, union representatives working jointly as 'Inter Centrale' used the occasion to advance a number of issues of contention, many reaching far beyond gas price. These included negotiations around workers' compensations, pensions and health coverage[43]. Yet, the main focus of the initial campaign, the price of gas, was dismissed and swept to the side in these 'behind closed doors' negotiations. In fact, the agreement signed jointly by the 'Inter Centrale', representatives from the private sector and the government stipulated that: "All parties agree to maintain the price of one liter of gas at its current level." The only concession made by the government as the regulatory body in charge of fixing the price of gas was that even if the cost of the barrel of oil were to go up, the price for the customer 'at the pump' would be maintained to its current level

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[43] See http://www.africaguinee.com/articles/2016/02/19/guinee-voici-l-integralite-du-protocole-d-accord-signe-entre-le-gouvernement-et for a full transcript of the agreement signed.

i.e. 8,000GNF per liter until December 2016. This clearly fell far short of any of the original aims of the campaign, and many of the young activists who had originally launched the campaign felt betrayed, noting that their campaign had been 'hijacked' and the unions had 'failed them'. One youth for instance noted how he had wasted five days taking part in protests, a 'complete waste of time.'

The #DroitALidentité campaign by comparison followed a very different trajectory in part relayed in the quote by Alpha provided above. The youth-led campaign remained online until it created enough buzz online, forcing the Guinean government to respond. The Minister for Citizenship in charge of registry and documentation services invited representatives from ABLOGUI, and after some initial hesitation, finally agreed to start issuing both ID cards for Guineans at home and passports for those abroad until the biometric upgrades could be rolled out. Comparing the trajectories of these two campaigns provides important insight into sites of political struggle and the flows of power that traverse them. In particular, it shows how once the #5000cbon moved to the street, youth and their bodies found themselves reconfigured in ways that both instrumentalized them – as bodies in protest – and undermined them – as marginalized political actors. As noted above, the workers' unions seized in the initial protest an opportunity to galvanize support for their broader agendas. Joining forces with the online campaign allowed the unions to ensure that youth could be mobilized as a critical mass at their rallies. This is particularly important in Guinea where youth, their bodies and ability to engage in insurrectional violence and rioting have long been a key feature of street-based political protests (See Phillips, 2013). Yet, as soon as youth invested the street, organizations with historical ties to street protests and long-standing links to

government officials were able to sideline them (See Barry, 2000). By contrast, in the case of #DroitALidentité, by remaining entirely online youth were able to create enough 'buzz' or visibility for their cause that the government felt compelled to respond, even after some initial hesitation and foot-dragging, to the growing momentum gained by the campaign. The combined potential for more street-based demonstrations especially given young people's determination to resolve the matter and potential damage to Guinea's international reputation if it continued not issuing identification to its citizens were particularly important in influencing the government's decision to act. On social media, Guinean youth as a constituent group remained a privileged interlocutor for the Minister who invited young members of ABLOGUI to meet directly with him. It is important to note that I am not arguing that every time Guinean youth go to the street to protest they are sidelined by trade unions or other prominent organizations. The 2009 protests that led to the first democratically held elections in 2010 were largely youth-led and are a recent testament to the contrary amongst several others. However, social networking sites and the 'street' as sites of political struggle are invested by very different configurations of gerontocratic power. During the 2009 demonstrations, youth-led efforts and trade unions or more broadly the so-called 'civil society' converge and their interests in demanding fair elections largely aligned, whereas in the case of #5000cbon their interests diverged.

Interestingly these two Guinean examples somewhat complicate or qualify Gerbaudo's argument about the relationship between social media and physical public space, part of Gerbaudo calls the 'choreography of assembly'. As he shows by looking at contemporary activism during the Arab Spring, 'indignados' protests in Spain and the

Occupy movement, protest did not so much take place *on* Twitter or Facebook – as is

often deemed the case in portrayals of Facebook or Twitter revolutions – as these social

networks were used in order to 'choreograph' or project what was happening in the

'street' where people physically came together to occupy squares and reclaim the

physical space of the 'street'. As he notes:

> The social media practices of the 2011 popular movements urge us to depart from this escapist vision of the internet as a virtual space wherein to refuge ourselves from the crisis of public space. What we are witnessing now is a use of social media in the service of re-appropriating physical public space rather than its substitution with a virtual one. (2012: 159)

This is for him not confined to the 2011 popular movements, which form the

empirical evidence of his book, but rather a broader indication of social media's relation

to public space in general. As he further explains:

> In front of [a] situation of crisis in public space, social media have become emotional conduits for reconstructing a sense of togetherness among a spatially dispersed constituency, so as to facilitate its physical coming together in public space. This finding clearly goes against much scholarship on new media which has tended to locate them in a 'virtual reality' or in a 'cyberspace' (McCaughy and Ayers, 2003), or in a 'network of brains' (Castells, 2009) detached from geographic reality. (*ibid*: 160)

Comparing the divergent trajectories of the #5000cbon and #DroitALidentité

campaigns both confirms and complicates the argument presented by Gerbaudo. Clearly,

in both cases the 'physical coming together in public space' played a crucially role, either

as something that actually happened in the case of #5000cbon or as a potential threat on

the part of determined youth in the case of #DroitALidentité. This goes along with Gerbaudo's quote above and contradicts understandings of social media as detached 'virtual reality' and 'cyberspace'. Yet, for Gerbaudo the relationship between social media and public space is linear and unidirectional: social media is a 'conduit' that 'facilitate' actual gathering in physical public space. Thinking about the unique arrangements or assemblages of political protest, public space and social media across the #5000cbon and #DroitALidentité campaigns complicates that relationship proposed by Gerbaudo. Rather than pre-determined channels or conduits, what these campaigns highlights is the contingent and assembled nature of these coming together rather than social media as always a stage for choreographing 'assembly' in the public space, where Gerbaudo implicitly stressed the 'real' action is occurring. In fact, within the specific socio-historical assemblage of trade unions, gerontocratic power, youth bodies and protest and social media that come together in each of these two recent campaigns, gathering in the physical space of the street to protest for lower gas prices resulted in the campaign being 'highjacked' by historical forces and interests. Instead, remaining online allowed youth to remain the preferred interlocutor to the government in the case of #5000cbon. Comparing the #5000cbon and #DroitALidentité campaigns, then, highlights the extent to which the workings of gerontocratic power, and interrelated question of youth agency, need to be explore within and not separate from the socio-cultural, embodied and material assemblages in which they arise.

#guineennedu21esiecle: 'Presencing' in Dissonant Times

#guineennedu21esiecle translates in English as #21stcenturyguineanwoman. The campaign was launched by a group of young Guinean bloggers under the impetus of Dieretou Diallo. It was planned to coincide with International Women's Day on March 8th 2016. In fact, as Dieretou Diallo explained in a recent interview, the idea for the campaign came as a reaction to the way International Women's Day is typically celebrated in Guinea. As she explained, she was somewhat dismayed at idea of celebrating by wearing traditional wrap dresses imprinted with the portraits of illustrious female historical figures or current political figures or leaders such as trade union leader Rabiatou Sera Bah Diallo for instance, and going to the 'Palais du Peuple', the main concert hall in Conakry. She found this celebration useless because it focused on traditional dance and keeping the 'status quo'. As she noted, once the celebration is over 'everyone goes home and nothing changes'. In reaction, her and a small group of young Guinean women decided to organize a campaign on social networking sites. In less than two weeks, they put together the #Guineenedu21esiecle campaign, one of the largest online campaigns in Guinea to date. As I have noted previously, in the introduction to this dissertation, this is an example of young people taking matters into their own hands and mobilizing the tools of digital society in order to make their demands heard. The specific aim of the campaign was to mobilize the technological capacities of social media on order to engage public debate on the issues affecting Guinean women today. Guinean social media users, men and women, were invited to share what they felt were the most pressing issues, and what characteristics best described the '21st century Guinean woman' as the hashtag puts it.

Hundreds of Guineans responded by posting messages noting that the '21st

century Guinean woman' was 'brave', 'strong', 'takes part in decision-making', 'is

independent', 'has a job', 'has responsibilities', 'says no to Female Genital Mutilations'

and rejects 'domestic violence' to include just a few of the most commonly shared

examples. Internet users were also invited to post a picture of themselves or selfie

holding a sign that read the hashtag #guineennedu21esiecle. Hundreds posted self-

portraits holding a sign as shown in figure 2. The campaign was widely celebrated as a

success and received a great deal of media attention, including a long article in *El Pais*

the Spanish newspaper which described the campaign as follows:

> A group of young Guinean women have taken over social networking sites and
> managed to draw the attention of international media. They did it using
> Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and social networking sites
> to put together an operation without over-sentimentalizing the issue. They are
> calling for a new Guinea, a modern Guinea and a constructive spirit. These are
> women, youths and bloggers, and their weapons are creativity and innovation. (El
> Pais, 4/23/2016, translation is mine)

As this quote illustrates, the campaign strongly resonates with the sense of

responsibility that is associated with the 'generation consciente' [In French 'conscious

generation']. The term has a broad appeal within francophone Africa where it is often

used to designate millennial youth. The term emphasizes this generation's sense of its

own responsibility toward the realization of democracy and justice in Africa, a sense that

the 'onus' is now on them and only them. This ethos of the 'generation consciente' is

reflected in the El Pais' article tone and emphasis on the combative spirit of the young

Guinean women behind the #guineenedu21esiecle campaign. The campaign is also

clearly within the domain of 'digital society' since the activities of the campaign and the

interventions it aims to make within the Guinean public sphere are almost entirely

mediated by digital technologies and social networking sites more specifically. As

mentioned above, the campaign was organized in a record time of less than two weeks.

Its main agentic moves were to create a Twitter account @guineenedu21esiecle, a

hashtag and digital image used as the avatar for the Twitter account and digital poster for

the campaign (See figure 15) [INSERT FIGURE FIFTEEN]. The poster's text also

reflects the combative spirit which I have described as associated with the 'generation

consciente'. Specifically, it calls on 'blogueuses et femmes engages guineennes' [In

French 'female bloggers and committed [or politically engaged] Guinean women'] to

launch a hashtag in order to 'change mentalities, inform, denounce and express

themselves on the feminine cause in Guinea'. The hashtag noted twice within the short

text provides the link that will bring together all of these different tweets, people and

locations and constitute them as a critical mass and force to be reckoned with in

advancing women's issues in Guinea. The hashtag is a way for Guinean women who

recognize themselves in this announcement to 'presence' themselves within the Guinean

public sphere. And this process presents a number of key differences with the ways in

which people relate to official institutions within the other domains of postcolonial public

life as proposed by Chatterjee. As previously, noted, for Chatterjee, people make claims

and in turn are governed as individual right-bearing 'citizens' within the formal domain

of 'civil society', and as 'populations' defined by shared characteristics such as ethnicity,

geographical origins or social status that can be measured by statistics (Chatterjee, 2011:

139). Yet, as the examples shared here show, within the domain of 'digital society',

people relate to official institutions, that is make claims and in turn are governed, based

on the ways in which they 'presence' themselves, and sometimes are 'presenced' on

social networking sites. The hashtag #guineennedu21esiecle invites the constitution of a

group that is more than a collection of individuated 'citizens' and is not simply defined

by shared statistics.

As the campaign's poster makes clear, geographical origin is not the relevant

common element since they are specifically calling onto those in the 'diaspora or living

in Guinea'. The call is geared towards women, a statistical determinant, yet the critical

factors in the invitation are a shared attitude and combative spirit towards advancing

women's cause in Guinea as well as a practice, an engagement with digital technologies.

In making their marks within the Guinean public sphere, this collective of young Guinean

women who feel marginalized from public debate on gender equality as it is typically

generated in International Wormen's Day are constituted not by a shared history, lineage

or geographical origin, but rather by their shared sympathies and attitudes. In other

words, rather than statistically defined they are 'assembled' according the definition of

'assemblage' first provided by Deleuze and Guattari. As they explain, an assemblage is

a:

[…] co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. It is never filiations which

are important but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but

contagions, epidemics, the wind. (2007 [1977]: 42)

My contention here is that within 'digital society', the locus of people's relation to

the state, that is the basis onto which they make claims and in turn are governed, is the

assemblage. This has several key implications for how the question of agency is

approached. First, an assemblage as conceptualized here takes form 'in between', in the interactions, alliances and coming togethers that it generates. A hashtag such as #guineennedu21esiecle functions as an opening, an invitation to come together and take part. Yet, the assembled group is not predetermined, rather once launched the hashtag as an invitation to constitute as a collective takes a life of its own. For instance, although the poster shared above which announced the launch of the campaign, specifically targeted 'female bloggers and 'political engaged Guinean women', a much broader group that included young women from other African countries, Guinean men as well as observers based in the West such as me and a number of journalists and activists, participated in the campaign, tweeting and re-tweeting posts containing the hashtag. The assemblage included young Guinean women and men from across the globe posing with hand-written or printed signs reading '#guineennedu21esiecle' to show solidarity with the campaign. As noted previously, one of the most noted and shared tweets included two young women from Upper Guinea on their way to washing clothes at the local stream. This picture was particularly noted by one of my research participants who had played a key role in organizing the campaign because the women in the picture have very limited access to the Internet and limited education. Still when they heard people in their neighborhood talk about the campaign they wanted to take part. Their picture featured within the same flow of information as another one from the young Guinean man wearing a brightly adorned t-shirt that read 'London' – suggesting that he was a diaspora youth – striking a pose clearly meant to show off his expensive looking watch. Several 'Miss Guinee', winners of beauty contests organized by diaspora groups in various countries such as Canada or the USA posted videos of themselves expressing their support for the

campaign. Several officials from government agencies in Guinea posting photographs of themselves holding a '#guineennedu21esiecle' sign in solidarity. The eclecticism of the assembled collective echoes some of the strategies used by marginalized groups within political society as described by Chatterjee. As he notes with regards to the strategies used by a community of squatters in Calcutta:

> These strategies, far from being inward-looking and isolationist, actually involve making a large array of connections outside the community—with other groups in similar situations, with more privileged and influential groups with whom the community has social or economic exchanges (such as employers or middle-class neighbors), with government functionaries, with political leaders and parties, and so on. (2011: 136)

The diversity of these connections is the basis unto which Chatterjee argues against Benedict Anderson's opposition between the 'unbound seriality' of nationalism and the 'bound seriality' of ethnic politics. As Chatterjee shows, with the domain of political society – which Anderson supposes organize by ethnic politics –, categories such as ethnic, familial or class affiliations in fact need to become more fluid and often need to be transcended in order to advance the group's claims. In the case of recent hashtag campaigns in Guinea such as #guineennedu21esiecle, a similar case can be made. I did not see one mention of ethnicity in the campaign's tweets, and categories such as class, gender or geographical location were not foregrounded as relevant and were often transcended. Youth, however, in the context of Guinea, always seem to run as a subtext to operations online. In the case of #guineennedu21esiecle, as in the case of #GuineeVote, the campaigns were technically opened to all users. Yet, in their announcements and on their website, youth were particularly targeted because of their

supposed connection to social media technologies. This for instance that when participants were discussing the 21st century Guinean woman, they tended to discuss a young 21st century woman, one that as many noted represented the 'future of Guinea', and 'refuses traditions that endanger her'.

Yet, there are also key differences between the populations in political society, and the assemblage of social media users that 'presence' themselves using a hashtag. The role of the technologies in shaping these interactions needs to be acknowledged. The constant flux of information that characterizes the treatment of information on social networking invite a particular relation to time. This is one that is different from the regulated time of 'civil society', which Chatterjee describes as providing the standardized units necessary for capitalist operations. Yet, it is also different from the heterogeneous 'real time' of political society, which as Chatterjee notes, reflect the reality and diversity of experiences and relations to time in which most live, and even more so in the more informal space of the post-colony, take place. As he explains: "The real space of modern life exists in heterogeneous time: space here is unevenly dense" (2011: 136). The flexibility of time within political society is what allows for populations to be treated not uniformly but as 'exceptions' with varied claims and requiring varied forms of attention within the domain of political society.

On social networking sites, however, the technologies are designed to emphasize particular relations to time. These are best described by a dual process: instantaneous and traceable. The campaigns described in this chapters such as #guineennedu21esiecle were assembled in record time, and took forms in the spaces of real-time communication. The massive amounts of information produced and shared as part of the

#guineennedu21esiecle or #GuinéeVote campaigns for instance were produced almost entirely over periods of 24 hours or less. Users were invited to connect and collaborate over very short periods of time. Yet, rather than ephemeral and adaptive, the activities become observable and retrievable. Durations within digital society then become both compressed and permanent. Again, this is not the same as saying that the technologies determine what users do online. Relations to time are socially constructed and take very different shape depending on the contexts in which they are enacted. Yet, we do need to consider the role of technologies as agents mediating the conditions of the governmentality within digital society. In the case of the #guineennedu21esiecle, for instance, the location of the campaign in social media platform meant that the circulation of the information and the need to attract a maximum number of participants and generate activity in the form of tweets and re-tweets was emphasized over the depth of connections built over time. The campaign's activities instantaneously turned into a measurable and observable archive, its success in large parts assessed against the number of tweets it could generate. What is more, once published tweets exist permanently as part of a retrievable database. Linking back to the discussion on governmentality in chapter two, the possibility of all comments, publications and actions to be traceable also invites restraint and self-policing on the part of participants.

Again, some of the possibilities of agentic moves available within political society find themselves greatly reworked within the digital domain. The young women who launched the campaign were able within the space of two weeks to achieve unparalleled levels of visibility, their actions being celebrated in influential media outlets such as *El Pais*. Government officials acknowledged the courage and engagement of their actions.

Yet, the potential traceability of their actions and their automatic constitution as a permanent archive also resulted in the internalization of new conditions of governmentality that targeted youth in particular.

Conclusion

What emerges across these examples is the idea that youth cohere around a specific keyword in order to form specific assemblages of messages, images, bodies and physical spaces. This opens possibilities to self-constitute as political agents in potentially new and disruptive ways. What is more the fact that this process is collective and participatory challenges any notions of agency as an individual property. The category of youth traverses these online campaigns as a kind of subtext, a code or hashtag that somehow connect these in distinctive ways. This highlights the unique historical moment and arrangement of youth and technologies in Guinea. Yet, the divergent trajectories of each of these campaigns also points to the 'disjointed' histories that they represent. In the Guinea context, circulation whether digital or not remains a highly uncertain pursuit. The campaigns then become more akin to bets hedged against highly unpredictable configurations of historical forces, power arrangements, devices and desires.

Conclusion: Movements and the Specter of Youth in Digital Times

Sometimes a study ends with as many questions as when it started, and this is certainly where I find myself at the end of writing this dissertation. Yet, this process can be fruitful, indicating not that questions were left unanswered but rather that they shifted and that new ones arose. I set out wanting to understand how the internalization of digital practices, now a key part of the very fabric of everyday life for most Guinean youth, affected the realization of youth, as a social category – rather than as a biological stage -, in Guinea, and vice versa, how youth, as a social category, was affecting the emergence and realization of the digital infrastructure in Guinea. Specifically, I was interested in how politics, and issues related to the relations between Guinean youth and the state, traversed the intersections between youth and digital technologies. Most of my attention has focused on social networking sites which are the main platforms through which the digitalization of public life is experienced by youth in their everyday lives, although the first half of chapter two looked more broadly at the emergence of a digital infrastructure in Guinea, by exploring the introduction of a new Internet tax.

As detailed in the chapter on methodology, my engagement with the field has been through multiple avenues and driven by a theoretical engagement with recent conceptualizations of the ontology of assemblage. This challenged me as a researcher to favor the consideration of multiple genres, scales and registers as they come together rather than more linear approaches and systematic engagements with the field. What is more, the entirety of the research activities and ethnographic fieldwork was conducted online. This focused my research lens and directed my academic attention in ways that

forced me to constantly question the role of the digital technologies themselves in mediating the relations of youth – with politics, with me or with other social categories such as older generations or the 'analphabets'. This multifaceted lens shaped my analysis to consider technologies as agents in the remaking of youth politics in Guinea, the discussions on the Internet tax in chapter two or on hashtags as agentic moves in chapter three attest to that.

Operating entirely digitally as a researcher also gave my own personal history in and with Guinea, and Guinean youth in particular, a more prominent role in shaping fieldwork. When I discussed specific places or activities in Guinea, or looked at photographs posted on social media by my young research participants, I had no direct sensorial access to these places, how they felt, smelled or how hot or loud they were. My own phenomenological engagement with the field was heavily mediated by my own memories of Guinea, which were not only constantly solicited and called back, but also formed an intense focus on my fieldnotes. As with every fieldwork experience, these unique positionings end up being both limiting and productive. In this case, although I didn't have direct sensorial access to the spaces represented or mediated on the social networking sites where I was conducting fieldwork, my prior knowledge and long-standing engagement with Guinean youth spanning two decades became foregrounded. The constant reminiscing exercise also provided me with a long-term – or at least semi-long-term – view which helped me better identify the specificities and historical significance of the current moment for Guinean youth. This passage of time greatly contributed to the core arguments of this dissertation including the rise of 'digital society' as a new domain of political life in Guinea. My dual positioning, both up-close and long-

term, was also central in informing the notion of 'conscious bits' as a way to capture some of the more experiential and affective dimensions of the current moment for Guinean youth and their politics.

The main concern of this dissertation has been with the changing conditions of governmentality of youth under the current historical moment characterized by the digitalization of public life in Guinea. My most major contribution to current debates on political life not only in Guinea, but perhaps more generally in West Africa or the postcolonial world, has been to argue that we are witnessing in recent years the emergence of an entirely new domain of politics which I called 'digital society'. Building on Partha Chatterjee's distinction between 'civil' and 'political' societies, I drew on the evidence collected as part of this research to show that in 'digital society' the conditions under which Guinean people make claims on their government's various agencies and state officials, and the conditions under they are in turn governed are vastly changed. As Chatterjee has shown within the formal domain of 'civil society', the locus of power and governmentality is the individual right-bearing citizen, a locus that changes to groups constituted as statistically defined 'populations' in the more fluid domain of 'political society'. My contention is that in 'digital society', interactions between the state and people become centered on 'users' who become the target of new forms of digitally-mediated governmentality. These new forms of governmentality in 'digital society' are distinct form the legislative institutions of 'civil society' or informal dealings of 'political society' in that they tend to mobilize the technologies themselves as proxy of the assertion of state power. When a new Internet tax was recently introduced in Guinea, the process of locating and accounting for an object of taxation became entirely devolved

to the digital technologies themselves, identified by wirelessly connected devices exchanging chains of binary code. This form of identification removed the possibility of entering into direct negotiations with the government over the tax, as was for instance the case with another tax protest in the Daka market in Labé. This increasing devolvement of the management of governmentality to non-human agents, to the digital technologies themselves, has several key consequences that bring us back to the question of youth.

First, as I show in chapter two, the introduction of the Internet tax is part of a broader process of internalization of the conditions of governmentality under the domain of 'digital society'. This has resulted in a deeper reach of the state's apparatus of surveillance that increasingly exists on a continuum between social networking sites, neighborhood institutions and the government agencies, the police and military in particular. Second, the shift in the conditions of governmentality are positioning 'youth' as a changing status in Guinea in new and unique ways. As I show in chapter one, in Guinea's gerontocratic society, digital technologies and social networking sites in particular, position youth in new ways by foregrounding the need for literacy and digital literacy skills. Social networking platforms offer literate youth possibilities to re-articulate their status within Guinean society in new ways. As I show, youth, who form the overwhelming majority of users on Guinean social networking sites, mobilize literacy, understood both as the ability to read and write French correctly but also to navigate digital platforms in a confident manner, in order to challenge the terms of the gerontocratic order, and assert their power in new ways in relation to figures of authority, older politicians in particular. This is a complex process of 'boundary work' that uses the category of 'analphabet' [in French 'illiterate'] figuratively in order to make a moral

claim on the political domain. This chapter shows the extent to which youth as a social category and status is increasingly imbricated into the very fabric of digital technologies in Guinea, and remade in ways that need to be understood within the broader context of Guinea's gerontocratic order.

Finally, the advent of 'digital society' has key implications for the possibility of change and political agency more generally. Exploring recent youth-led digital or 'hashtag' campaigns in Guinea such as the election-monitoring campaign #GuinéeVote, the campaign to pressure the Guinean government to restart issuing identification documents #DroitALidentité or the effort to shift the ways in which International Women Day was celebrated in Guinea #guineennedu21esiecle, shed light on the implications for agency in the digitalization of public life in Guinea. As I show hashtags have become not only instruments for young Guineans to assert their collective agency, but rather the very material of that agency. Yet, a close ethnographic exploration of the processes of social constructions and the ways in which youth negotiate their engagements with hashtags and digital campaigns shows that digital technologies cannot simply be understood as shaping new models of social formations, which would reflect the technologies' networked or diffused architecture. Instead, youth agency as realized on social networking sites needs to be understood as 'distributed' across complex socio-technological assemblages. As I show the digital technologies such as hashtags invite conceptions of agency that can be equated with a form of 'presencing', a term Couldry (2012) proposes to define the process of constituting oneself as a collective on social media using a hashtag (*ibid*: 42). Agency as 'presencing' can be measured by the number of users and accounts reached or the digital 'impressions' left on Twitter or Facebook. Yet, agency in the domain of

'digital society' cannot be reduced to 'presencing'. Instead it needs to be understood as formed 'in between', in the assemblage of unique histories, devices, bodies and desires that come together in the interactions generated by the campaign. As the comparison between the divergent trajectories of the gas protest #5000cbon and the near simultaneous campaign #DroitALidentité shows hashtags as agentic moves do not have a pre-determined format. Rather, they take shape 'in between', in the assemblage they invite. As a result, agency in 'digital society' becomes more akin to bets hedged against uncertain alliances and digital assemblages. This piecing together of agency operates within the changed temporalities of the digital domain.

In thinking about the specificity of the current political moment for Guinean youth, I have proposed the phrase 'conscious bits', which I return to throughout the dissertation. In conjunction with 'digital society', which I am arguing in a new domain of political life in Guinea, the phrase 'conscious bits' is aimed at capturing some of the more experiential and affective dimensions of 'digital society' and of the current political moment more broadly. It is worth here noting that I am not in this dissertation in any way suggesting that 'digital society' is replacing either 'civil' or 'political' societies as defined by Chatterjee. Rather it exists in addition and in conjunction with these other domains, just as for Chatterjee, in postcolonial India, the domain of 'political society' exists in conjunction with that of 'civil society'.

Deploying the phrase 'conscious bits' is for me a strategic move in order to bring together several dimensions of contemporary political life in Guinea. First, I use the term in order to invoke the notion of 'generation consciente', a term that has in recent been widely used within Francophone Africa to characterized the current generation, coming

of age in the early decades of the new millennium. In particular, the term makes a distinction between this current generation, which tends take on a sense of responsibility and understanding that the 'onus is on them' forged through decades of structural adjustment and the dismantling of government services, and the generation of their parents, who came of age in the decades following Independence. For the Independence generation, national politics and nation-building were the primary objectives, which was often expressed through a commitment to governmental service provision and a national welfare state, through the terms proposed by the socialist revolutionary ideals. So, for instance, when young Guineans correct the errors made in French by powerful politicians, they understand this act as an example of taking it upon themselves to make sure that Guinea as a nation is associated with 'proper' grammar on social networking sites. Or, when they take it upon themselves to organize an election-monitoring campaign that can deploy four times as maybe observers as the large agencies of the African Union or European Union, they are acting in ways that strongly resonant with the term 'generation consciente'. Yet, in mobilizing the term 'conscious bits' rather than 'conscious generation' or 'generation consciente' for instance, I am also hoping not to define the young Guineans who took part in this research by this term. In fact, I am also hoping to mobilize the culture of hip hop, and the term 'conscious beats' in particular as a way to expressed the frustration and anger that animated much of these youths' political actions. In hip hop, the term 'conscious beats' is used to refer to political conscious rap, songs with political engaged lyrics. Conscious in this sense then refers to the fact of being aware, and particularly of being aware of one's own oppression. Several of the youths who took part in this research were rappers, and for most of the other ones, hip

hop was a big part of their culture, a way through which to expressed their anger and frustrations. In invoking that term, I am hoping to refract some of the deep frustrations and anger felt by the current Guinean generation, a generation whose projection onto the political scene in Guinea is strongly associated with the horrors and exactions of the massacre of the 28 September 2009, in which over 150 demonstrators were killed, thousands injured or imprisoned and hundreds of women and girls raped or sexually mutilated.

In invoking the terms of hip hop then, I am hoping to retain some of that anger into the pages of this dissertation and communicate to the reader some of the tensions and deep frustrations that I felt and perceived in all of my discussions with Guinean youths. Finally, in putting together or perhaps more appropriately 'assembling' the phrase 'conscious bits' from these different registers and domains I aim to highlight the roles of the digital technologies, a key focus of this dissertation and digital ethnography. My contention here is that the 'bits' of code that form the digital infrastructure in Guinea are important non-human agents in the remaking of youth. Not only does the role of the technologies themselves need to be acknowledged and explored, the role also needs to complexified and politicized. Just as supposedly value-neutral and objective scientific instruments of measurement such as the census, statistics or even the naming of streets are now widely recognized as politically-charged instruments of colonial domination, Western imperialist rule and governmentality, so do the binary codes need to be understood as highly political. The digital 'bits' that form the chains of '0s' and '1s' that make up the digital infrastructure, Internet Protocols and social media platforms, take on a particular urgency in postcolonial Guinea, and more specifically for Guinean youth.

Still, at the end of this dissertation, I am left with many questions. Two seem to be of particular importance in order to further define the domain of 'digital society' in Guinea. In the last part of chapter three, I began an exploration of time in 'digital society', a dual temporality defined by both immediacy and permanence. As I noted, the ways in which claims on the government are made and responded to in the domain of 'digital society' is shaped by two seemingly contradictory tendencies: to be immediate, 'presenced' in the present and immediately answerable to on the one hand, and defined by a sense that everything once online becomes permanent, recorded and archived. This resulted in a need to act immediately, but also to be constantly guided by the awareness that digital actions will leave a permanent trace. The trace again points to the role of digital technologies as non-human agents inviting changed conditions of temporality. Yet, relations to temporality are cultural notions, ones that have specific histories and connotations in a place such as Guinea, as well as for youth, who have historically been uniquely positioned with regard to national time, as the nation's future in particular. This dimension of 'digital society' was beyond the scope of this dissertation and came up as a question once the notion of the 'digital society' emerged across the various examples and chapters. It therefore remains as a question to be further explored.

Equally, finding a language to account for the imbrication of youth and technologies has proved a more arduous and frustrating undertaking than I had hoped. That imbrication of youth and digital technologies, and social networking technologies even more specifically, is so taken-for-granted in Guinea that it becomes hard to disentangle. I hope this dissertation begins to do that work. As I show, digital technologies by foregrounding the need to read and write and to be digitally literate –

skills that overwhelmingly are more present in the young population in Guinea – insert

themselves in the lives of Guineans in ways that challenge the articulation of social

difference and offer youths new possibilities to challenge the gerontocratic order. From

the point of view of governmentality, youth found themselves uniquely targeted by the

new Internet tax and forms of digital surveillance. Beyond the crucial issues of fairness

raised, it was primarily the bodies of youth, understood by the state as a digitally

connected body, which were specifically targeted by these new regimes of surveillance

and governmentality. Equally, youth as a collective group and social category ran as a

'sub-text' in all of the recent hashtag campaigns. Although none explicitly excluded

other groups from taking part, youth was typically understood to occupy a unique place

in these campaigns officially aimed at everyone. The campaigns' announcements for

instance often specifically called onto Guinean youths to take part. As I conclude this

dissertation, I am left wondering about AbdouMaliq Simone's notion of the 'spectral',

which he explains as follows:

> Although the notion of the spectral is close to that of the invisible […], it is not
> the same thing. I use the notion of the spectral here to refer to a series of
> refractions among real life, artifice, imagination, and action whereby residents
> hedge their bets as to what events, relationships, resources, and opportunities
> actually mean to their everyday navigation of the city. (2004: 92)

I am wondering whether this notion could be mobilized in order to further explore

the imbrications of youth and social media technologies in Guinea, where youth seems to

be always refracted among these technologies and vice versa. In May 2017, I will travel

to Guinea with ten digital cameras, a 360-degree digital camera and a digital audio

recorder on a research trip joint-funded by the Rutgers Digital Studies Center and the

national African Studies Association. My immediate goal for this 'follow-up' trip will be conduct a participatory image-making exercise in conjunction with the Guinean bloggers' association, and to collect '360' footage that will be used to build a digital version of this dissertation.   This will be a web-based multimedia publication that will use excerpts from this dissertation in conjunction with images and short video clips in order to mobilize the potential for scholarship of digital technologies and foster a broader range of dialogues around some of this dissertation's findings.

This dissertation has also led to a number of conversations in Guinea, and began the process of developing a new research project building on this initial work. In November 2016, I was contacted by a researcher based in Guinea, and contributed a three-page summary of my research to an event on 'youth and digital technologies' held in Conakry. The event brought together web-activists, youth practitioners, youths and scholars to discuss over two-days the impact of new digital technologies for Guinean youth. Following this event, I was contacted by the German Ambassador to Guinea who was interested in the ways in which Guinean youths used social networking technologies in order to discuss migration. This led to a series of discussions with the ambassador, and I am now serving as an advisor for a working group on youth and migration convened by the German Foreign Office. My goal here would be to explore social networking and digital media more generally as 'migrant media' and continuing the lines of enquiries started here in order to ask what possibilities for youth and social media are opened and foreclosed in the everyday practices of migrant youth in Guinea. In other words, this project offers to explore the digitalization not of political life but of migration and movements, another key dimension of youth in Guinea.

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