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GUINEA IN 2008 : THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

GUINEA'S POLITICAL TRANSITION SEEMS NEVER ENDING. IN 2008, STRIKES, RIOTS AND CLASHES AFFECTED COUNTRY AND STATE. IN THE LIGHT OF THE EVENTS OF 2006 AND 2007, IT IS A QUESTION OF INTERPRETATION WHETHER THE « REVOLUTION » FINALLY CAME TO A CLOSE IN 2008 OR IF IT IS STILL GOING ON. WITHIN AND BEYOND THESE INTERPRETATIONS, THE GUINEAN MILITARY PLAY AN IMPORTANT BUT HARDLY PREDICTABLE ROLE. HOWEVER DESCRIBED, THE POLITICAL SCENE LOOKS LIKE A PALTRY THEATRE AND GUINEAN CITIZENS, TIRED OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES, ARE MORE AND MORE IMPATIENT.

« L'État, c'est moi. Le gouvernement, c'est moi. La justice, c'est moi¹. »

The year 2008 has been a turbulent one for Guinean politics². To understand the current volatility, one needs to go back to the 2006-2007 events when a federation of trade unions, the Union syndicale des travailleurs de Guinée – Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée (USTG-CNTG) called for several strikes, proving to be, for the first time since independence, an effective force for oppositional mobilisation³. Issues were economic but also political. Most demonstrations were put down by the military. Some leading trade unions figures were temporary arrested and mistreated⁴. Conté eventually accepted the nomination of a Prime minister of consensus, but he appointed one of his loyal followers, Eugène Camara, in February 2007. The very same night, violent unrests started; during the following days, state buildings were destroyed, civilians and soldiers marauded, and people were killed as a result of the indiscriminate violence of the security forces. Conté imposed a state of emergency, which was a call to loot for bandits, militaries and policemen. Finally, on 26 February, he gave in and appointed Lansana

1. Lansana Conté quoted in « Fin de récréation ? », <www.jeuneafrique.com>, 7 January 2007.



Kouyaté as his new Prime minister. Kouyaté, a trained diplomat, enjoyed the support of the trade unions and the Conseil national des organisations de la société civile guinéenne (CNOSCG). Commenting on these events, International Crisis Group wrote that « [t]he outcome of the crisis, the appointment of a head of government from a list put forward by those involved in the social movement, looked like an exemplary victory for the people over a totally discredited power – a real revolution »⁵. Mike McGovern also optimistically concluded that, after this victory, « conditions seem propitious for change in the middle or long term »⁶. Therefore, 2007 had brought about promises of political change – however, the subsequent events seem to suggest that these were nothing else than a short interruption in Conté’s style of governing; compared with the « February Revolution » of 2007, the events of 2008 seem to be the inversion of popular power, a presidential counterstrike. This paper suggests two interpretations of the recent events that might seem, at first sight, mutually exclusive. The first interpretation proposes that the revolution failed. The second argues, that the initiated political transformation nevertheless did carry on in 2008, with different means, on different scales and with different intentions. Within and beyond these two different interpretations the Guinean military plays an important but hardly predictable role.

THE TIDE OF EVENTS IN 2008

2008 started eventfully for Guinean citizens and political elite alike. With no prior discussion with Lansana Kouyaté, his Prime Minister since February 2007, President Conté dismissed his Communication Minister Justin Morel Junior on the 4th of January 2008. Morel Junior, who had entered the cabinet appointed by Kouyaté in March 2007, had been involved in the development of more open media and the expansion of the mobile phone network and he stood as a symbol of the democratisation and its success, however limited. Conté reproached Morel Junior with failing to ensure that all state media broadcast his end-of-the-year speech⁷. In this address, Conté had called Kouyaté’s government « a disappointment ». President Conté eventually appointed a new Communication minister, Issa Condé, a loyal follower of his.

Immediately after the announcement of the dismissal, angry youth blockaded several streets in Conakry and its suburbs; stones were thrown at some all-terrain vehicles, symbols of the « corrupt » elites. Riots and demonstrations ensued with cries of « No to the return of the old system ! We do not want the corrupts back⁸ ! » The police and military suppressed the demonstrations brutally, and at least one person was reportedly killed. The following day,

Conakry was quiet. Many shops remained closed, only a few taxis were on the road and transport to the interior of the country was largely closed down. The news spread quickly through the country though, and family and friends throughout Guinea called Conakry for information. Demonstrations in the cities of Kankan and Labé followed, and skirmishes apparently took place in N'Zérékoré. The next day, the USTG-CNTG announced a general strike for the 10th of January, demanding negotiations on the political level. Trade unions warned that Conté's interference in Kouyaté's cabinet was against both the letter and the spirit of the agreement signed in January 2007. They demanded Morel's restoration to his position. Kouyaté met with union leaders and civil society organizations, and trade unions at last called off the strike – more exactly, they postponed it to the 31st of March.

The next few weeks were given over to bread and games: the national TV channel Radio Télévision Guinée (RTG) celebrated the new Communication minister, thanking him for the donation of a generator, henceforth enabling RTG to show the games of the Africa Cup of Nations 2008. Electricity was delivered during the opening football game between Ghana and Guinea in January, clearly a move to please the youth, some of them sarcastically commenting that they should talk more about football than about politics⁹.

On the anniversary of one of the deadliest days of 2007 protests, Guineans gathered peacefully in churches and mosques to pray for the victims. In February and March 2008, rumors circulated that Conté had gone to seek medical treatment in Switzerland. The difficulties between President Conté and Prime minister Kouyaté continued when the latter imprisoned Chantal Cole, a businesswoman closely related to Conté.

2. This text was finalised at the beginning of December, a few weeks before President Conté died. An appendix was attached in January 2008 to cover recent developments. The author wishes to thank P. Assef, T. Hagmann, K. Heitz, B. Korf and the three anonymous reviewers for helpful comments.

3. For background information on the 2006-2007 events, see O. Georg, « Fin de règne sans fin en Guinée », *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 2006, p. 15; M. McGovern, « Janvier 2007 – Sékou Touré est mort », *Politique africaine*, n° 107, October 2007, p. 125-145.

4. Conté confronted them with a direct threat: « I am going to kill you all, I am a soldier, I have already killed people », in International Crisis Group (ICG), *Guinea: Change or Chaos*, Africa Report, n° 121, 14 February 2007, p. 7.

5. ICG, *Guinea: Change on hold*, Africa Briefing n° 49, 8 November 2007, p. 2.

6. M. McGovern, « Janvier 2007... », art. cit., p. 145.

7. « One Conakry, two Lansanas », *Africa Confidential*, vol. 49, n° 3, 2008, p. 9.

8. Radio France Internationale, « Tensions à Conakry après le limogeage d'un ministre », 5 January 2008.

9. Author's discussions with four young residents of Conakry, 20 January 2008.



Some weeks later, trade unions cancelled the strike due at the end of March 2008. High prices for rice imports made life during that time increasingly expensive, and possibly affected popular support for Kouyaté: « we thought it was Conté who was at the root of our problems and that with the appointment of Kouyaté, everything would settle. But unfortunately we realize that neither one of them can deliver happiness », commented one Guinean interviewed by Irin¹⁰.

President Conté interpreted the situation on his own terms and fired Kouyaté in May, replacing him with Ahmed Tidiane Souaré, who had served as minister of Mines and Geology (2004-2006) and of Education and Science (2006-2007). Despite a few demonstrations in localities in Kouyaté's region of origin and in some suburbs of Conakry, the situation remained relatively calm. Only a few days later, the dismissal of the minister of Defence and commander-in-chief Mamadou Bailo Diallo stirred tension within the armed forces; shots were reported around barracks in Conakry and in the country.

President Conté went on dismissing officials throughout the year, to such an extent he seems to have lost track, appointing different persons to the same office at nearly the same time. Guinean observers took this as a sign of an ongoing « battle of elephants » fought between the competing clans in Conté's entourage, as well as an indication of « the President's lack of control over the situation »¹¹.

Following the civil unrests in early 2007, transparent, democratic elections had been agreed. For that reason, a Commission électorale nationale indépendante (Ceni) was established. With support of the UN Development Program and the EU, elections were originally scheduled for June 2007, but were repeatedly delayed – in November 2008, they were once more delayed to 2009 or even 2010, with the then-Prime minister Ahmed Tidiane Souaré arguing that elections could not be held until a broader « national consensus » had been built¹².

Throughout the rest of the year, different trade-unions launched sectorial, small-scale strikes. Riots broke out in various cities, in protest against the lack of basic services such as electricity and water. The latter were mostly organized by malcontent youth and often resulted in clashes with the security forces. No surprise, then, that Guineans kept expressing their concern for the state of current political affairs¹³.

FAILED REVOLUTION...

One way of reading the situation is to see recent political developments in Guinea as a « failed revolution ». According to this view, President Conté never changed his political behaviour, his style of ruling. As early as June 2007, Conté said in an interview, « I am the boss, the others are my subordinates »¹⁴, a clear sign that, for him, nothing had changed. The sacking of various ministers reflects this attitude as well as his capacity to bide his time ; Conté dismissed Kouyaté as soon as he lost the support of the trade unions and the population. International Crisis Group concluded accordingly that, « Conté assumes his irresponsibility so well that he has ended up convincing many of his fellow citizens that he can be both head of state and completely irresponsible »¹⁵. Accusations of policy failure were almost automatically directed towards Kouyaté and his government, and Conté characteristically declared, « [it] is a good thing to have a Prime minister to take the blows instead of the president »¹⁶.

A number of other central episodes support the « failed revolution » interpretation. One of them is that, although ex-Prime minister Kouyaté had promised to build up a government with new faces in March 2007, many senior civil servants from the old administration found important positions in the new administration, particularly as *préfets* or governors¹⁷. In addition, Conté's former ministers met regularly throughout, and it appears that they successfully organized resistance to the shifts initiated by political opposition groups and trade union leaders. The eventual take over of Ahmed Tidjane Souaré, a loyal follower of President Conté, as Prime minister is a sign of Conté's success in bringing the old guard back in. Power therefore remained unequally distributed because Conté and his entourage continued to pull the strings. Furthermore, President Conté remained the constitutional leader of Guinea ; he had to sign all decrees and could thus easily stall government action. One should also recall that the position of Prime minister is not mentioned in the constitution and any incumbent has only the powers that the President

10. Irin, « End of fuel subsidy increases economic woes », 1 April 2008.

11. A. T. Camara, « Comment Lansana Conté fragilise ses Premiers ministres! », <www.guineenews.org>, 3 August 2008.

12. See Irin, « Guinea: Political players differ over further election delays », 5 December 2008.

13. Author's conversations in Conakry, October 2008.

14. Agence France-Presse, « Je suis le chef, les autres sont mes subordonnés », 15 June 2007.

15. ICG, *Guinea: Change...*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

16. Agence France-Presse, « Je suis le chef... », *art. cit.*

17. ICG, *Guinea: Change...*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.



delegates to him. Behind the scenes, different actors have been influencing the President, especially his four wives and their respective coteries. All of them try to consolidate their influence on the «old man» and they do not act in isolation, but in complex networks of kin, ethnic relations and business connections.

However, the weaknesses of Kouyaté and his cabinet were not solely the result of the influence of President Conté and his entourage, and Kouyaté did come under the criticism of those involved in the movement for change. He was for instance reproached with favoring his ethnic clientele, the Mandinka group. Thus, in an open letter to the Prime minister, the trade union leaders insisted that appointments at the Central bank, the *préfectures* and governorships had been made on the basis of «kinship» rather than competence¹⁸. This letter signaled that the «February revolutionaries» were no longer in full agreement. Kouyaté's difficulties in bringing trade-unions, civil society organizations and political parties to the negotiating table in January 2008 were a result of these growing disagreements and a proof of his inability to launch a real national dialogue about the future of Guinea. Only through such a dialogue could he have put the responsibility of economic and political change on different shoulders, gained real legitimacy and avoided his dismissal in May 2008. A famous anecdote illustrates how Kouyaté increasingly came to be seen: his decision to build the statue of an elephant built on the Dixinn-Hamdalaye road, in Conakry, in January 2008, officially as a gesture of support for the national football team during the Africa Cup of Nations, was widely seen as a sign of an ethnocentrist attempt to restore the image of Sékou Touré and his Parti démocratique de Guinée (PDG) – like Kouyaté, Touré hails from the ethnic Mandinka group and the PDG's regalia had been an elephant¹⁹.

Trade-unions were part of the problems facing Kouyaté, too: after the events of 2006 and 2007, their leaders found themselves heading a mass movement increasingly political in nature. In January 2008 trade-unions were not able to alter the analogies of possible strikes with violent and dangerous demonstrations; different government officials compared the strikes with «war»; some called it an «atomic bomb», to be launched by the trade unions²⁰. Popular fear of uncontrollable marauding demonstrators grew accordingly and they lost the support they had long enjoyed.

When President Conté replaced Kouyaté with Souaré, trade union representatives were shocked. One of their leaders, Ibrahima Fofana, said, «We do not understand how the president could have chosen one of the old guard»²¹. But disagreements within trade unions weakened their position and signs of internal divisions were manifest during an all-day meeting of the union leaders in Conakry on 22 May 2008. A member of a union based in the provincial

capital of Kindia said, « Even if the secretary-generals of the unions don't want to go on strike, we, the union members do »²². But finally, no strikes have been reported.

... OR UNFINISHED REVOLUTION ?

The current situation in Guinea could also be interpreted as a slow, but steady march towards political change and durable democratization. During the « February Revolution », Guineans demonstrated their enthusiasm and desire for political reforms, that is an accountable president and a democratic system with a Prime minister, who would be more than the president's jumping jack. Writing soon after, Mike McGovern optimistically commented that the Guinean population was ready for political change for the better²³. The main actors or initiators of these political transformations, he observed, were the trade unions, standing for a political alternative rather than for a simple replacement of the old guard by a new generation from the same elite. Additionally, the vote of the National assembly against the prolongation of the state of exception in February 2007 could be read as a sign of internal shifts within the entourage of President Conté. Therefore there have been shifts within and beyond the old-established power elite.

After the events of 2007, trade unions established new local branches and gained new members, building up support throughout the country, thus creating a level of political awareness beyond ethnic affiliations. Therefore, while opposition parties are often seen as strongly related to ethnic groups²⁴, trade unions are seen as much closer to « national » ideas. The various, smaller strikes of 2008 can also be seen as a continuation of the revolutionary momentum of 2007. Thus, the teachers' union went on strike in June 2008, asking among others for compliance with the decrees taken in January and February 2007 for the modernization of the education system and for salary increases²⁵.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

19. A. Bakr, « Asanavie à belle-vue, syli so tai... », *Le Lynx*, n° 824, January 2008, p. 3.

20. Author's interviews, Conakry, 8-10 January 2008.

21. See Irin, « Guinea : appointment of new PM "violates" union agreement », 23 May 2008.

22. See Irin, « Guinea : Appointment... », art. cit.

23. M. McGovern, « Janvier 2007... », art. cit.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 128 ; P. Chambers, « Guinée. Le prix d'une stabilité à court terme », *Politique africaine*, n° 94, June 2004, p. 130.

25. N. Baldé, « Après les militaires, les enseignants "réclament" des sous : une autre grève est annoncée à partir du 19 juin », <www.guineenews.org>, 10 June 2008.



In August and September 2008, most of the health care workers shut down medical provision in and around Conakry, asking for back pay, salary increase and promotions²⁶. Therefore, trade unions have continued to impact politics and their politicisation did persist, even though on a different scale – the 2008 protests only included several minor groups in different strikes and did not have the same impact on the interior as nation-wide strikes in 2007.

Along with these «regular» strikes, mostly young people carried on demonstrating during 2008. On the evenings of 8 and 9 September 2008, different boroughs of Conakry were barricaded by youth protesting against month-long electricity blackouts²⁷. On 3 November 2008 again, roads were blocked with logs and burning tyres in protest against high fuel prices – as a result, public transport operated on reduced levels and shops remained closed in Guinea's capital. In the interior, people were no calmer. For example in November 2008, residents of Boké, protesting against the lack of basic services in their communities, blocked the railway, the central transport link for mining companies²⁸. Altogether the Guinean people's struggle for political change has gone on and Guineans have time and again expressed their grievances.

At the outset of 2008, Kouyaté said «We have changed the ways of doing things» and, elsewhere, «Guinea is on the move»²⁹. On both the economic and political fronts, he was optimistic. At that time, he claimed that disagreements with President Conté were under control and that negotiations with the leaders of the political opposition and other key actors were going on. Despite the subsequent changes and Conté's removal of opposition ministers, the events of 2007 had indeed opened of political dialogue of a kind, which included different stakeholders. Therefore, parties, trade unions and civil society organizations jointly agreed on the postponement of the important legislative elections.

Economically, the discovery of uranium in the forest region and of possible offshore oil reserves in 2007 fostered the interest of international corporations in Guinea. Several mining conventions were organized in 2008 and seemed to promise economic improvements and political progress. International actors remained involved, *e. g.* financially support the preparation and realization of the legislative elections.

BEYOND AND WITHIN : THE MILITARY

Not only the different trade unions launched small-scale strikes, the military did not keep quiet either. In May 2008 soldiers demanding the pay-offs promised by ex-Prime minister Kouyaté started rioting in three military camps

across Conakry. They entered a four-day standoff with the loyalist presidential guard during which 101 people were injured and 2 killed. The army has long demanded the settlement of unpaid salaries – in May 2007 militaries had gone on a looting spree in Conakry and other garrison towns. In May 2008 disagreements erupted between different units and ranks of the Guinean army, opposing powerful loyalist units like the presidential guard (Bérets rouges), the gendarmerie and members of the Compagnie mobile d'intervention et de sécurité (Cmis), a police force, to disorganized and badly trained infantry troops. Disagreements between older and younger army members added further fuel. Accordingly, some younger military officers demanded that all top commanders from the armed forces be discharged. This ambivalent situation within the security forces causes uncertainty and fear among the population. At the same time, they were seen as nearly the only force in a position to bring to an end Conté's unpopular regime: « if the military wants to get rid of President Conté, they can do it, but they shouldn't involve us and they should do it without violence », said one Guinean interviewed by Irin³⁰. However, following talks in May 2008, the government agreed to pay outstanding salaries. Furthermore, the president granted promotions. Two weeks after the soldiers' protest, policemen started demonstrating in the Guinean capital over back pay. Soldiers were sent to fight these police strikers, shots were fired and casualties were reported on both sides. The clash between the military and the police was strongly criticized by the population, a commentator on a popular Internet page calling it an indicator of the « death » of the Guinean state³¹. Furthermore discussions on the loyalty of the military proceeded. « Les enfants de Conté », as Guinean citizens often call militaries, have often been seen as loyal only to Conté's ethnic group, the Soussou, out of which most are popularly seen to come from³². Indeed, one analyst has been so far as to describe the Guinean army as an « ethnic gang docilely serving General Lansana Conté and the Soussou-dominated elite »³³. This statement is a bit

26. See Irin, « Guinea: Medical services paralysed for day two of health strike », 9 September 2008.

27. See Irin, « Guinea: Youths pledge continued demonstrations until lights come on », 10 September 2008; Irin, « Guinea: Strike suspended, health workers back on job », 18 September 2008.

28. See Irin, « Guinea: mining communities will not let up "despite repression" », 4 November 2008.

29. C. Y. Seck, Interview Lansana Kouyate, *Jeune Afrique*, n° 2450-2451, 23 December 2007 – 5 January 2008, p. 95-96.

30. See Irin, « Guinea: Mutinous soldiers stand down after pay-off », 30 May 2008.

31. M. I. Sory, « La disparition évidente de l'État guinéen », <www.aminata.com>, 10 July 2008.

32. Author's conversation in Conakry, 1 October 2008.

33. M. S. Camara, « From military politization to militarization of power in Guinea-Conakry », *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, vol. 28, 2000, p. 324.



excessive, though there is no doubt that ethnic affiliation plays an important role within the networks that structure the armed forces. Still, the recent mutinies have undoubtedly complexified the situation within the armed forces, possibly weakening the grasp of the Soussou.

Further current military issues are the border conflicts with neighbouring Sierra Leone in the Forest Region. Since 1998 Guinean military troops have been positioned in the city of Yenga, which is disputed between Guinea and Sierra Leone³⁴. In October 2008 the situation there deteriorated and the Freetown authorities demanded the return of Yenga to Sierra Leone by 2009³⁵. The town lies on a frequently travelled road between Sierra Leone and Guinea, and is a booming market place, especially for drugs³⁶. Several hundred Guinean troops with tanks and heavy weapons are said to guard this extra-state market. A clash between Guinean and Sierra Leonean soldiers is not impossible and could destabilize the border region, the basis for a longer-term problem for the Guinean state.

Therefore, the Guinean army, with its different units, ethnic affiliations, and political and economic entanglements, plays an important but opaque role. On several occasions during 2008, rumours of a military coup spread in Conakry and the country. Indeed, such a coup seems quite possible, though its leaders could belong either to the old guard or pursuers of «revolution».

The 2007 «February Revolution» and the ensuing government reshuffle and power struggles initially suggested that Guinea was undergoing fundamental political change. At the time of writing (end of November 2008), the situation appears much more ambiguous: Conté's political counterstrike seems to have succeeded, and the political alternative has failed. The promised transformations did not completely stop however: trade unions are still key actors and mobilise efficiently. And the youth have not stopped protesting and complaining about their unsatisfactory living conditions. These are, indeed, signs of an unfinished revolution. However, riots – tumultuous clashes rather more than coordinated strikes – give rise to fears and uncertainties not only for the residents in Conakry. President Conté, who was born in the 1930s, is seriously ill; his appearance on the occasion of Independence Day attested to his poor health. But his succession remains undecided. What actors will play the leading roles is difficult to say yet. Right now it seems to be the old guard and/or the army. The latter, shaken as it has been by the recent mutinies, will be unpredictable and could easily destabilize the country. However, the increasing grievances of Guinean citizens also suggest that parts of the population could follow a charismatic leader and fight for political transformations. It is hard to say who this leader could be. Events of the past years have shown

that it was trade union leaders with a national, not ethnic, and not the opposition parties who could mobilize the population. In any case, the forthcoming legislative elections will be as crucial as the orientation of the army and regional and social dynamics ■

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APPENDIX – 12 JANUARY 2009

On the evening of the 22 December 2008, after 24 years in power, President Lansana Conté passed away – it seems as if only death could remove Conté, after all, an indication of his uncanny mastery of Guinean politics. Only hours later, on the 23, a group of militaries took power in a bloodless coup. The military junta, organised in a Conseil national pour la démocratie et le développement (CNDD), announced the dissolution of the government. The day after, the CNDD declared they had chosen (by lot) Captain Moussa Dadis Camara as their leader. On the very same day, Camara declared himself the new President of the country. A week after the coup, he appointed as the new Prime minister Kabiné Komara, a banker who had been among the nominees of the trade unions in 2007. President Camara quickly vowed to hold presidential elections in 2010, insisting he would not run for office.

While few figures of the political opposition have taken a public stand so far, Guinean trade union and civil society leaders seem to perceive the newly installed military junta as the best chance for change – the nomination of Komara has clearly been a gesture in their direction³⁷. To this day, no demonstrations, clashes or gunshots have been reported. Nevertheless, two weeks after the coup, several high-ranking officers, including the former head of staff of the armed forces, General Diarra Camara, were arrested³⁸, apparently under

34. Colonial or pre-colonial demarcations legitimize each country's claims. Author's interview in Conakry, October 2008.

35. I. Tarawallie, « Koroma, Conté, Sirleaf to discuss Yenga », <www.allAfrica.com>, 23 October 2008.

36. Author's interview in Conakry, October 2008.

37. See Irin, « Guinea: Civil society looks to junta for break from past », 30 December 2008.

38. Y. B. Sylla, « Exclusif: plusieurs officiers supérieurs arrêtés par la junte militaire! », <www.guineenews.org>, 6 January 2008.



suspicion that they were planning a counter-coup. The former head of staff of the armed forces, General Diarra Camara, was detained.

As has lately become the norm with coups in Africa, international organisations have condemned the CNDD's take over, and Guinean authorities have been suspended from the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) and the African Union (AU). Most of the neighboring countries expressed their concern with the developments in Guinea, but President Wade of Senegal expressed his full support for the new president and the military junta. The EU (including France) said it would not suspend aid but asked for elections to be held as soon as possible. The United States suspended assistance outside of humanitarian aid and programs supporting the democratic process.

Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, the new Guinean president, is 44-year old, a Christian from the minority Guerze/Kpelle ethnic group, from the Guinée forestière (*préfecture* of Lola). He joined the Guinean army in the 1990s and was trained in Germany³⁹. Under suspicion of a coup attempt, he was jailed for some time in the mid-2000s, which made him a popular man among the lower ranking soldiers who were key in the mutinies of 2007 and 2008. It is still difficult to understand the dynamics behind the coup. Captain Dadis Camara certainly has an outsider profile: his age and junior rank confirm that the military hierarchies have been muddled over the last years, and he has publicly marked his dislike of General Diarra Camara, a close associate of Conté. A new generation might be on the rise, at least in the armed forces, and it is encouraging that trade union leaders seem positive about Captain Camara. But his entourage, the workings of the CNDD and its connections to the many segments of Conté's old guard, but also to opposition politicians, are not known – it is thus not clear whether the CNDD can initiate a real political alternative. The coup confirms, if need be, that power in Guinea lies with the armed forces.

2008 ended up being the last year of President Conté's resilient regime. Conté's rather successful political counter-attack left a rather confused scene, and the military stepped in. It remains to be seen whether the legislative and presidential elections that have been announced will take place, how the issue of ethnicity will fare in this new situation and whether they will stimulate the political scene and prevent the routinisation of a new military regime.

39. A. T. Camara, « Exclusif: qui est Moussa Dadis Camara, le nouveau président de la Guinée ? », <www.guineenews.org>, 26 December 2008.