6 Politics of the Future – Riots of the Now

Temporal Horizons of Youth in Upheavals
in England and Guinea

Joschka Philipps

INTRODUCTION

A great deal of politics seems to be about the future, and much of the future seems to be managed by politics. Political networks develop narratives and ordering mechanisms that negotiate continuity and change in societies, and attempt to manage the contingency created by an entirely elusive future. In functionally differentiated societies, Luhmann (2002: 151) suggests that the political system creates the impression of a future that is being taken care of. And in many former colonies, governments find themselves confronted with widespread and long-standing expectations of ›development‹, which are placed in the more or less proximate future (see Mitchell 2014: 500).[1] When studying as to why and how the future is significant for people, it thus becomes important to take a closer look at politics. It should be particularly revealing to look at political upheavals, the »realm of contingency« where the taken-for-grantedness of political regimes is dismantled (Branch and Mampilly 2015: 10), and where uncertainty looms large as to who will deal with the future *in* the future.

In this chapter, I analyse interviews and conversations with young men who were directly involved in popular upheavals in England and Guinea. My central question is how these young men talk about the

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[1] | Mitchell (2014: 507) delineates how »the future entered government« as a fundamental historical shift in modern political practice after the Second World War in the United States, and argues that politics became »a mode of government-through-the-future.«

political future. While they actively destabilised the present political order, did they see their agency as potentially contributing to a different future? Or did they consider their actions to be short-lived and with no further political impact? I suggest that exploring these questions can tell us a lot about how different political systems, insofar as they include and exclude their citizens in different ways, shape young people's perspectives on the collective future. During my fieldwork in Guinea (2009-2012), where I had studied the involvement of youth gangs in urban protests (Philipps 2011; 2013a; 2013b), I never explicitly asked these questions. Nevertheless, informants and interviewees generally expressed an intense longing for radical political change in the imminent future. The comparison with the English riots of 2011 is born out of a growing curiosity in transcontinental comparative research (see Philipps 2014: 10-11; Robinson 2011), which treats African cases as examples for global dynamics and developments (see e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 2012a, 2012b; Mbembe and Nuttall 2004; Utas 2014). Looking through the available data on English rioters' perceptions of the future, however, the Guinean and the English case stand in an unexpectedly stark contrast to each other. In a nutshell, while most Guinean young men I talked to between 2009 and 2012 embraced the notion of imminent political change, the English youth I read about seemed to have rioted with no obvious concern for the future at all. This chapter asks how we can make sense of that contrast.

Niklas Luhmann's thoughts about the relation between politics and the future, as well as on trust and confidence, provide a loose collection of ideas to be critically explored in this paper. Luhmann is concerned with the future's uncertainty as an indispensable resource for politics (Luhmann 2002: 147). Broadly, politicians project futures to obtain popular support – they project a bright future provided that they will win the elections, for instance, and a troubling future in case they do not; and any political decision for the future is valorised as »a difference to what would happen if one were to let things simply slide« (Luhmann 2002: 146).[2] As the political system juggles with different futures, usually on a spectrum between utopian and dystopian, and as it makes collectively binding decisions that affect the future, Luhmann (2002: 169) claims that:

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2 | My translation from German: »eine Differenz zu dem, was sich ergeben würde, wenn man die Dinge laufen ließe, wie sie nun einmal laufen.«

The possibility of observing politics [provides] a substitute for the obstructed possibility of observing the future. The future's unknown character, its unobservability is therefore the condition for politics' high level of attention. Not least, this could explain why the observation of politics oscillates between trust and distrust. [...] Politics [functions], so to speak, as the governor [*statthalter*] of the covert, unintelligible future.[3]

According to Luhmann, the public's observation of politics as an indicator of what the future may hold oscillates between trust and distrust – both vis-à-vis the overall political system and in regard to individual politicians and political parties. Following Luhmann (2000: 97), the overall system generally requires confidence (*Zuversicht*), a trusting attitude that takes itself for granted: »every morning you leave the house without a weapon!« Supporting individual politicians, however, requires trust (*Vertrauen*), an attitude of actively choosing one object of trust over another – risking that you »eventually regret your trusting choice« (Luhmann 2000: 98). The available data reveals that the young men from the urban socio-economic margins involved in urban upheavals did not have much confidence in the overall system, neither in England nor in Guinea. But while the English youth also had no trust in individual politicians, some of the Guineans did. This, I will argue, has to do with different modalities of political inclusion and exclusion. While the English rioters were, in the sense of Luhmann, systematically excluded from politics, their Guinean counterparts could hope for a possible future of being integrated into the political apparatus. However rare, ambiguous, fragile and short-lived their ties with politicians were, there was a slight possibility that their political actions could eventually improve their individual lives, whereas for English rioters, politics largely seemed inaccessible and likely to remain the same – at least from what we know. In that regard, this chapter critically reviews two interrelated tropes that frequently arise in discussions on global

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3 | My translation from German: »die Möglichkeit, Politik zu beobachten, [bietet] einen Ersatz für die verbaute Möglichkeit, Zukunft zu beobachten. Das Unbekanntsein, die Unbeobachtbarkeit der Zukunft ist deshalb die Bedingung des hohen Aufmerksamkeitswertes der Politik. Das könnte nicht zuletzt erklären, daß die Beobachtung der Politik zwischen Vertrauen und Mißtrauen oszilliert. Keine der beiden Möglichkeiten kann prinzipiell ausgeschlossen werden, da die Politik gleichsam als Statthalter der verborgenen, unerkennbaren Zukunft funktioniert.«

politics: the trope of inclusive democracies in Europe, and the trope of the marginalised urban underclass in Africa.

THE 2011 ENGLAND RIOTS: THE ABSENT FUTURE

The England riots ensued shortly after a Metropolitan Police Service officer shot 29-year-old Marc Duggan on 4 August, 2011. Two days later, Duggan's relatives and local residents requested information on the circumstances of his death in front of the Tottenham police station. The demonstration later turned into a standoff between police and protesters (Scott 2011), which sparked the riots that spread with unprecedented speed across London and to other cities (Newburn 2014). Five people lost their lives; 2584 shops were looted, and the overall financial cost is estimated at around half a billion pounds sterling (Riots, Communities and Victims Panel 2012: 3). While the London Metropolitan Police Service (2012: 14) described the five days of rioting as »unprecedented in the capital's history«, British Prime Minister David Cameron was quick to emphasise the banality of the event. »This was not political protest, or a riot about protest or politics,« he argued, »it was common-or-garden [ordinary] thieving, robbing and looting« (House of Commons 2011). In a sense, Cameron was right: the English rioters of 2011 had no connection whatsoever to networks and symbols that we tend to call ›political‹. The rioters were not associated with political parties (the opposition equally condemned the riots), not organised in any legible way (see Williams 2012) and, most importantly, they made no reference to the future. Even those who most violently confronted the state's security forces did not, according to their own reports, imagine a different politics to come.

One of the most detailed independent inquiries into the rioters' motivations is the ›Reading the Riots‹ report, produced by a collaborative research team from the London School of Economics and the Guardian newspaper (Lewis et al. 2011). Based on interviews with 270 people who claimed that they were involved in the riots, it constitutes a central empirical reference in various sociological and criminological analyses (e.g. Body-Gendrot 2013; Slater 2011; Sutterlüty 2014; Valluvan, Kapoor and Kalra 2013; for critiques, see Henri and Hutnyk 2013: 210-213; Treadwell et al. 2013: 2, 4). Their observations match with various others' in that they

see rioters as largely apathetic vis-à-vis the political future.[4] A 19-year-old unemployed man from Birmingham, for example, shrugs when asked what he would like to see change: »Fuck knows, dunno, don't really care about that no more. I've gone past caring. Just think there's no point in me wishing, wanting things to happen« (Lewis et al. 2011: 26). The rioters' fatalism was highlighted in all other large-scale empirical analyses (Morrell et al. 2011: 34-35; Riots, Communities and Victims Panel 2012: 8). In fact, the ›future‹ appeared in reports exclusively to designate what the rioters ›lacked‹, what they had lost faith in. Rather than struggling for a better future, rioters seemed far more concerned with either the past (when framing the riots as taking revenge on the police) or the present (when describing the riots in terms of situational excitement and looting opportunities). A rioter called Daniel said he was striving for revenge:

> I was there for revenge and I will always remember the day when *we* had the police and the government scared. For once, they were the ones living on the edge, they, like, *they* felt how *we* felt, they felt threatened by us. That was the best three days of my life. (The Guardian 2011)

Daniel and his friends were on holiday when their peers in London sent them Blackberry messages with images of the riots. They immediately cut their holidays short and came back to England nine days earlier than planned.

> I always *thought* to myself when I was on holiday: ›Well, this chance may never come again.‹ I saw it as my opportunity, like, *now* was the opportunity to get revenge. It wasn't even just the police, just the whole government, like, everything they do, they make things harder for us, like, they make it hard for us to get jobs, even when, like, we do get benefits, they cut it down. (The Guardian 2011)

Daniel's comment that »this chance may never come again«, as well as the narrative of ›payback‹, exemplify that the riots were indeed no attempt at

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4 | To name but a few examples, Sutterlüty (2014: 49) remarks »it is highly significant that they hardly spoke of hopes«; Body-Gendrot (2013: 18) speaks of »futureless young males«; and Lewis et al. (2011: 26) argue that »many [rioters] felt that little was likely to change«. All available data from interviews that I have been able to gather confirm this view.

political reform. As much as the »mayhem saw rioters take control back, in their own minds, from the clutches of the police« (Lewis et al. 2011: 20), this reversal of police dominance was known to be short-lived and did not aim at future improvements in policing or socio-economic redistribution. However, within the moment, the reversal of established power relations provoked great enthusiasm. Daniel proudly recalls: »We actually had the choice of letting officers off the hook or seriously injuring them. Like, I threw a brick at a policewoman, I saw her drop; I could have just easily bricked her again. I didn't because it was a woman« (The Guardian 2011).

Looting accounted for half of all riot-related crimes (Riots, Communities and Victims Panel 2012: 17); many commentators distinguished it as the England riots' essential feature (see Bauman 2011; Moxon 2011; Riots, Communities and Victims Panel 2012; Stuart Hall in Williams 2012; Žižek 2011). Looting generally appears to take place within a highly present-centred atmosphere (Collins 2008: 247). A business student who claimed to have made £2,500 by looting, recalls a sense of urgency: »I wanna get it now. I want it now. That's what it was« (Lewis et al. 2011: 29). Karl, a young man interviewed during the riots by Treadwell et al. (2013: 11), explains:

I am 23, never had no job [...]. I got fuck all [nothing] to lose man, fucking Babylon [police] can't do shit anyway, fuck them. We run this town now, not them pricks man, I am gonna take as much as I can get. I want to get watches man, I want me a fucking Rolex.

A looter going by the name of G explains: »Opportunities come and you can't let them go, know what I'm saying?« (Treadwell et al. 2013: 5).

Often the two key motives – revenge against the police, and looting – seemed to intertwine within an effervescent »party atmosphere« (see Lewis et al. 2011; Morrell et al. 2011; Treadwell et al. 2013). Rioters enjoyed what Collins (2008: 250) calls a »moral holiday«, which created a sense of social solidarity amongst the marginalised social strata. Daniel, an English white man in his thirties, recalls a »bonfire atmosphere« with people cheering him on when he set a police car on fire: «I felt great and excited ›Yeah, fuck them, fuck them scum bastards‹ [...]. It was just an opportunity. I never set fire to a police car before. [...] It's a police car, I know what they stand for« (The Guardian 2011).

The rioters came from a disadvantaged socio-economic background: approximately 59 per cent of the riot suspects were amongst the poorest 20

per cent of the national population; 76 per cent had a previous caution or conviction, and 63 per cent were from ethnic minorities (Lewis et al. 2011: 5; Riots, Communities and Victims Panel 2012: 18; Ministry of Justice 2012; Slater 2011). But even though 85 per cent of the 270 rioters interviewed by Lewis et al. (2011: 13) said that policing and police discrimination were a key cause for the riots, the riots themselves featured almost no reference at all to police racism or to the preceding protests over the death of Marc Duggan. Some rioters rejected outright the notion of political protests. A rioter going by the name of Dexter explicitly exclaimed: »Fucking protests, what, the riots? Like the lads from round here are gonna bother going up town for a protest! It was for 10 pairs of free Adidas. It's a fucking joke [to claim that this was a protest], anyone can see it's fucking fantasy« (Treadwell et al. 2013: 11-12). This seems puzzling, for upheavals are commonly seen as inherently political in the sense that they threaten the stability of the political system and insofar as regimes become vulnerable when they are forced to demonstrate their power, in particular consensual democracies that execute physical force against their own citizens (see Luhmann 2002: 47-48). Why, then, did none of the English rioters seize the moment and make future-related political demands, although they would have had plenty of reasons to do so? And why did the political opposition, notably the Labour Party, refrain from politicising the riots to a greater degree?

Along the lines of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, we can explore the underlying issues in terms of political inclusion and exclusion. If rioters did not communicate in the language of politics, that is, if they made no future-related political demands, it means that they were not included in the political system. Although Luhmann can only illuminate the excluding political system and not the perspectives of the excluded individuals themselves – a problematic theoretical stance, to which I return below – his focus on inclusion and exclusion highlights the boundaries of politics and, more symbolically, the boundaries of who can or cannot participate in the contest of different futures. These boundaries were stark and systemic in the English case, while they were fuzzy and porous in Guinea. This is because, in the English case, political parties depend fundamentally on the systematic procedures of electoral democracy. They had little interest in considering a riot as being political – if they had done so, they would have aimed for systemic suicide. Instead, the familiar political order was to be restored as swiftly as possible to dissipate any doubts about the system's authority and the political parties' legitimacy in representing the will of the

people. Indeed, that is precisely what happened. The English security and judicial apparatus reacted with an »extraordinary« effort to criminalise the rioters as quickly as possible (Newburn 2014: 20), organising 1,200 riot-related hearings before magistrates within ten days of the riots, which resulted in all-night sittings across the country and led to sentences that were generally two-to-three-times longer than usual (Slater 2011). By March 2012, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) had made 4,000 riot-related arrests and their investigations still occupied over 411 officers at a cost of £33.5 million, many of them analysing the 200,000 hours of surveillance-camera footage (Metropolitan Police Service 2012: 126, 128-29). The MPS is currently developing a ›Digital Imagery Strategy‹ with video surveillance technology to respond »to any future large-scale public disorder in London«, at an estimated cost of £43 million (Metropolitan Police Service 2012: 128-29). In short, the English political system has not only a strong interest but also a high capacity to exclude the disaffected urban margins from politics.

The upshot for the national population, according to Luhmann, is straightforward. Whoever wants to be included in the political system needs to display confidence in that arrangement, and they need to trust specific politicians for whom they can vote. Otherwise, given the absence of feasible alternatives, »one can only feel unhappy and complain about it«, or organise »protests that won't change anything« (Luhmann 2000: 103; Luhmann 1996). The risks of this arrangement seem manageable for the English political system. Although the lack of trust amongst the voting public might eventually diminish the size of the system through a dearth of participation (Luhmann 2000: 104), and although there is evidence for gradually decreasing political participation among young and poor voters in the UK (Flinders 2014), the turnout in the 2015 elections was still higher than in all three previous elections. And while the public's lack of confidence »may have indirect repercussions on the political system«, it will first and foremost affect those who lack confidence, thereby causing »feelings of alienation« and a »retreat into smaller worlds, [...] fundamentalist attitudes or other forms of retotalizing milieux and ›life-worlds‹« (Luhmann 2000: 103-104). Whether these life-worlds will gain political relevance in the future remains to be seen. In the case of organised gangs during the 2011 England riots, which can indeed be understood as life-worlds (see Hazen and Rodgers 2014; Venkatesh 2006), that was not the case. Although 19 per cent of the arrested rioters

were gang members and »otherwise hostile gangs suspended ordinary hostilities« or even collaborated during the riots (Lewis et al. 2011: 21, 22), they remained politically illegible and, in the long term, did not disrupt the system's stability. Quite to the contrary, police emerge today as an even stronger political-administrative sub-system than before, and criminalisation of rioters has easily excluded them from various social systems at once – a trans-systemic exclusion that systems theory is at great pains to explain (on *Kopplung*, see Luhmann 1995a: 407-495).

In sum, Luhmann can explain why the political system excludes rioters and refrains from politicising them, yet he cannot explain why they made no political demands. More broadly, this shows that thinking in terms of functionally differentiated social systems makes sense from within these systems, but much less sense from outside these systems. This applies in particular to concerns of intersectionality (for a recent discussion, see Collins 2015). For those who are simultaneously excluded from various social systems – the jobless, less-educated, and criminalised poor with no political party to vote for – the issue is social exclusion *tout court* (see Depelchin 2005: 210; Grizelj and Biti 2014: 14). When Luhmann (1995b; 1996) explored this concern of total social exclusion after a visit to Brazil's *favelas,* the German theorist, who is usually known for his unemotional and anti-normative style of theorising, was visibly troubled by the magnitude of exclusion, which, he argued, eschewed all description and explanation. He seems to unwittingly refer to himself when writing:

> To the surprise of all well-meaning [people], one has to notice that there is exclusion after all; in fact it is plentiful and in a form of wretchedness that eludes all description. Anyone who dares to visit the South American urban *favelas* and gets out alive can give account of this. But even a visit of the neighbourhoods affected by the shutdown of coal mining in Wales may suffice. It needs no empirical investigations. Whoever believes their eyes can see it, in fact in an impressiveness that all explanations fail to convey. (Luhmann 1996: 227)[5]

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5 | My translation from German: »Zur Überraschung aller Wohlgesinnten muß man feststellen, daß es doch Exklusionen gibt, und zwar massenhaft und in einer Art von Elend, *die sich der Beschreibung entzieht.* Jeder, der einen Besuch in den Favelas südamerikanischer Großstädte wagt und lebend wieder herauskommt, kann davon berichten. Aber schon ein Besuch in den Siedlungen, die die Stillegung des Kohlebergbaus in Wales hinterlassen hat, kann davon überzeugen. Es

It is revealing when a constructivist theorist asks the reader to simply ›believe their eyes‹, as if reality was suddenly a more simple, immediate matter. What it actually implies is that Luhmann's approach cannot make sense of the perspectives it excludes. The agency of the excluded, and more specifically the ›absent future‹ in protests and riots, inevitably requires a different frame of analysis.

Research on urban youth and politics in African Studies can contribute significantly to such an approach (e.g. Abbink 2005; Branch and Mampilly 2015; Christiansen, Utas and Vigh, 2006; Christensen and Utas 2008; Diouf 2003; El-Kenz 1996; Vigh 2010; Zghal 1995). Branch and Mampilly (2015: 35), for instance, argue that among the protesting urban underclass, the »horizon for political action is now: it is all or nothing, because faith in the possibility of reform requires faith that the state will follow through on its promises.« Such confidence in the state is largely absent at the urban margins, which makes voicing political demands rather absurd for them, and helps to explain why their protests are so often interlaced with looting. Just as political and economic exclusion seem to go hand-in-hand – at least from the perspective of the excluded (Branch and Mampilly 2015: 7) – upending the political order inevitably constitutes a rare opportunity to seize the material goods that usually remain out of reach under that order. Getting something tangible and material out of a protest may be prioritised over making future-related political demands, not just amongst the poorest rioters but equally amongst those who have lost hope that the political order is going to change. As in the England riots, rioters will join the carnivalesque exceptionality not to seek political inclusion, but to settle accounts from the past or to cash in on the present. If the political system, in Luhmann's (2002: 169) words, functions as the governor (*Statthalter*) of an unknown tomorrow, the English rioters simply enjoyed their limited control over the now (if only for five days). As the Guinean case indicates, the future becomes much more of a resource among urban marginal youth when political inclusion and exclusion are less distinct and definitive.

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bedarf dazu keiner empirischen Untersuchungen. Wer seinen Augen traut, kann es sehen, und zwar *in einer Eindrücklichkeit, an der die verfügbaren Erklärungen scheitern.*«

GUINEA IN 2009: THE IMMINENT FUTURE

In August 2009, the Guinean military junta ›Conseil National pour la Démocratie et le Développement‹ (CNDD) had been in power for nine months. Their bloodless coup in December 2008, which followed the death of former President Lansana Conté, had been widely applauded by the national population (McGovern 2009). However, criticism and impatience increased among the Guinean public when the junta delayed preparations for the democratic elections which they had promised. Many wondered whether the junta's president Dadis Camara would stick to the transition timeframe and keep his promise not to run for president in the elections. The political climate was tense. Since the 2007 general strike, which had featured countrywide demonstrations and violent clashes on an unprecedented scale (see Engeler 2008), tightly organised youth groups – so-called ›staffs‹, ›clans‹ and ›gangs‹ – had become important mobilisers for contentious politics, rallying masses of underemployed urban youth to join protests, political gatherings and demonstrations in Guinea's capital city Conakry (Philipps 2013a). Politicians were eager to attract large crowds through these groups, be it in an effort to undermine the state's fragile monopoly of power or, conversely, to undergird it. In 2009, different political movements made their proposed political futures seem propitious and accessible to these gangs, clans and staffs, and this future depended notably on President Dadis Camara: the ›Mouvement Dadis Doit Partir‹ (MDDP) proclaimed that ›Dadis has to leave‹, while the ›Mouvement Dadis Doit Rester‹ (MDDR) argued that ›Dadis has to stay‹. Middlemen, shifting between the ghetto and party headquarters, brokered deals between youth groups and politicians. Partisan politics intertwined with ghetto discourses, money handouts and promises for a brighter future. A language of imminent change permeated the urban margins of Conakry. It was believed that, after the 2007 general strike had failed to democratise the country, the coming elections would; and also that the youth would be employed in the state that they were about to capture.

    Junta leader Dadis Camara was the most explicit in seeking the support of Conakry's ›ghetto youth‹. In August 2009 he organised a mass rally at Kaporo Rails, a symbolic site of an earlier state-society conflict in Conakry. He channelled money to 37 leaders of different staffs and clans in Conakry, and gave a passionate speech, in which he declared solidarity with the axis area's ghetto youth: »If they call you thugs,« Camara exclaimed, »me too,

I deem myself a thug!« I attended the rally at Kaporo Rails with Dogg Mayo. One of my first informants, Dogg Mayo was an agitated man in his late twenties, an Islamic Studies student in his final year of university, and the *conseiller* of the staff ›Bunker Family‹. As a *conseiller*, he would, amongst other things, negotiate with middlemen from political parties about whether or not to support them in demonstrations, rallies and in organising protests in their favour. They would sit together, negotiate prices, condemn political corruption and injustice, and assert the need for radical political change. Dogg Mayo thereby occupied a paradoxical position in Conakry's politics. On the one hand, he was a self-proclaimed ghetto youth, proudly representing in sartorial styles, gestures and rap-inspired vocabulary the transnational margins of an urban world, to which many English rioters would probably also count themselves.[6] At the same time, he also transcended these margins because he was also linked to the very politicians at the centre of national power that he despised as the corrupt elite. Dogg Mayo's position thus oscillated between inclusion and exclusion, allowing for an agency »outside of increasingly outmoded laws and regulatory systems«, as Simone (1998: 84) puts it, and bespeaking an urbanity of »nonformalized, creolized, hodgepodged social orders and territories [that] obscure any clear reading of what is going on« (Simone 1998: 83). More specifically, Dogg Mayo's political position represents the connections that were possible within the Guinean context of 2009 between the urban margins and the national political centre. It was through such connections that the political future could become an important resource for youth at the urban margins.

In early August 2009, Dogg Mayo had co-organised Dadis Camara's rally and mobilised the Bunker Family staff to attend his speech. After the speech, Dogg Mayo approached me with an air of absolute confidence.

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6 | Socio-economically marginalised, sometimes ethnically discriminated against, and frequently in conflict with the law, the English rioters shared import-ant characteristics that the Guinean young men I interviewed between 2009 and 2012 mostly used to describe themselves. Both cases of protests and riots were associated with global hip-hop culture (on Guinea, see Philipps 2013a; on England, see Hancox 2011), and rap songs like the UK's Lethal Bizzle song (2007) ›Babylon‹s burning down the Ghetto', which made allusions to the likelihood of urban riots in England four years before 2011, convey the same narratives that Guinea's ghetto youth evoked in interviews.

»I'm telling you, this is someone, a man, who is patriotic! He himself is a *patriot*!! [...] And the transition timeframe that he promised once more: he will respect it. This is someone who is honest!« Interestingly, the president had not mentioned the transition timeframe at all during his speech and had made no remarks concerning his candidacy during the promised elections – Dogg Mayo had made this part up, eager perhaps to pin his hopes on something substantial. But this was in vain: just five days after the event, I looked for Dogg Mayo and met his friends in a crowded bar, all of whom were gathered around a small television set. The evening news was on; Dadis Camara gave another speech, and rumour had it that he would present himself in the presidential elections. Among the young men there seemed to be a sense of disorientation: noise, laughter, loud political comments of all kinds, a venting of frustrations, criticism, fears, all circulating under the corrugated iron roof. Different voices with entirely dissimilar comments: »Fuck the CNDD!« »And if Dadis does *not* run for president, *they* will make him run.« »Nobody has money nowadays. Everybody is scared. I'm scared, I swear.« »I'm leaving, I'm going back to my home village.« Another assured: »It's just the beginning for now, we will follow and see.« I heard that youth had started to put up barricades to block traffic in the adjacent neighbourhood of Bambéto – signalling that anti-government protests were about to start. Somebody asserted: »By God, if I go out on the streets now, the whole neighbourhood of Kaporo Rails will rise up.« All around, politicians' names were mentioned in relation to corruption scandals; numbers were bandied around the room, claiming that the CNDD had seized SOBRAGUI (the national beer brewery) and that the army drank for free ever since its capture of power – owing the brewery 7 billion Guinean Francs (US\$1.5 million). »It's not only Cellou Dallein who ate the Guineans' money. All the ministers, they all ate it.«[7] Another said: »Cellou Dallein is an asshole, a *bastard*.« And yet another: »I'm with Cellou. I'm with Cellou.« »Alpha Condé is an international employee. He's not even married.«[8] Somebody approached me: »Wait, you there, which candidate have you seen who can do something here

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7 | Cellou Dallein is a Guinean opposition politician of the Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée (UFDG). He was a minister under Lansana Conté and is president Alpha Condé's main opponent today.

8 | Alpha Condé is Guinea's current president and a long-time opposition politician heading the Rassemblement du Peuple de Guinée (RPG).

in Guinea? *Who*?« And while I stuttered something about how youth can transform the country, somebody else said: »My father is not even a politician. I haven't been to school. I don't even know politics.«

Later that night, I found Dogg Mayo in front of the television watching Dadis Camara's speech. »I *really* loved this guy,« he confessed. »I loved him in the beginning. But now, with these rumours that he wants to run for president....« He looked at the set: »Now he's talking about the underclass! If he speaks to us about the underclass, we will *shit* on him! You're for the underclass? Then help the underclass!« And when I started emphasising again my amazement at »all these people who are ready to change the country,« Dogg Mayo interrupted me harshly, as if my comment could have implied any sort of doubt:

Oh, we're ready to change this country! If we weren't ready to change – me, whom you see in front of you, if someone gives me money, even if it's 100,000 Guinean Francs [equivalent to US$20 at the time], he hands me a gun with – how do you say? With *ammunition*, I am ready to kill. Now, *wallahi*, I kill. ›Cause this one [gesturing towards Dadis Camara on television] does *not* want us to change. Even if in our lives, there is no more hope; but our children to come: that guy still wants our children to live the same lives as us. He's just gotta fuck himself! We are sick and tired of military regimes. […] Those guys can't do nothing. They don't have any more power than that gang of Lansana Conté.[9] We faced them! And back then, people didn't have guns. […] People will be *very well* prepared this time before taking to the streets.

Indeed, the wave of protests that started that very night in August 2009 can be regarded as the beginning of the end of Dadis Camara's presidency, and later of the CNDD regime itself. Several demonstrations and protests led up to the notorious massacre on 28 September, 2009 by Guinea's security forces, killing at least 150 demonstrators at an opposition rally in Conakry. Isolated internationally and dreaded by Guineans, the junta crumbled due to internal strife. Dadis was later shot and severely injured by his aide, whom he had held responsible for the massacre. The junta's third-in-command, Sékouba Konaté, took power; and Guinea held presidential elections in 2010, and again in 2015.

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9 | Ex-president Lansana Conté ruled Guinea from 1984 to 2008.

Even though the political changes have thus far not improved the livelihoods of Dogg Mayo and his peers, it is crucial here to acknowledge how strongly the rumours about Dadis Camara's plans to run for president seemed to affect the young men in the Kaporo Rails bar, instantaneously causing a diversity of reactions: a young man thinks aloud about moving back to his native village out of fear; a search for new political affiliations begins: who is the politician to trust now? Who has not been corrupt in the past? Given that Conakry's ghetto youth are often depicted as either opportunistic (in that they support the politician who offers them money), merely violent for the fun of it (and for the economic benefits of looting), or ethnically affiliated (to politicians with close ties to their respective neighbourhood), this reaction is remarkable for the heterogeneity of political opinions and its inconclusiveness.

In Luhmann's (2000: 97) terms, the incident constitutes an event that contradicts »previous trusting relationships [and] may lead to a sudden collapse of confidence or trust.« Trust in ›Dadis‹ indeed collapsed and led to overt confusion about the future. Dogg Mayo, after having vented his indignation vis-à-vis the televised image of the president, confesses: »I don't understand, I just don't understand anymore, my brother. I can't understand, I don't know where this is going with this regime. We thought that guy [Dadis Camara] was good.« But the confusion did not last long, as Dogg Mayo simply entered new networks once others failed. Just one week after having organised the rally for the president, he quickly joined the opposition and participated in anti-government demonstrations in late August and September 2009, burning tyres and throwing stones at the police. He was present at the September 28-massacre but escaped unharmed. He claimed to have voted for president Alpha Condé in 2010, the only opposition candidate who had never been part of previous governments. But Condé also betrayed his trust, so he sided with the new opposition, for which he mobilised Kaporo Rails' youth through the networks of Bunker Family. In 2013 Dogg Mayo was still as infuriated by Guinean politics as when I had first met him. He reasserted his hopes of an armed rebellion against the »vampires« who sucked dry the state and continuously emphasised the inevitability of fundamental political change. His thinking about the world around him remained anchored in the future. The future constituted a space of untainted hope, a refuge from the present and, perhaps most importantly, a locus of observation. Perceived from the future, the past lost its powerful grip on reality (»Ahhha! Those fifty years we went through,

that's over!«) and, in contrast to the past, the imagined future confirmed Dogg Mayo's political hopes, independent of whatever individual politicians would concoct. As he said in 2009, »if he [Dadis Camara] accepts positively, we change; if he doesn't accept positively, we will change. Because it must change.« In short, the future's quality resided precisely in the fact that it was untamed by reality and fully manipulable by imagination.

Dogg Mayo in that regard seems to exemplify what young militia-men in neighbouring Guinea-Bissau call *dubriagem* – in French: *se débrouiller* (Vigh 2010). Etymologically, *se débrouiller* is related to *brouillard* (fog) and »indicates a process of gaining clarity whilst moving in an opaque (social) environment« (Vigh 2010: 150). Young militia-men in Guinea-Bissau, Vigh (2010: 151) argues, navigate such opaque environments through »a dual temporality« which interrelates »both the socially *immediate* (present) and the socially *imagined* (future).« Differently from more stable social contexts, where the present constitutes the stable basis from where to think about the future, in the case of Bissau's militias the present is as much clarified by the imagined future as the future is imagined through the given possibilities of the present. Knowing how quickly things can change, the political future is thought of as volatile and manipulable and, therefore, as being susceptible to hopeful imaginations, not least to dissipate the distress, confusion and haze of the present. *Dubriagem*, then, is much more than economic survival; it is »a process of disentanglement from (present and future) confining structures and relations as well as a drawing of a line of flight into an envisioned future« (Vigh 2010: 151).

Summary

This chapter has addressed the uncertain collective future as a key concern and resource of politics (Luhmann 2002; Mitchell 2014). It has inquired into the circumstances in which this becomes a resource for youth at the urban margins, and has thereby turned it into a question of political inclusion and exclusion. I have sketched out two contexts of riots and protests where youth from the urban margins actively destabilised the present political order, yet responded differently to whether their actions aimed at a different future. In the English case from 2011, according to secondary sources the political future remained outside the purview of rioters. The rioters did not voice demands for a better future, and English

politicians did not see the upheavals as being political in nature, mainly because they did not depend on the rioters to access or remain in power. That situation was fundamentally different in the Guinean context of 2009, where both the government and the opposition were eager to harness Conakry's urban margins for popular support. Dogg Mayo and his peers could develop political leverage on the basis of an uncertain political future and comparatively inclusive political networks. As mobilisers and participants in political rallies, demonstrations, protests and riots, they would call for imminent political change as *their* project, and they hoped that their actions would tangibly improve their personal lives. Finally, in the dynamic and quickly changing political context of Conakry in 2009, the envisioned future significantly illuminated their understanding of an unstable present. As a utopian space of manipulable realities, the future provided orientation where the present proved either too intangible or too grim to work with on their way forward.

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