

Michelle Engeler

YOUTH AND THE STATE IN GUINEA: MEANDERING LIVES



From:

Michelle Engeler

Youth and the State in Guinea: Meandering Lives

October 2019, 202 p., pb.,

39,99 € (DE), 978-3-8376-4570-5

E-Book:

PDF: 39,99 € (DE), ISBN 978-3-8394-4570-9

By combining an ethnographic study of youth with an analysis of the local state in the making, this research monograph introduces the perspective of »meandering lives« to grasp being young and growing up in the Guéckédou borderland, a remote space approximately 700 kilometers southeast of Conakry, Guinea's capital. This history-sensitive perspective represents a fruitful lens to not only depict youth but to also draw a nuanced picture of the functioning of the state in Guinea.

Michelle Engeler (PhD) works at the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Basel. Her research interests focus on youth, political change and mobility, particularly in West Africa.

For further information:

www.transcript-verlag.de/en/978-3-8376-4570-5

Content

| | |
|---|----|
| List of tables and abbreviations | 9 |
| Acknowledgments | 11 |
| Prologue | |
| Who is young, is courageous! | 13 |
| I. Introduction | 15 |
| 1. Meandering lives and the state in the making | 17 |
| 2. A territory near or at a border | 21 |
| 3. Listening, experiencing, observing | 28 |
| 4. Book outline | 37 |
| II. At the crossroads | |
| The Guéckédou borderland in the making | 39 |
| 1. Journeys to and from Guéckédou | 41 |
| 2. Political relations, population movements and colonial boundary marking | 45 |
| 3. Narratives on Kissi origins and Guéckédou's founding myth | 50 |
| 4. Secret societies and generational relations | 52 |
| 5. Integration and conflicts | 54 |
| III. Get the state to work | |
| State iconoclasm and revolutionary youth | 57 |
| 1. The postcolonial state apparatus and political ideology | 59 |
| 2. The Demystification Campaign and the Cultural Revolution | 63 |
| 3. Revolutionary youth | 66 |
| 4. Remembering the days of youth | 68 |
| 5. Continuity and interruption | 70 |

IV. I am the state

| | |
|--|----|
| Re-making the state in post-revolutionary Guinea | 73 |
| 1. The Second Republic: Administrative changes and reforms | 76 |
| 2. Recognising the elderly: <i>Conseils des Sages</i> | 84 |
| 3. New and old actors: <i>Forces Vives</i> | 87 |
| 4. Mayor, civil servant, politician or NGO activist? | 88 |
| 5. A flexible political generation | 92 |

V. Meandering

| | |
|---|-----|
| Being young and growing up | 95 |
| 1. Defining youth and growing up | 97 |
| 2. Albert | 99 |
| 3. Boubacar | 102 |
| 4. Fatoumatou | 105 |
| 5. Meandering lives | 107 |

VI. Dangerous times

| | |
|--|-----|
| In defence of the homeland | 113 |
| 1. The Mano River War | 115 |
| 2. Refugees, arms, combatants, attacks | 117 |
| 3. A youthful self-defence movement: <i>Jeunes Volontaires</i> | 119 |
| 4. Local heroes | 123 |

VII. War-peace continuum

| | |
|---|-----|
| On the move | 127 |
| 1. Cultivating and breeding peace: <i>Coopératives des jeunes</i> | 129 |
| 2. Still at the crossroads: <i>Union Taxi Moto</i> | 132 |
| 3. Three young men's life trajectories | 135 |
| 4. Managing the war-peace continuum | 139 |

VIII. Entrepreneurial spirit

| | |
|---|-----|
| Associational life | 141 |
| 1. Youth associations | 142 |
| 2. Participating in development and creating local networks | 146 |
| 3. Interacting with the state at work | 148 |
| 4. Young political entrepreneurs | 152 |

IX. Distant horizons

| | |
|---|-----|
| Belief and innovative development | 153 |
| 1. The local religious terrain | 154 |
| 2. Community building: <i>Communauté de Sant'Egidio</i> | 156 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 3. Manoeuvring between innovation, conservatism and patriotism: <i>Scouts</i> | 160 |
| 4. Developing without development | 163 |
| X. Concluding remarks | 165 |
| Epilogue | |
| Mutual dependency | 173 |
| Appendix I | |
| Timeline of important events in Guinea | 175 |
| Appendix II | |
| Key informants | 179 |
| Bibliography | 183 |

Prologue

Who is young, is courageous!

One of my Guinean friends, Albert, once said that we can distinguish the young from the elderly through courage. “The young person is the one who always has courage”, he said.¹ He gave war as an example and talked about the courageous young warriors who had fought on the battlefields during the recent conflicts in the Guéckédou borderland. On another occasion, he described himself as having been young and courageous early on in his life. He said that back then, when he started studying in a town far away from home, he had faced challenging times, “however, with courage, I made it through the first year.”²

In fact, I heard people equating courage with the youth on several occasions. Once, for instance my neighbours talked about the apprentices working on big trucks. They explained that these men were courageous young people because they were on the road day and night and sat on the load bed without any protection from the rain or dust. From up there, they could keep an eye on the oncoming traffic and could jump down to guide the truck around the potholes. During their few breaks, they protected the cargo, taking turns to sleep under the truck, sometimes on mats, sometimes in hammocks. This is not a job for an old man! Another time, they mentioned a brave young woman who sold rice on a street corner to contribute to her family’s income. She arrived to sell food for breakfast around seven thirty each morning. To do this, they explained, she had to get up very early to prepare the rice and the garnishes. She would also have had to manage other household obligations. However, every morning she there was, selling rice without ever complaining. A courageous young woman!

People expressed themselves differently when talking about old men and women. Sometimes I got the impression that the elders needed no further adjectives to describe them. Youngsters, on the other hand, were not just associated with

¹ “*Le jeune, c’est celui qui a toujours le courage*”, 10.10.2010, communication with Albert, one of my key informants. His life trajectory is further explained in Chapter V.

² “[...] *mais quand-même, avec du courage, [...] j’ai fait la première année*”, 18.11.2009, communication with Albert.

courage but could also be rude or angry, beautiful or clumsy. The attribute of courage and being courageous, however, was expressed in respectful terms and sometimes regarded with a hint of incomprehension, but never contempt. Thus, unlike in the West, where youth (also in the context of Africa) is often portrayed as “bad” or as a potential threat to social stability, young people in Guinea are often described in terms of positive values such as courage and bravery.

When meeting young people in Guinea and talking to them about their life stories, their activities in different youth groups, their strategies for earning a living, or their relationships with other members of the community, I was indeed amazed at how many of them courageously and actively set out to shape their everyday lives amid political changes and economic hardship. I dedicate this book to all the young people I met in Guinea. May you continue to have the courage to constantly shape your society’s future while creating the meandering courses of your lives.

I. Introduction

“Que la grève commence”,
graffiti on a building in Conakry, seen in 2008.¹

My desire to study youth and the state in the Guéckédou borderland originated in my first preparatory field trip to Guinea in 2008.

At the time, I spent the first couple of weeks in Conakry, Guinea’s capital. Besides visiting the administrative centre and making contact with different people from universities, ministries and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), I went for a walk every day around the neighbourhood I was staying in. Through these walks I became familiar with some of my neighbours, got to know the owners and employees of a couple of small restaurants, shops and Internet cafés, and regularly visited the beach where many youngsters were playing football or revising for their exams. Here and there we started to chat on an almost daily basis. We would usually discuss the political situation, which was quite turbulent at the time. Besides current affairs, almost every conversation confronted me sooner or later with tales of the general strikes that had taken place a year previously and had paralysed almost every Guinean town. Back then, in 2007, the trade union confederation, the USTG-CNTG (*Union syndicale des travailleurs de Guinée – Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée*) had called for nationwide strikes and masses of people, among them many youths, were mobilised. They had demonstrated for political change and a better future, and for almost the first time in Guinea’s recent history proved their strength in changing the direction of the president’s politics. Then head of state, Lansana Conté, had to acknowledge some of the accusations and finally appointed a new prime minister of national consent. However, in 2008, many of my interlocutors were dissatisfied with the current state of affairs and told me that Conté had resumed his political machinations of constantly dismissing ministers and favouring his entourage of party members and business people. According to them, their calls for change had vanished into thin air. They

¹ The phrasing can be translated as “may the strike begin”, the respective photography is published in ‘Bilder von Staat’, Engeler (2009).

explained in disappointment that Guinean politics was only for the old and that youths were supposed to keep quiet and simply play football.

During this first stay in Guinea I kept asking myself what it meant to be young and to grow older in Guinea and in what kind of spaces young people could negotiate their own and their society's and country's future. Would it be first and foremost by means of demonstrations and therefore by occupying the streets to demonstrate against the current government? And what role was ascribed to trade unions, political parties or state institutions?

During a short trip to Guéckédou, the town which I later decided should become my main research site, I had another formative encounter. In front of a small video shop I met a man of about thirty who was part of a youth association that tried to make a living through animal breeding. Previously, however, he had been a member of the *Jeunes Volontaires*. He described the *Jeunes Volontaires* as a young vigilante group that had emerged in the Guéckédou borderland in 2000 after rebels from Sierra Leone and Liberia had attacked the region. During our conversation the young man explained how he had become involved in taking up arms to defend his country. Apparently, the Guinean state did not provide enough security for its citizens in this remote borderland. How did it come about that young people instead protected the nation's borders? What happened to those young armed fighters after the fighting was over? And what do local identities, national feelings and youth associations in that particular context mean?

Besides talking about the war, the young man also pointed out the ethnic relations in the cross-border space of the *pays Kissi*. He described the Kissi as the autochthons of Guéckédou. But the Kissi also inhabit the nearby towns and villages in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Fascinated by this territorial complexity, I became very interested in how it related to the making of ethnic and national identities. Back home, while researching the topic, I soon learnt that these relations and identities are also strongly linked to the management of generational relations and young lives more generally. Moreover, Guinea's First Republic, which took the shape of a socialist one-party state, seriously unsettled and shaped the local social fabric of intergenerational relations and power configurations in Guéckédou, not least through the Demystification Campaign, the Cultural Revolution, and various socialist youth groups and associations.

My preliminary field trip not only stirred my interest in studying young people growing up in complex political terrains but also revealed to me some of the topic's complexities and peculiarities, particularly in Guinea. As a result, I decided to focus on young people's meandering lives and associative activities to shed light on the broader topic of the relationship between youth and the state in Guinea.

1. Meandering lives and the state in the making

The goal of this book is to examine the relationship between youth and the state in the Guéckédou borderland, thus the edge of the Guinean nation-state. The years between 2000 and 2010 take centre stage here while the main body of data was collected between 2008 and 2010. Thus, more recent events such as the Ebola outbreak in late 2013 and the subsequently declared epidemic from 2014 to 2016, or the presidential elections in 2015 and related political turmoils are not discussed. However, the insights provided by this study may give valuable background information for these complex contexts and related future developments. Moreover the book demonstrates that being young and growing up in the Guéckédou borderland is and has always been shaped by major events, (geo-)political circumstances, population movements and different, often overlapping political organisations and ideologies. However, the lives of both individuals and (state) institutions interact not only with more general socio-political transformation processes but also with each other to finally follow their very own, often unpredictable, meandering.

By combining a detailed ethnographic study of youth with an analysis of the local state, this monograph can be seen as contributing to the growing body of literature on the youth and the state in contemporary Africa and beyond.

Researching young people

Research on youth has become a major subject for social scientists working in Africa and elsewhere (Maira and Soep, 2005, Furlong, 2012). For Diouf, for instance, young people represent a key concern for African studies and Straker even identified a “boom” in youth studies arising in Africa over the last decade (Diouf, 2003, Straker, 2007b). Goerg and co-authors argue that this scientific interest in African youth (Goerg et al., 1992: 6) is prompted by demographic characteristics in particular – the so-called youth bulge – and African conceptions of age, knowledge and power. However, as Bucholtz notes, until recently surprisingly little of this research was informed by anthropology but was instead dominated by sociology of youth (Bucholtz, 2002: 525).

With Kirschner (2010), I argue that one can distinguish three key discourses in youth studies focusing on Africa. One trend is based on the conception of a “youth crisis”. This perspective may be seen as interlinked with the perception of Africa as a triple crisis, involving the nation, the state and the family (Diouf, 2003). Diouf explains this as follows: after independence, African states conceptualised young people as both the bearers of the project of modernity and the source of a return to African culture (Diouf, 2003: 4). This nationalist project on the twofold role of young people sought to do two things: firstly, sustain a clear differentiation between the elders and the youngsters and, secondly, place youth at the centre of

economic development and national liberation. However, in the 1970s, in a context of economic hardship and political turbulence, this project was embroiled in crisis: “In this new situation, the construction of youth as ‘the hope of the world’ has been replaced by representations of youth as dangerous, criminal, decadent, and given to a sexuality that is unrestrained and threatening the whole society” (Diouf, 2003: 4). The youth crisis debate received prominent support, branding African youth a “lost generation” (Cruise O’Brien, 1996: 56) or “loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid” (Kaplan, 1994: 46; 1997). Very often, the discourse about a youth crisis is related to demographics, thus to the youth bulge on the African continent and the notion that huge masses of unemployed youths, mainly young men, result in a security risk in both rural and urban spaces. However, various publications have also critically questioned this perspective.

A second trend in youth studies perceives young people in Africa to be merely victims, thus as marginalised young people or as subaltern in the context of war, HIV/AIDS pandemics, rapid urbanisation and economic decline. Hence, this perspective may be seen as the other side of the “youth crisis” coin; young people are not regarded as the mere perpetrators of the crisis but as its victims (Galperin, 2002, Bøås, 2007). This conceptualisation of youth as a subaltern identity also implies that young people constantly oppose those in power: “Youth, as political position, has long played the role of critiquing those in power (the elders) for not doing what they should” (Shepler, 2010b: 631). As a consequence, young people tend to be discontented, to resist or revolt (Mbembe, 1985: 77, 228, Jeffrey, 2012).

The third trend within youth studies tries to overcome the perpetrator/victim dichotomy by emphasising that young people should instead be seen as actors of social change. Thus, they are simultaneously related to crisis and constantly creating new meanings. Various authors address this dual situation of powerless youth lost in crisis on the one hand and powerful and creative youth on the other, mirrored in publications entitled *Makers and Breakers* (Honwana and De Boeck, 2005) and *Vanguard and Vandals* (Abbink and Van Kessel, 2005). Most of these contributions address youth as ambivalent actors of social change in the context of urban spaces, violent conflict, health and/or economic challenges. Another common characteristic of the most recent scholarly debates about young people in Africa is to conceptualise and define “youth” in a very broad sense. They examine young people as plural and heterogeneous categories related neither to biological age nor to a fixed group of people (Christiansen et al., 2006: 11). However, one can nevertheless distinguish three slightly different conceptions. The first perceives youth as a transition period between child and adult status, thus as life stage; the second emphasises youth as a subculture; and the third tackles youth merely as a social construction. Many of the early anthropological investigations of the 1930s form part of the first approach, conceptualising youth merely as a clearly bounded life stage. Thus, research centred on initiation into age groups or the transitions

or rites of passage from youth to adulthood (Mead, 1929, Evans-Pritchard, 1960 [reprint]). The second definition, then, perceives youth merely as a subculture. Hence, this perspective highlights youth as a separated or isolated segment of society. Accordingly, young people form subcultures, which, for instance, become observable in specific dress, musical styles or forms of expressions (Boesen, 2008, Tait, 2000).

Both of the youth definitions mentioned above give crucial insights into youths' everyday life in different regional and thematic contexts. Both perspectives also risk underemphasising youths' agency and sociality. Christiansen and co-authors appropriately state: "The consequence of the life-stage perspective is that we gain a picture of youth as having very little agentive capacity to change or move within or between generational categories. The focus on youth culture, on the contrary, can easily paint a picture of youth as an entity, which is socially and culturally detached from the surrounding world" (Christiansen et al., 2006: 16). The third conception may serve as an alternative as it approaches youth as a socially constructed category rather than as a time-delimited state with a universal definition (Shepler, 2010b: 630). Thus, age boundaries are dependent on time, place and social context: "Within the same day a person can be positioned as child, youth and adult, depending on the situation and the stakes involved in the relationship" (Christiansen et al., 2006: 12). Hence, life *stages* are rather perceived as a fluid part of life *courses*, which often follow uneven trajectories. As Burgess writes: "Youth status can be lost or gained through the aging process and a variety of personal decisions and life events. Often invisible to censuses and maps, youth consists of a constantly shifting population moving in and out of locally determined notions of youthfulness" (Burgess, 2005: viii).

Following up on these perspectives, the most important analytical premise guiding this study is the idea that "youth" represents a socially constructed category; thus, age boundaries are conceptualised as loose. This book therefore aligns itself with studies that understand youth as relational and focus on youthful agency rather than grasping youth as a clear-cut transition period between child and adult status (thus a clearly defined life stage) or as a mere subculture (often highlighting youth as a separate or isolated segment of society).

Finally, this research monograph combines the analytic category of agency, which Emirbayer and Mische (1998) understand as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, with the theory of vital conjunctures proposed by Johnson-Hanks (2002) and introduces the perspective of "meandering lives" to grasp youth as a state of being *and* becoming, of actively shaping *and* of simply following the course of life. Inevitably, these meandering lives are interwoven with the socio-political context of the Guinean state in the making. Hence, unlike other youth studies, this monograph aims at a historically sensitive analysis of the youth-state nexus, which represents a fruitful lens for not only depicting youthful lives

and associative activities in present-day Guéckédou but also drawing a nuanced picture of state–society relations and of political changes and continuities more broadly in postcolonial Guinea.

Approaching state–society relations

Importantly, this book avoids a broad-brush analysis of the state versus society in line with studies that examine specific places, events and groups – which Hagmann and Péclard (2010) understand as arenas – in which the boundaries of state and society are blurred, become discussed or are negotiated by a variety of actors (Kerkvliet, 2001, 2003). Significantly, “a state is not only built as a deliberate means to contain and direct power for the benefit of the few, a state is also formed, out of the anonymous actions of many” (Lonsdale, 1992: 15). State formation processes – which differ from state building efforts to create an apparatus of control – are thereby rendered non-teleological but historical, without a pre-established pathway but with multiple trajectories (Hagmann and Hoehne, 2009). Analysing these processes “impels us to reconsider the mechanics of rule and workings of power” and “enables us to examine the dispersed institutional and social networks through which rule is coordinated and consolidated, and the roles that ‘non-state’ institutions, communities and individuals play in mundane processes of governance” (Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 9). Moreover, state formation processes are inherently conflictive and contested (Hagmann and Péclard, 2010: 557).

The geographical starting point for this study is the Guéckédou borderland, a remote space between coastal and savannah West Africa, approximately 700 kilometres southeast of Guinea’s capital. Thus, it addresses a rather remote town and its rural fringes to understand youth–state relations. By doing so, this research brings a perspective one rarely encounters in youth studies and research interested in the state. Generally, youth studies focus on the urban spaces of major cities and young unemployed men trapped in inactivity, tending in contrast to avoid the peripheries of the state. In addition, research interested in political transformation processes often neglects the state apparatus as an important site for political imagination. It concentrates instead on regional contexts where the state as an institution is weak or has vanished altogether. Hence, this monograph asks for the research agenda for African youth studies to be broadened to remote areas such as the Guéckédou borderland and to manifold arenas including the state as an institution.

This study also aims to bridge the research gaps in the scientific treatment of Guinea. Although youth has always been a subject of state formation processes, it was not until the mid-2000s that social scientists interested in Guinea started to recognise youth as a subject worthy of study. In particular, McGovern’s and Straker’s exceptionally rich contributions on the postcolonial Guinean state’s relation

toward the youth figure prominently among the key references for this study (cf. McGovern 2004; 2012b, Straker, 2004; 2007a; 2007b; 2009). Both authors focus particularly on Guinée Forestière and the socialist state, which came to an end in 1984. Thus, their writings serve as the bedrock for my own investigation into youth and the state in Guinea.

Besides asking what it means to be young in the Guéckédou borderland, this research also aims to understand how the state is done and re-done or un-done in the locality, and how young people negotiate and participate in state formation processes. To answer these questions, I find it crucial to consider the making of the Guéckédou borderland and therefore include a historical perspective in the analysis. In addition, understanding youth is closely related to answering questions that address the changing shape of youthful identities and the management of generational relations. While looking at young people in relation to both past and present state formation processes, it is also crucial to understand the state in its local manifestations. Therefore, this monograph also takes a closer look at different political actors or power brokers, as well as encounters with formal political institutions. Finally, taking a closer look at crucial arenas for negotiating the political within and outside the state as an institution offers additional insights into young people's agencies and socio-political imaginations. These arenas refer not only to the street or to the taking up of arms but, as this study will show, include public crossroads, rice fields, the *Maison des Jeunes* or assemblies of youth associations. In all these arenas, which are perceived as relational and contextual, young people establish, shape and terminate various sets of social relations. I consider it crucial that youthful practices are not automatically associated only with what we may perceive as progressive attitudes or revolutionary ideas beyond the family and/or the state – a fact that the sociologist Mannheim underlined years ago while he studied “the problem of generations”: “biological factors (such as youth and age) do not themselves involve a definite intellectual or practical orientation (youth cannot be automatically correlated with a progressive attitude and so on)” (Mannheim, 1997: 297). This does not, of course, mean that there are no confrontations between elders, the political elite and young people (Bangura, 2018, Philipps, 2013).

2. A territory near or at a border

According to its geographical position in the far southeast of Guinea on the border with Sierra Leone and Liberia, Guéckédou town and prefecture can be described as a “territory at or near a border”, thus as “borderland” (Newman, 2003: 123). Hence, throughout this book I also use the description ‘Guéckédou borderland’ to describe my research site.

In addition to describing the geography of the research site, “borderland” also hints at the fact that the region comprises different socio-ethnic relations, cross-roads and interactions, referring to so-called “dynamic migrant spaces” (Park, 2010: 461). The national borders that characterise the Guéckédou borderland can be seen as both a resource for and a restriction on local agency, identities and state formation processes. As Wastl-Walter writes, “[o]ver the course of history, the functions and roles of borders have continuously changed” (Wastl-Walter, 2011: 1). Accordingly, borders and borderlands can only be understood within their context – and this is equally true of Guéckédou. Borderlands are therefore not only spatial or geographical phenomena informed by the demarcations of the sovereign territories of states, but also refer to “social, political or economic expressions either of belonging or of exclusion within state territories” (Wastl-Walter, 2011: 2).

To understand state formation processes in the Guéckédou borderland, I, like McGovern (McGovern, 2013: 3), perceive four states to be relevant: that of Almamy Samory Touré, whose late-nineteenth-century state encompassed much of the region, the French colonial state, the postcolonial socialist state headed by Ahmed Sékou Touré (1958–1984) and the post-socialist government which began with Lansana Conté (1984–2008). This study in particular focuses on the period between 2000 and 2010, thus it includes the turbulent period before and after Conté’s death in 2008. Despite political actualities, however, a nuanced understanding of the past is important to grasp youth–state relations in the Guéckédou borderland. Hence, although this monograph concentrates on more recent political transformation in postcolonial Guinea, references to the past are included in various chapters.

Guéckédou town

Guéckédou centre or town is one of ten sub-prefectures, together with Bolodou, Fangamandou, Guendembou, Kassadou, Koundou, Nongoa, Ouéndé-Kénéma, Tekoulo, and Temessadou. Together they made up Guéckédou prefecture, which belongs to the Guinée Forestière, along with Kissidiougou, Kerouane, Beyla, Macenta, Yomou, Lola and N’Zérékoré prefectures.²

Guéckédou town lies approximately 700 kilometres from Conakry, Guinea’s capital. In terms of infrastructure and economy, the main road, the National 2, connects Conakry via Mamou, Faranah and Kissidougou to Guéckédou and thereafter continues to Macenta and finally to N’Zérékoré. Hence, this highway is key to Guéckédou’s national economic integration. The “forest” part of the main road (running from Kissidougou to N’Zérékoré) was, at the time of this research,

2 Guinea has four regions in total: Guinée Forestière, Guinée Maritime or Basse Côte, Moyenne-Guinée or Fouta Djallon, and, finally, Haute-Guinée.

full of contradictions. Whereas the road to and from the Guéckédou area was in a terrible condition, with patchy tarmac and often impassable during the rainy season, the final part to N'Zérékoré was one of the newest and best-designed roads in the entire country. Likewise, electricity in the Guéckédou prefecture depends on private generators and back roads on international donors or community efforts. N'Zérékoré, however, seems to profit far more from border trade and is a busy, sprawling town. All in all, the Guinée Forestière is rich in contrast, not only in terms of infrastructure, economic life and urbanity, but also in terms of its residents, and its ethnic and religious groups.

The latest census (2014)³ indicates that Guéckédou town has a population of 66,761.⁴ It can be described as a scattered settlement with 21 *quartiers* or neighbourhoods and covers a relatively extended area. The city centre encompasses the neighbourhoods of Sandia, Macenta Koura and Sokoro and is the liveliest part of the town, containing the main market, the taxi rank, the offices of the police and the gendarmerie, the prison, the Catholic Church, various mosques and most of the administrative state and community buildings such as the prefectural building, the *Maison des Jeunes* and the municipal building. As a result of my research interest, I spent a lot of time in this central part of town. However, as I myself lived in the Carrier neighbourhood and used to visit my diverse dialogue partners at their homes, in the end I got to know at least seven neighbourhoods quite well, among them Carrier, Nyalinko, Madina, Mangala, Heremakono, Solondoni and Waoutoh. In addition, I regularly visited Guéckédou-Lélé, a rural area some distance out of town centre. I could reach this area quite easily by crossing one of the rivers close to my home in a pirogue ferry and then walking for twenty minutes through gardens and rice fields.

The main road directs most of the traffic through Guéckédou town; side roads lead off to different neighbourhoods and the countryside. In addition, the Oueou, Boya, Ouoya and Wau rivers and their tributaries and bayous meander through the settlement, dividing the town into the various neighbourhoods and, a short distance out of town, mark the national border with Liberia. These streams flow into the Makona, the river which forms the border, and then finally into the ocean on Sierra Leonean territory where the river is called the Moa.

3 <https://www.citypopulation.de/php/guinea-admin.php?admId=82> (accessed 28.03.2019).

4 In 1996, Guéckédou town was officially said to have 85,457 inhabitants. In 1983, the official census stated that the town had 2800 inhabitants (Bidou and Toure, 2002). The population growth between 1983 and 1996 is first and foremost related to the presence of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees, which in 1996 consisted of 400,000 in the prefecture, bringing the total to 611,753 inhabitants (D'Urzo, 2002). Most of these refugees have in the meantime left the region. The rate of growth has, accordingly, completely changed (Bidou and Toure, 2002).

In everyday discourse, Guéckédou town is, in contrast to its surroundings, an urban space, attracting villagers to the market on Wednesdays to do business, to the hospital for treatment or simply to take a taxi to other major towns. It is also the capital of the prefecture and so for administrative purposes you have to come to town – although certain everyday matters can be dealt with at the local level or at the sub-prefectural headquarters. However, Guéckédou lacks many of the amenities one might expect of an urban area, for example an electricity and a water supply, area-wide cellphone coverage, and regular access to national newspapers. Also economically speaking, Guéckédou is hardly appealing. The main employer is the state, which offers job opportunities in different institutional settings, for instance in the administrative or security sectors, as well as in the education or agricultural sector. Apart from the state, where employment is determined by official recruitment drives and/or good connections, there is no large business that exerts an irresistible economic attraction or provides many formal jobs. However, important seasonal trade does include the cross-border kola market and the distribution of the new rice crop. Both businesses provide seasonal work on various scales and contribute to the income strategies of numerous families. The region's prosperity is based mainly on the fertility of its soil – and people are well aware of this. Accordingly, many activities and comings and goings are determined by the rhythms of farming. The hilly landscape and the region's rainy climate allow the cultivation of rice, palm oil, coffee and bananas, to mention just a few of the most important agricultural products. Farming activities shape the villagers' lives as well as everyday life in Guéckédou centre, which is surrounded and traversed by rice fields, small gardens and cultivated land. Thus, many inhabitants of Guéckédou town not only maintain an interest in farming in their home villages and go there to help out during the harvest season, but also cultivate land on the urban periphery or fallow land. In addition to flooded rice, urban farmers grow cassava, peanuts, yams, maize, and sometimes fonio.

With regard to the national borders close by, one must also consider economic activities that benefit from the location between three different administrative regimes (Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia) and rumours of diamond and drug smuggling and related fortunes are part of everyday life. People said for instance that one of the few guesthouses in town – a spacious, multi-storey hotel with conference facilities, a swimming pool, a billiard saloon and a weights room – was financed by a prominent local man involved in drug trafficking. To think of Guéckédou as a border boomtown, however, would have been misleading at the time of research. In general, people described the area as being quite calm, almost paralysed compared to former times, when Guéckédou held the largest market in the entire country, selling merchandise from the entire Upper Guinea Coast. The civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone (also known as the Mano River War) and, finally,

the rebel attacks on Guéckédou itself had led to a shrinking economy and to many abandoning the town, excepting for market day on Wednesday.

Because of the Mano River War, Guéckédou can also be described as a small hub for different humanitarian aid projects, at least during the 1990s. At the time of the research, most of the projects had left the area or switched from humanitarian to development aid projects. Consequently, the stream of cash had dwindled and several local NGOs or associations that originated in the realm of development aid struggled to obtain financing. Nevertheless, most job seekers, including those who were already employed, for example within the state bureaucracy, longed to work for an NGO financed by an international development agency.

Pays Kissi

Along with the neighbouring Kissidougou prefecture and the bordering regions in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, Guéckédou prefecture forms part of the so-called *pays Kissi*, in reference to the dominant ethnic community in Guéckédou centre and prefecture, the Kissi-speaking people.⁵ The Kissi-speaking people generally describe themselves as farmers and particularly rice growers; accordingly, I will critically reflect on both descriptions in subsequent chapters. I will also discuss the relations with other ethnic communities living in the area, like the Malinké, Peul or Soussou, and discuss the various past and also more recent population movements and the religious affinities in this particular region. In all the chapters I use the ethnic notations as my Guinean interlocutors used them when talking to me in French. I thereby use only the singular term (e.g. I will speak of the Kissi referring to the ethnic community of the Kissi-speaking people who describe themselves as *les Kissi*, although, in grammatically correct Kissi language, it would be *Kissia*) to keep it as simple as possible.

Some notes on the three largest ethnic communities present in Guinea: The Malinké, also known as Mandinka or Man(d)inko are one of the largest ethnic groups throughout West Africa and belong to the linguistic group of the Mande. The Soussou or Susu, Soso, are also a Mande-speaking community but live primarily in Guinea. The Fulani or Ful-speaking people, also known as Fulbe, Fula or Fulani, are like the Malinké spread over many countries. In Guinea, they call themselves Peul or Pulaar-speaking people and claim to hold the majority.⁶ Ho-

5 Guinea is a multi-ethnic country, in which Mandé- and Pulaar-speaking communities are the most numerous, together making up around 80 to 90% of the population. Thus, if one accepts the framework of the nation-state, the Kissi, like the other Forestières, can be described as national minorities.

6 I use "Peul" and "Pulaar-speaking people" to address the ethnic Fulbe.

wever, the staging of numbers can also be seen as a political strategy and must be interpreted with caution (Arieff and McGovern, 2013).

Although I use the different ethnic labels I am well aware of the artificial character of most of these attributions. Thus, I am aware that “the Kissi”, or “the Peul” do not exist as closed entities but are social constructions; I will elaborate on this further on in this book. Generally speaking, the making of various identities and, for instance, ethnic consciousness, is contextual and refers to open and thus incomplete processes (Förster, 1997: 46).

Importantly, the research site for this study includes different communities from different religious backgrounds. The latter aspect is rather uncommon in Guinea, which is generally described as having a Muslim majority (Camara, 2007).⁷ Moreover, the dominant ethnic community living in the research area, the Kissi-speaking people, describe themselves as the autochthons who inhabit a cross-border space.

Postcolonial historical background

Guinea became an independent state in 1958.⁸ Guinea’s independence was characterised by a massive rejection of membership of General Charles de Gaulle’s *Communauté française*: On 28 September 1958, the population voted overwhelmingly for complete and immediate independence from France – 85% of registered voters participated with 94% favouring immediate independence (Schmidt, 2005: 1). At the forefront of the Guinean nationalist movement was the Guinean branch of the RDA (*Rassemblement Démocratique Africain*), the *Parti Démocratique de Guinée* (PDG), although often both abbreviations were used: PDG-RDA. However, “the most visible player in Guinea’s startling rise to nationhood” was Guinea’s first president Ahmed Sékou Touré (Straker, 2009: 5). He was the nation’s charismatic leader from the advent of independence until his death in 1984. Born in 1922 in Faranah, he was 36 years old when his presidency began and 62 when it ended. McGovern declares that the material on Guinea immediately after independence and during the First Republic had but one author – Sékou Touré himself (McGovern, 2004). Thus, “[t]he puzzle of Guinea and the puzzle of Sékou Touré are inextricably linked” (McGovern, 2004: 31). McGovern also recognises other important political actors, but Sékou Touré always managed potential political rivals: “He [Touré] obviously worked through colleagues and intermediaries, but so many of these were eliminated along the way, from Telli Diallo to Fodeba Keita, that

7 Most Guineans practise relatively orthodox forms of Islam (O’Toole and Baker, 2005: 115).

8 As a supplement the interested reader will find an extended chronology in Appendix I which includes important events and names from 1895 to 2012. For an insightful recent publication on the history of Guinea since World War Two, cf. Camara (2014).

only a few lasted more than ten years close to power” (McGovern, 2004: 31). During his presidency, Touré and his cadres established a socialist state with various institutions at national and local level to confirm the state’s sovereignty. The PDG monopolised the political, judicial, administrative and technical authority and controlled state functions and public affairs. In the course of his presidency, Touré declared the socialist Cultural Revolution and Demystification Campaign, “vowing intensified transformations of national economic and cultural processes” (Straker, 2009: 7). Touré placed particular importance on youth; young people were considered the key supporters of the socialist revolution. They were therefore organised into various youth groups which were incorporated into the one-party state. Guinée Forestière and thus the Guéckédou borderland during that time was one of the main sites of Touré’s state building efforts.

Although Touré reorganised the economy, especially agriculture and secondary industry, the one-party state struggled with financial hardship and international isolation (Rivière, 1977). Touré nevertheless maintained some relations with other socialist countries such as Cuba and the Soviet Union. However, in the course of his presidency Touré grew more and more despotic, which resulted in state violence against various individuals, social groups and ethnic communities. Many people died under suspicious circumstances, some ethnic communities were marginalised and exiled, and others lost their religious heritage owing to the pervasive nature of the socialist state’s iconoclasm. According to an ICG report, Sékou Touré’s authoritarian rule “was characterized by paranoia about plots, state violence unprecedented in Africa and the country’s isolation in the context of its nationalist and socialist stance” (ICG, 2007: 1). Consequently, when Touré finally died a natural death in 1984, he left behind a devastated country.

A few days after the death of Sékou Touré, Lansana Conté together with a group of officers seized power in a coup. Lansana Conté’s presidency, which was to last 24 years, was characterised by economic reforms and political democratisation processes. Thus, the Guinean government also solicited the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and major donors and introduced a constitution and a multiparty system (Smith, 2006: 418). In 1993, Guinea finally held its first presidential elections. Conté, however, “always kept a firm grip on power and never entertained the possibility of losing any election organized under his tutelage” (ICG, 2007: 1). Conté won the elections in 1993, 1998 and, finally, in 2003. In 2001 he also organised a constitutional referendum that gave him the opportunity to become president for life – removing restrictions on the number of presidential mandates and the age limit (70) and extending the term of office from five to seven years (ICG, 2007: 2).

By the late 1990s, Guinea was surrounded by civil wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau and later Côte d’Ivoire (Arieff, 2009: 338). The Mano River War – the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia – affected the Guéckédou borderland

considerably. Accordingly, many international observers warned that Guinea was at serious risk of civil war or a military coup. But Conté managed these conflicts to his benefit (Arieff, 2009: 339). In 2006 and 2007, the situation again became tense after a trade union confederation called for several national strikes. They finally proved to be an effective force for mobilising the opposition and Conté appointed a new prime minister, Lansana Kouyaté, who enjoyed the support of the trade unions. Thus, 2007 seemed to hold promise of political change (McGovern, 2007), but only a few months later the situation changed; Conté took back power and finally dismissed Kouyaté in May 2008 (Engeler, 2008).

In December 2008, after 24 years in power, President Conté finally passed away. Only hours later, a group of soldiers took power in a bloodless coup. The military junta was organised as the *Conseil National pour la Démocratie et le Développement* (CNDD) and declared Captain Moussa Dadis Camara as their leader and the country's new president. After a turbulent year, the military regime culminated in the violent oppression of a political party rally on 28 September 2009; Dadis Camara was shot by one of his military allies and had to leave the country for medical treatment in Morocco. By January 2010, after a political agreement known as the Joint Declaration of Ouagadougou signed by Dadis Camara, Blaise Compaoré and Sékouba Konaté, the latter became interim head of state and thereafter formed a "government of national unity" and organised presidential elections (Arieff, 2010: 1). These elections took place in June 2010. It was "the first national election in Guinea's history organized by an independent commission, and the first not to feature an incumbent government candidate" (Arieff and Cook, 2010: 9). Two candidates won the most votes in the June poll: Cellou Dalein Diallo of the UFDG (*Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée*), and Alpha Condé of the RPG (*Rassemblement du Peuple de Guinée*). In November 2010, Alpha Condé won the second round and has been president of Guinea since December 2010 (Ammann and Engeler, 2013).

3. Listening, experiencing, observing

This monograph integrates and interprets fieldnotes that were developed using various methods. In the following chapters I will, for instance, include personal descriptions of public events or discussions, integrate information I obtained from semi-structured or life history interviews, refer to data from more informal conversations and, finally, take account of my own experiences and reflections. Methodologically, my data collection, analysis and interpretation were inspired by the circular research methodology of grounded theory and related approaches.⁹

9 The analysis process was supported by CAQDAS, thus by Computer Assisted/Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software.

In order to make data collection reasonable, all upcoming chapters include information regarding the data basis. I therefore take account of varying challenges depending on the topic and/or the actors focused on and add further information regarding my research approach. Moreover, I hold the interpretation and analysis of my data up to scrutiny and allow the reader to make a methodologically more informed reading of the chapters throughout this monograph.

In what follows, quotes from semi-structured or life history interviews are in quotation marks, followed by a footnote indicating the date and with whom the conversation was held.¹⁰ For easier reading, I translate all French statements into English, but add the French version in the footnote for good measure. All of the names used are pseudonyms in order to preserve my communication partners' anonymity.¹¹ Some of the more public figures, however, remain recognisable, as there were for instance only one prefect and only one mayor in Guéckédou at the time of research. As a supplement to the information in the text, a list of all the key informants is included in Appendix II.

Approaching the field

As both resources and time were limited, this research project is based on approximately fourteen months of anthropological fieldwork undertaken in Guinea. The fourteen months were divided into different periods. The first period, January and February 2008, may be called a preliminary field trip, since it served to develop the research topic and a local network. I also had the chance to make a brief visit to the Guinée Forestière and decided that Guéckédou should be my primary research site. The second field trip was dedicated particularly to coming to grips with the Guinean state apparatus and presence nationally. I visited Conakry for the festivities to mark the 50th anniversary of independence and learnt about how the state tried to be represented in public. During this second stay I also established further personal contacts in and beyond Guinea's capital city. The following two visits between 2009 (September to January) and 2010 (June to November) were spent mainly in the town of Guéckédou and other small towns and villages in Gué-

10 Data collection was done with the help of a digital recorder. Thus, whenever possible, I recorded the conversations and the semi-structured or life history interviews. However, I also made notes following all the discussions and social interactions I observed, no matter whether they were recorded or not. After all, I did not always feel comfortable with recording, especially with elderly people or during informal meetings. However, taking out my small notebook, among other things, to clearly indicate my identity as a researcher was never a problem.

11 While choosing a pseudonym I tried not to change the name's resemblance to a particular social, ethnic or religious community. Thus, I replaced a Christian name with another Christian name and so forth.

ckédou prefecture¹² and beyond.¹³ This is how the main body of data was collected. My last stay in 2012 (January to February) can then be labelled as a closing field trip during which I collected further data from other regions, not least to compare with my own findings, and also updated the data I had collected on people's life trajectories, everyday life and the socio-political situation in and beyond Guéckédou.¹⁴

This division of fieldwork had several advantages. Amongst other things, it enabled me to follow specific political processes, case studies and life courses over a longer period of time. In addition, I could take stock of the material regularly and was therefore able to continuously reflect on how to proceed. On a more personal level, I felt more at home each time I arrived in Guinean territory and could build on an ever more familiar local network of people.

I could count on various people who facilitated and supported my research during the fieldwork. One of my most important assistants for the main research in Guéckédou was Augustin Tamba Koundouno. At the time of research, Augustin was completing his studies at the *Supérieur des Arts de Guinée* (ISAG) and was based in the city of Dubreka, Guinée Maritime. However, he spent much of his time in Guéckédou and agreed to become my research assistant. We got to know each other through a mutual friend who knew that we were both intending to do some research in the area: at the time Augustin had completed his master's dissertation on local conflict resolution strategies in Guéckédou prefecture. Accordingly, we had similar interests and I also accompanied him to some of his appointments, during which he talked with local elders about conflict within families or between different ethnic groups and was particularly interested in how people managed to resolve the conflict. Among other things, he described mediation procedures, joking relationships or mutual pacts for non-violence as typical strategies for conflict resolution in the *pays Kissi* (Koundouno, 2009: 6ff).

Regarding my own research, Augustin featured as a gatekeeper to the many youth groups active in Guéckédou and also knew most of the important power brokers in and around Guéckédou – or at least had no problem with simply knocking on their doors. When visiting these actors and institutions, Augustin served, whenever the conversation was not in French, as a translator and also as a companion who would introduce me to the people and help me to ask my questions.¹⁵ Usually, the conversations would lead on to more informal discussions du-

12 I made day trips to the following villages in different Guéckédou sub-prefectures: Nongoa, Temmessadou, Kouakoro, Beindou Boodou, Koundou and Mongo.

13 Other towns I visited in Guinée Forestière include Kissidouougou, Macenta, N'Zérékoré, and Lola.

14 I got to know Mamou and Dalaba in Fouta Djallon, and Kouroussa and Kankan in Haute Guinée.

15 Almost all of the semi-structured interviews or more informal conversations were carried out in French. This has consequences in that some of the nuances of the local languages such as local expressions or meanings were lost in translation processes.

ring which Augustin also participated. Thus, besides being my research assistant, Augustin became himself one of my key informants, allowing me to understand being young and growing up in the Guéckédou borderland.

In addition to Augustin, I could count on the help of many other people, who assisted me a great deal with my research and also helped me to overcome some of its challenges. Most of those people lived in the same neighbourhood as I did and simply became friends, with whom I shared the everyday life of going to the market, preparing food, drinking coffee and, whenever the political situation was tense, listening to the radio and waiting for news from Conakry. Some of these people were not originally from Guéckédou but described other Guinean regions as their ethnic origin. Accordingly, they extended my view on the Guéckédou borderland by introducing me to religious and ethnic communities other than those introduced by Augustin, who is Christian and part of the Kissi-speaking community. This extended view actually proved to be an important source for understanding the making of local identities and the subjectivities of first-comers and latecomers in the Guéckédou borderland, as well as to have a more differentiated view on being young and on the political turmoil at the time of the research.

My neighbourhood was not only important in broadening my views of different ethnic or religious communities, however; it also proved to be very important for grasping the everyday lives of young women from whichever community. Through these daily interactions with my young female neighbours, during which we simply cooked or did our hair, I was able to learn a great deal about their lives, their worldviews and the way they manoeuvred through the local socio-political terrain. This generated a no less valuable but different data set to the one I was able to assemble with male youngsters. Among other things, the sheer number of female informants was lower and the fieldnotes I wrote about the long periods I spent with female friends included many more personal issues about family and financial problems for instance.

Life history interviews and shared experiences

After the preliminary field trip and an exploratory period spent in Guéckédou, during which I organised my research and familiarised myself with the surroundings, I decided to approach the relationship between youth and the state by focusing on three aspects: firstly, on the everyday life of the youth; secondly, the organisation of young people into different social groups; and thirdly, on the political terrain with its diverse state and non-state institutions and actors.

To grasp youths' everyday lives and their agency I carried out life history interviews and participated in parts of their lives, going to the market and preparing food, sitting outside different homes making and drinking tea, visiting small video clubs to watch football games, visiting people's gardens, or spending time in

small mobile phone repair and charging shops, just waiting for the next client and talking about anything and everything. Very often these shared activities allowed for a more embedded interpretation of the data I gathered through interviews. Another part of the fieldwork involved the workings of several different social groups. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and more informal conversations were carried out with the young members and founders of these groups. In addition to talking to them or interviewing them, I also participated in their weekly meetings or visited their offices or project sites, if these existed. I was interested in youth associations and cooperatives as well as in young vigilante groups, the motorbike taxi union and religious groups such as the Scouts. I was thus able to include not only a particular milieu – for instance students – but also other youngsters living in and around Guéckédou. As I conducted most of my interviews in French, my informants had to have a certain level of education. Moreover, most of my interlocutors who were commonly described as young were between 18 and 34 years old, so they were no longer children but rather meandering through the youth/adult nexus.

The decision to focus on, among other things, the way young people were organised socially was closely related to my interest in former socialist youth groups, which were, as I learnt from many local elders, closely linked to the state. Accordingly, the focus on contemporary youth groups provides an important lens through which to research youth–state relations sensitive to history and socio-political change.

To research the third aspect – the political terrain – I talked to political actors and local power brokers such as local authorities, various public servants, NGO activists and mapped out political institutions representing or related to the state apparatus in Guéckédou, for instance the state administration bureaus, the municipality, or the council of elders. Again, life history interviews provided crucial insights into the political actors' career trajectories and various perspectives vis-à-vis the state. In addition, observations of state orchestrated events allowed for multifaceted insights, not only regarding state imagery but also regarding state–society interactions. Finally, I also traced settlement histories and researched the way in which elders perceived their own youth, which resulted in important background knowledge to understand socio-political changes and continuities against the backdrop of past and contemporary youth, youth groups and state–society relations.

All in all, one of the key methods besides participation and observation was the life history approach, which included not only life history interviews but also more informal conversations, discussions and observations of everyday life which, in combination, helped me to grasp people's life trajectories, their past career moves and future plans (Engeler, 2011). As Atkinson notes, “[i]n the telling of a life story, we get a good sense of how and why the various parts of a life are connected

and what gives the person meaning in life. There may be no better way to answer the question of how people get from where they began to where they are now in life than through their life stories" (Atkinson, 1998: 20).¹⁶ Thus, while I tried to approach the field sensitive to local concerns, meanings and categories, the life history approach proved to be an important method that provided me with insights into the ways in which personal experiences and life trajectories were shaped by social dynamics, as well as by socioeconomic and political changes. I am aware that the life history interview can, besides providing space for remembering and reflection, also provide a stage for image cultivation (Svasek and Domecka, 2012: 122). Moreover, as Crapanzano writes, people not only remember or stage particular life episodes during life history conversations but also imagine alternative trajectories and interpretations (Crapanzano, 1980: 10).

Besides life histories and, more generally, besides simply asking people what matters to them I followed Emerson and co-authors who suggest: "Writing ethnographic fieldnotes that are sensitive to members' meanings is primarily a matter not of asking but of inferring what people are concerned with from the specific ways in which they talk and act in a variety of natural settings. Thus, interviewing, especially asking members directly what terms mean to them or what is important or significant to them is not the primary tool for getting at members' meanings. Rather, the distinctive procedure is to observe and record naturally occurring talk and interaction" (Emerson et al., 1995: 140).

Thus, I perceived the sharing of parts of daily life and the experiencing of, for instance, the same sorrows and fears because of the complex political situation, as crucial additional methods.

Challenges and lessons learnt

Researching youth and the state in Guinea was accompanied by various challenges. Obviously, the political circumstances at the time of the research complicated my life as a researcher and significantly affected my data collection and analysis: In late 2008, the country's long-term President Lansana Conté passed away and hours later a group of soldiers took power in a bloodless coup. In 2009, when the military junta was still in power the militarisation of everyday life with its numerous roadblocks and over-zealous soldiers restricted travel and at times also generated anxiety and uncertainty. On certain days it was better to stay at home and wait for news from Conakry or, paradoxically, from friends in Switzerland, who

16 Many authors discuss the life history approach. I thereby perceive Bjarnesen's "mobile life story-approach" as very useful for grasping young people's life trajectories (Bjarnesen, 2007; 2009). However, other approaches are as helpful, cf. amongst others (Svasek and Domecka, 2012, Anderson, 2011, Atkinson, 1998, Bertaux, 1981, Heinz and Krüger, 2001, Luttrell, 2005).

had much more information about what was going on in Guinea from the Internet than we had in Guéckédou, where we were often cut off from the Internet, thus depending predominantly on *Radio France Internationale* and *BBC Afrique* for news of the regime. Accordingly, my neighbours and I soon formed some sort of information centre as we all had different sources supplying us with the latest news. I generally felt safe while we were sitting together and sharing the news, whether good or bad, in large part thanks to my host family. I only found out later that the mere fact that I had stayed in Guinea during the CNDD regime was for many people evidence of my strong commitment to the country and its residents and opened more than one door when I returned to Guéckédou in 2010.

During the transition period preceding the presidential elections in 2010, I was put on the spot by the intensified ethnic conflict, resulting in serious disputes between people I had previously known as friendly neighbours. All of a sudden I realised how much it mattered to many of my friends where they went for water or food, with which taxi driver they drove and which mosque they visited for prayer. And even if they did not care, others did and could make an issue out of it. As the political circumstances affected both my data collection and my data reading and interpretation, I will return to that issue several times in this monograph.

Another challenge of doing research in the Guinean forest region was related to the hierarchies of withheld knowledge. Fairhead and Leach relate this practice to the region's power societies and the politics of secrecy (Fairhead and Leach, 1996: 15). According to them, there are "limits of knowing" because: "As researchers, the way villagers located us in their politics of knowledge has certainly circumscribed the information and understandings accessible to us. Furthermore we cannot know the extent of these limits, since withheld knowledge or the extent of ignorance is integral to the politics of secrecy" (Fairhead and Leach, 1996: 18).

Similarly, Knörr and Trajano Filho (2010) state with reference to "the underneath of things" analysed by Ferme (2001): "Another feature associated with the political culture of the Upper Guinea Coast is the widespread culture of secrecy. Secrecy is a salient feature of political culture and we have to look at the "underneath of things" (Ferme, 2001) to understand secrecy's meaning for processes of integration and conflict in everyday life as well as in situations of strife and warfare" (Knörr and Trajano Filho, 2010: 10).

McGovern further relates the culture of secrecy or discretion, as he frames it, to the scare tactics of the socialist state: "In Guinea, the cultural emphasis on discretion that is so pronounced in Forestier societies was compounded by the culture of paranoia cultivated by Sékou Touré's government" (McGovern, 2013: 200).

Generally speaking, I tried to accept the limits of knowing and could also see some advantages to it. As ordinary Guineans are in general also confronted with some of these limits, I could understand their perspective and shared some of their experiences, for instance when asking for a particular service from the state

administration. Very often state bureaucrats answered my questions indirectly so that in the end I did not know whether, for instance, there were no statistics on the town's population at all, whether I should offer some money to get more information, or whether the respondent simply did not want to help me with the matter. At the beginning of my research I was often very frustrated by these experiences but later realised that many of my dialogue partners faced similar problems in their everyday encounters with the state, as well as with some of the local elders and other authorities. I then started to appreciate these instances of talking without getting information, of endlessly waiting for people with whom I thought I had an appointment, or of getting answers to different questions to those I had asked. Mostly, these experiences taught me about issues which proved to be as important to my topic as the initial questions I wanted to ask. I learnt, for instance, about the sensitivity of putting what I considered banal questions to trade unionists in times of political tension. I took on board the fact that when talking to an elder it was not recent political transformation that was important but the Kissi-speaking community's origins and early migration movements. And I learnt that I was the only one who thought that the simultaneous presence of pictures of Mao, Marx, Sékou Touré and Jean-Marc Télliano (the local candidate for the 2010 presidential elections) in a village chief's living room was a contradiction of different political imaginations; for local people they formed an acceptable unity. Finally, this concurs with McGovern's finding regarding methodological problems in Guinea's Forest region: "there is more to be gained by watching, listening, and considering, than by talking" (McGovern, 2013: 200).

As previously mentioned, I also had to deal with other challenges. I had to be careful to listen not only to young men but to include the often less forceful voices of young women. Thanks to a few close female friends I was able to enter the world and perspectives of young women, although not as often as for young men.

Finally, my own age was both an advantage and a disadvantage. In the eyes of almost all of my conversation partners I was a young woman who had not yet attained adult status. This was related to the fact that, at the time of fieldwork, I was not only a student but also unmarried and childless. Of course this was a door-opener for researching youth – but also a difficulty when entering some of the political arenas. However, in retrospect these circumstances allowed me to get a better grasp of youths' everyday life in Guéckédou, as the youngsters I talked to often could not enter the political terrain that easily either.

All in all, I do not claim "to know the other" (Jackson, 2006) but tried to approach the emic perspective as best I could. Thus, as young men and women are at the centre of this study, I simply tried to follow them and accompany them in order to grasp parts of their different life trajectories, to understand their future dreams and everyday problems, and to see things through their eyes to further understand youth and the state in Guinea.

Grounded theory

This research project applied a grounded theory methodology. Hence, data collection is, as Silverman puts it, “only half the battle”. Data analysis and writing-up are “the name of the game” (Silverman, 2007). Hence, I agree with Emerson and co-authors when they write: “Ethnography is an active enterprise. Its activity incorporates dual impulses. On the one hand, the ethnographer must make her way into new worlds and new relationships. On the other hand, she must learn how to represent in written form what she has come to see and understand as the result of these experiences” (Emerson et al., 1995: 15).

While developing this “written form”, I considered it important that data collection, analysis and interpretation in the grounded theory tradition form a circular process. Accordingly, my own data analysis started directly following the first visits to the field and continued over the years. In addition, I continued memo-writing throughout the research and analysis process and established the analysis against the backdrop of several rounds of coding and analysing. In addition, I followed Emerson and co-authors (1995) by devising thematic narratives that were closely linked to the fieldnotes and organised around a specific topic or event (Emerson et al., 1995: 170). During these processes of identifying relevant stories and writing thematic narratives – related to a second round of more specific coding – I drew my inspiration from, among other things, my memos. However, I also tried never to lose contact with my data and re-read my fieldnotes over and over again. Nevertheless, in moving from fieldnotes to writing the ethnographic text, I turned away from local scenes and their participants, “from relations formed and personal debts incurred in the field” (Emerson et al., 1995: 169). Instead, I started to compare the narratives with youth studies and the anthropology of the state. Finally, my interpretations emerged from these processes of rereading fieldnotes and intertwining them with scientific discourses.

In general, I agree with Emerson and co-authors who write that “data are never pure; they are ripe with meanings and always products of prior interpretative and conceptual decisions” (Emerson et al., 1995: 167). Thus, even the process of data collection, which I have called “listening, experiencing, observing”, was influenced by theory and did not simply spring from nowhere.

4. Book outline

In reflecting on this research focus and the related questions, this monograph is organised into nine chapters and one concluding reflection. All the chapters are grounded in empirical evidence and include references to different scientific discourses related to the topic and the argument. The timeframe concentrates on

post-revolutionary Guinea, in particular the period from 2000 to 2010. This period emerged from the data analysis and represents the temporal context in which most of my young interview partners located themselves. However, references to the more distant past were frequent. Accordingly, I also outline the making of the Guéckédou borderland with references to early population movements, to the impact of colonialism and to colonial boundary demarcation in West Africa. In addition, a couple of chapters address revolutionary Guinea, as a thorough awareness of this period is crucial in order to understand present-day social and political circumstances in Guinea, in particularly in the Guinée Forestière. Moreover, the legacies of the socialist period were very present in people's accounts, especially when talking about the state administration or the relationship between youth and the state.

The book is organised as follows. This first introductory chapter has sought to provide an understanding of youth and the state and has introduced the reader to the research site and research approach. The second chapter examines the making of the Guéckédou borderland and local ethnic and national identities. The next chapter is particularly interested in looking at Touré's state-building efforts in Guinée Forestière, which included the creation of revolutionary youth and inter-generational confusion. Chapter four, then, addresses state re-making processes after 1984. Besides looking at governmental changes and continuities, this chapter takes a closer look at how and by whom the political is shaped in the context of the local state in post-revolutionary Guéckédou. The next couple of chapters address young lives in relation to the youth–state nexus in the Guéckédou borderland. I initiate the discussion by first reflecting on being young and growing up and then referring to the meandering everyday lives of the youth in that particular region. I then write about what for most of my young interlocutors was an extremely crucial time: the rebel attacks in the 2000s and the young vigilante group that was formed in response to the increasing insecurity. The following chapters introduce the post-war period and discuss the political terrain that unfolded by examining youth-state relations in particular within the context of various social groups such as unions, associations and branches of religious movements. I perceive the members of these groups as interesting actors who navigate the local political terrain and create room for political participation – not only through street protests or by violent means but also by building up complex negotiating arenas, characterised by relationships to various actors such as civil servants, religious authorities and NGOs.

All the chapters of this study may be seen as complementary clusters. However, the different chapters also tell their own story, which will be discussed in the last paragraph of each chapter. The final chapter completes this book on youth and the state in the Guéckédou borderland by summarising the most important aspects.