Chapter 4

Contested Transnational Spaces

Debating Emigrants' Citizenship and Role in Guinean Politics

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Introduction

> They have no idea what they are talking about – they have no right to speak to us like that. They are not Guineans! (Forécariah, February 2007)

Such comments were commonly heard in Guinea during February 2007, when a wave of national strikes brought the country to a standstill and, once again, to the verge of a national crisis. 'They' referred to Guineans living abroad and voicing their opinions over the radio concerning recent events in their country of origin. In Forécariah, a small town in coastal Guinea, 'they' were usually referred to as *ressortissants Guinéens* – Guineans living abroad. The word *ressortissant* indicates someone who has left his or her place of origin to make a living in the capital city or elsewhere, and in this specific context, someone who went abroad. 'Us', on the other hand, were the local listeners, people assembled around a radio at home or in a street-side cafe – and implicitly all Guineans in a country that had experienced increasing economic hardship and political turmoil throughout the last decade.

The debates over the rights and duties of Guineans living abroad took place against a background of mounting political tension between Guinea's government and trade unions. The unions were protesting against declining living conditions due to failing economic policies and gross economic mismanagement of the country's abundant resources. From 2006 to early 2007, these economically motivated demonstrations evolved into demands for a personnel change in government and profound reforms of economic and political policy.[1] In a context of heated local debates about the national strikes and rising tensions countrywide, a growing perception of a dichotomy between the local population and Guineans living abroad could clearly be detected. The people discussing such matters even accepted and promoted the idea of denying 'them' Guinean citizenship.

What were the motivations and implications of this demand? What were the commentators truly saying when they asserted that Guineans abroad did not possess the right to express opinions on the political situation of their home country? These leading questions guide this chapter's investigation into the transnational public space that Guineans have created between their country of origin and new places of settlement. While the contested domain in this example is the right and duty of political participation, it is also an integral part of the larger transnational space created by migrants from and local communities within Guinea. Therefore, the political debates on the participation of *ressortissants* and their particular responsibilities are based on the general negotiations concerning the actual and desired relations between the local population and those living abroad.

After briefly considering the Guinean transnational community's establishment and its increased possibilities for participation in the political life of its country of origin, I will examine how one particular community in that home country reacted to such outside participation. Most studies of transnational communities focus on the political activities of emigrants, but here I am interested in how those 'at home' debated issues related to the political opinions and demands of migrants abroad. I present three different phases of this debate that spanned several months and focused on various aspects of political engagement: (1) notions of the *ressortissants* as the Guinean people's ambassadors to the international community; (2) the question of whether being absent from the country constitutes a negation of the *ressortissants*' Guinean nationality; and (3) the perception that those who live abroad dominate national politics to the detriment of those living in Guinea. Though I separate these three phases for the purposes of analysis, they are in fact highly interdependent. Taken together, they reveal the ambiguous stance that Guineans living at home take towards the Guinean transnational community in general and towards their rights and duties as political actors, and hence as citizens, in particular.

A Transnational Community's Political Participation: Considerations for Guinea

The term 'transnational community' has gained prominence in the social sciences since advances in the globalization of technology, mobility, migration and political discourse have established an ever evolving web of connections transcending the borders and boundaries of the nation state. In the analysis, some have been identified as diasporas – collectives of people residing outside of their country of origin due to forced migration, establishing new lives in new places but using the country of origin as the main reference for their individual and collective identities. Such foundations may lead to a permanent politicization of the collective identity into a diaspora.

Aihwa Ong (2003) and Rogers Brubaker (2005) warn against the analytical conflation of 'transnational communities' and 'diaspora' that is largely due to the expanding use of the latter term. 'Diaspora' is used to designate a politically motivated community in exile, whereas 'transnational' denotes communities that originate from increased mobility and migration more extensive than an expulsion of one particular group. I support Ong's contention that these diverse transnational communities should not be identified collectively as politically motivated and also, implicitly, as dissidents opposed to the government of their country of origin.

Processes termed 'transnational' are not new today, nor were they new when countries such as Guinea became independent. Many authors argue that the intensity of the migratory, social, economic and political processes occurring across and beyond national spaces should be distinguished from previous processes of migration (see Appadurai 1991; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Faist 2000). In recent years, these heterogeneous groups, subsumed under the collective term 'transnational communities', have come under scientific scrutiny with regard to their economic ties to their places of origin, for example in national or hometown (development) associations. That research has laid the groundwork for the consideration of their political (and advocacy) engagement in both the hosting societies and the countries of origin (M. Smith 1994; Portes 1996; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Itzigsohn 2000; Bauböck 2003). Transnational communities' conflict-fuelling or peace-building activities and influences in countries suffering war and civil strife have been studied (Sheffer 2003; Prikkalainen and Abdile 2009; Hoehne et al. 2010; Schlee and Schlee 2012). Such examples highlight collective activities by otherwise potentially unconnected people, all engaged in creating a transnational political space that links communities abroad with their home country. Just as hometown associations are established in communities abroad, so too are chapters of political parties, with party politics and election campaigns taking place in several countries at once. In response, the 'sending countries' attempt to influence their emigrants living permanently abroad by extending citizenship, electoral and other sociopolitical benefits to them (see Wang 1993; R. Smith 2003;). Itzigsohn (2000: 1127) claims that this highly institutionalized political space where migrants engage is what shapes the present-day era of migration as a whole.

This proclaimed new era of transnational migration does not mean that political engagement beyond the borders of a given country is a recent phenomenon. The colonial period established important institutional ties in this context. In the Guinean colony, direct political representation in the French parliament began with the Fourth Republic, whose constitution had been drafted in collaboration with political leaders in France's West African colonies between 1944 (the Brazzaville Declaration) and 1946, when the constitution went into effect. At the same time, the colony also established territorial councils, to which some

members were appointed by the governor and others elected by select groups of colonial subjects (Chafer 2002: 55ff.).[2] Although political participation during the end of the colonial period may have been reserved for the elites and taken place only in colonial centres or in Paris, these efforts were closely observed and discussed among the broader population (cf. Schmidt 2005).

Colonies, the *métropole* and regional institutions such as the Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF) struggled to deal with the mobility of politicians and the electorate, elections being the only form of political participation that was possible until political parties were founded starting in 1948. Some members of parliament or the territorial council represented a constituency from which they did not originate. Questions about whether voters who were eligible to vote within Guinea could participate in elections while residing in other colonies – and whether they would vote for their Guinean council member or that of their colony of current residence – cannot be easily answered, given the many transformations of the AOF after World War II. Additionally, with respect to the mobility of people in administration and politics at the time, Charles concludes that by 1954, just four years before the country's independence, Guinean colonial politics had been delocalized and 'gravitated' around the centres of Conakry, Dakar and Paris (Charles 1997: 103–104).

The movement of Guinean politicians, traders and other professionals within West Africa and beyond did not stop with independence. In fact, during the so-called First Republic (1958–84) Guinea experienced several waves of emigration caused by the lack of economic prospects and political suppression that sometimes assumed an ethnic character, particularly targeting members of the demographically largest ethnic group, the FulBe, called Peul in Guinea.[3] From this period a network of Guineans emerged across West Africa and beyond, held together by shared experiences and sometimes engaging in oppositional politics, such as founding political parties – a forbidden activity in Guinea at that time. The government publicly shunned emigrants and officially limited their rights to political participation. Extended family networks were maintained, however, enabling Guineans at home to profit from the earnings of those living abroad. Kaba (1977: 40) suggests that in the 1970s, basic medical services that typically were available only abroad were domestically affordable only to those Guineans who had financial connections to migrant family members. Thus, economic ties and political engagement between home and abroad are by no means a new phenomenon. However, new technologies of travel and communication have considerably intensified and strengthened the ties between Guineans living in the country and the *ressortissants.*

The *ressortissants Guinéens* are a very heterogeneous group. Some of them have their roots in political exile: they or their parents were forced to leave the country due following political prosecution during the First Republic under Guinea's first post-independence government. In later years, during the Second

Republic (1984–2008), economic (and educational) reasons seem to have been what motivated many Guineans to move abroad even as some of the earlier exiles were returning. Most recently, economic hardship and the search for greater sociopolitical stability have pushed many to emigrate. These are people from heterogeneous backgrounds, with or without formal education, substantial capital or international (family) connections.[4] Taken together, Guineans abroad do not represent a coherent group from any perspective. Some stay in touch with their family and friends in Guinea and can afford to provide a certain level of economic support. Some take an active interest in politics and even become engaged in political parties that have functioning chapters abroad. Though the latter are certainly not the largest group of Guineans abroad, their activities become highly visible in various media outlets, as will be discussed here.

Many studies of migrants establishing transnational communities foreground the intricate role these communities can play in local, regional or international politics, usually framing migrants' ties to their countries of origin in a political context in the form of motivation for migration, questions of legal status in the host country and so on. These migrants can become further politicized in times of crisis and prompt a new engagement with the country as a whole, the national government or other migrants of the same origin. Opposition to politics in the home country may prompt such revived political engagement. Indeed, oppressive practices of governance can create an atmosphere that allows dissenting parties to thrive abroad, as members of the transnational community fundraise and organize public events to initiate political communication with counterparts in the sending country. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004: 1026) argue that it is migrants' experiences with multiple legal and political cultures that frame their points of reference and result in demands for political or legal changes in their countries of origin, thus giving the impression that their engagement is usually critical of, if not overtly oppositional to, the government in place.

Studies by Guarnizo, Portes and Haller (2003), Ong (1996) and M. Smith (1994) indicate that migrants' political engagement, whether directed at host governments or at their countries of origin, is very heterogeneous and not necessarily counterhegemonic or oppositional. Strong supporters of the home government can be found among politically active segments of the transnational community. In 2006/07, both the major opposition parties of Guinea and the then ruling Parti de l'Unité et du Progrès had party chapters in cities abroad that hosted large groups of Guinean *ressortissants*. Because of their great diversity, their political engagements require context-specific examination. The discussion of such political engagements presupposes that these activities are recognized by the government and the local populations, and appreciated or contested from a position of political (party) convictions.

In Guinea, popular knowledge has it that about one third of the country's population emigrated during the First Republic. After the death of Sékou Touré

in 1984, the new government under President Lansana Conté – realizing the potential that lay in the migrant community – urged Guineans to return and help rebuild the country (Bah, Keita and Lootvoet 1989). While it is unclear how many Guineans emigrated where, or when they returned, the successive governments in Conakry were and are interested in integrating them into 'national development efforts'. The constitution of 1992, which is still in effect, stipulates that Guinean nationals living abroad have the right to participate in national elections and should be represented in parliament. However, it offers no specifications on how this direct representation should take place. The future constitution, in preparation since 2010, intends to clarify this issue, potentially granting the transnational community a fixed number of parliamentary seats by direct vote.

In this specific context it becomes evident that domestic sociopolitical conditions affect how governments deal with members of 'their' transnational community. Although parliamentary representation could be ensured in several ways, the direct election of a fixed number of candidates by all Guineans living abroad could lead to fears that certain particularly politically active subgroups of the transnational community have inadvertently been granted preference. The comparatively high number of ethnic Peul in Guinea's transnational community is an implicit argument against such reserved seats in parliament. Some members of this group recall experiences of political exile resulting from prosecution from the First Republic onwards. This group is well organized, compared to other associations (ethnic and non-ethnic) of Guineans abroad. Its mobilization with regard to political parties and fundraising is also comparatively strong.[5] Thus, a direct voting procedure for reserved parliamentary seats could give additional weight to those political parties that draw on ethnic (i.e. Peul) electoral support. This issue touches on popular fears in Guinea that the Peul could gain political power, something populist voices abusing ethnic stereotypes raise as a threat to all other ethnic groups in Guinea. The conflicts surrounding elections from the 1990s up to the latest parliamentary elections in 2013 reveal both the devastating consequences that can result from ethnicization of politics, and the way these tensions are quickly mirrored in Guinea's transnational community. Members of this community have in fact expressed doubts that direct representation could be enacted.

The political considerations concerning the electoral rights of the Guinean transnational community do not end with negotiations between that community and the 'home' government, for the local population is involved in the discussion as well. Studies on transnational communities do not often address whether local people accept emigrants as relevant partners in political discourse and then grant the necessary space for them to voice their opinions. Gerharz (2010: 161–62) points out that negotiations between groups of 'migrants' and 'locals' are essential to both parties because they redraw the boundaries between local and transnational spaces, similar to the way identities are mutually negotiated in these

encounters. Power relations between the groups remain complicated. Due to the resourcefulness of some members of the transnational communities, their engagement in the evolving relations within the transnational community may appear to dominate the expression of a country's public life or a particular political debate – the 'transnational public space'. In some cases, this space itself becomes the object of contestation between transnational and local groups negotiating politics (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 769).

This essay examines the negotiations of transnational public space using the example of Guineans debating political rights and duties of the *resortissants.* The debate focused on whether migrants did indeed deserve the political space they were demanding for themselves, and whether they were entitled to voice a political opinion when only the local population experienced the oppression by the government – in other words, whether emigrants possessed the necessary political citizenship to have a say.

Guinean Politics Debated Between
Local and Transnational Communities

In the highly fluid political situation of Guinea in 2006 and 2007, strikes against the national government occurred repeatedly. Popular call-in shows on international radio stations such as RFI (Radio France International) and the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) drew wide attention. Internet access was largely confined to the largest cities, so radio was sometimes the only source of information, particularly in rural areas – especially after the government inhibited the dispensation of mobile phone top-up cards and later disabled text messaging as well.[6] Fuel shortages kept the generators that supplied electricity to mobile phone antennas from being recharged, further limiting the already patchy mobile phone coverage in rural Guinea. The few private radio stations were forced to close down or limit their operations, while the public radio station RTG (Radio Télévision Guinéen) broadcast traditional music and heavily censored news. In this situation, international radio stations were instrumental, granting airtime for news on current events and allowing callers to debate the way out of the political deadlock. Many of the contributors identified themselves as Guineans calling from West African capitals, Europe or North America. They often called upon the local population to act: to strike longer and more efficiently, and to make certain demands of the government, labour unions and other national leaders.

In the local arena of Forécariah, much debate surrounded the personal background, Guinean town of origin, and family ties of these callers. Ethnicity played a part, but the speculation revolved primarily around extended family ties. 'Don't you have a cousin who is in [name of city]?' was an oft-heard remark after the popular RFI discussion programme *Appel sur l'actualité.* As many first and family names closely resemble one another, this question was quite common; one invari-

ably knew that one's interlocutor indeed had a relative of that name somewhere abroad. While the tone may have sounded accusatory, the enquiry was chiefly intended to validate an unknown caller's identity as a fellow Guinean before assessing the significance of the opinion voiced.

In this Guinean debate, the political figure of the 'stranger' is closely interlinked with the attempt to familiarize this figure and integrate him or her into personalized networks. In different periods of the country's past, foreigners were stylized as potential threats to the country who sought to disrupt the population's unity in order to weaken the country and make it more vulnerable to outside intervention. This public attitude may have begun before 1958, when the colonial administration tried to manipulate elections to limit the independence drive, or with independence, when the departing French colonial administration was accused of destroying infrastructure with the intention of hampering the new country's evolution (Rivière 1977; Diallo 1990; Straker 2007). Former Presidents Sékou Touré and Lansana Conté both utilized this image of the suspicious foreigner in contexts of regional instability to impress upon the population the necessity to stand united as Guineans. In early 2007, rumours spread that Liberian ex-rebels had reached the capital along with mercenaries from neighbouring Guinea-Bissau. These well-known spectres of the invading stranger built upon actual past threats and sought to connect them to the present (Kaba 1978; Kobélé Kéita 2002; McGovern 2002; Arieff and McGovern 2013). Beyond a call for national unity, identifying a foreign scapegoat implied that the current threat was not made by the ideal Guinean citizens, who were implicitly peaceful, law-abiding people faithfully supporting their government in trying times.

In the generally tense political atmosphere of late 2006 and early 2007, it was therefore important to establish that the speaker was not in fact a stranger aiming to sow dissension but rather a Guinean voicing a genuinely felt opinion. The idea of a distant cousin being potentially able to verify the identity of the caller from outside the country was a common and reassuring rhetorical move – and a typical practice with regard to newcomers from anywhere within Guinea as well. Once this symbolic familiarity had been established, the opinion voiced by the caller could be heard as valid – in the sense of 'He has the right to say that'[7] – even if the local discussants did not agree with the opinion and perhaps suspected that the caller had a specific political party affiliation or personal tie to a well-known political figure. Whatever the case, the callers' demands for space in the tense political arena of Guinea were granted, at first.

Referring to other people's political views rather than expressing controversial opinions oneself, breaking with the usual public 'culture of silence and guardedness' (Dave 2014: 2), could also represent a rhetorical move for self-preservation. In Guinea's not-so-distant past, particularly during the First Republic, expressing controversial political opinions could be dangerous in certain circumstances. People remember it as a time when

one could not talk. Everyone could be a spy, your neighbour, even your family could report you had said something against the government, then you were in real trouble. Even your life could be in danger. Here in Forécariah everyone has family members who disappeared during that time. (Forécariah, November 2006)

With this historical experience in mind, it is understandable that people preferred to discuss politics using other people's words, quoting radio comments to voice opinions and to participate in discussions. This strategy served as protection: should government agents enquire later, no one could be pressed to own up to a particular opinion.

Demand for Transnational Action

The perception of opinions coming from abroad, propagated by way of the media, changed over time in Forécariah. With the concurrent breakdown of political negotiations in the capital and rising cost of food staples, local commentators' attitudes towards members of the Guinean transnational community changed, affecting the communication space that they shared. To understand the circumstances that led to this change, it is necessary to consider what was happening in Guinea. The military had cracked down on protesting trade unions and other critical voices that had united under a loose civil society umbrella, often referred to in Guinea as *forces vives,* in June and December 2006. The negotiations – that is, the limited negotiations that had been allowed at all – had not effectively improved living conditions, curbed the climbing inflation or halted the high-level embezzlement of the country's resources by the president's entourage.[8] Demonstrations and negotiations had failed to yield results. Thus, local commentators called upon the Guinean transnational community[9] to function as ambassadors for the local population and organize protest marches to impress upon powerful actors, such as the United Nations and the governments of the United States and France, the extent of political repression and economic suffering in their home country.

    The news of the demonstrations that resulted in front of key embassies in Washington, Brussels and Paris was well received in Forécariah, despite the challenges to gaining access to news at all. Private Guinean Internet sites documented images and speeches from the protest marches, and when private radio was reinstated some of these reports were read out – again, closely listened to and accompanied by speculations as to who might have been there and what kinds of details this friend or that relative could have reported had there been a mobile phone connection at the given time. These websites preserved the 'transnational public' that had been created for later perusal and reflection by people who did not have access to the information during the period of strikes.[10]

In such a situation, the politically active Guinean communities abroad came to be perceived as the acting arm of a people whose majority could not engage in protests themselves. Locally, this was sometimes framed as 'the *ressortissants*' duty':

> They have to help us, they owe us that much. We look after their proper-
> ties here, after their old parents. We welcome them and host them when
> they come to visit. Now it is their task *as Guineans* to help us! (Foré-
> cariah, January 2007)[11]

Comments such as this were based on the argument of shared citizenship. At certain moments transnational and local populations shared tasks, such as build-ing of houses and then keeping them up, caring for older family members, per-forming rituals and holding religious festivals, and financing school or medical bills. In this way they remained closely bound as members of the same extended community. In other words, this sharing of tasks and benefits may initially have been based on family ties, but it effectively became a community occupation, particularly on the local side.

The above quote frames the sharing of tasks within the context of shared citizenship: all of the addressed are being united by the fact that they are Guin-ean citizens engaged in the political evolution of the country. Belonging to this community of people was automatically associated with shared obligations. Peo-ple within the country were looking for a way to connect to the outside as the domestic situation grew desperate; hence, outside support was sought. Whereas the optimal projected result of the emigrants' demonstrations was action taken by foreign governments that would directly intervene on behalf of the powerless population in Guinea itself, in the meantime the transnational community was an audience that listened and commiserated, providing at least a sense of relief and security. Such an attentive audience outside of Guinea also meant that the government and security forces could not pursue a policy of violence with impu-nity but would have to answer at some point. Such ideas and reassurances became a kind of solace in Forécariah. The transnational community, conceptualized as a homogenous whole by the local audience, was unable to share the experience of those in Forécariah directly yet remained an integral part of the process, and the resultant bond was not a matter of belonging to a particular extended family or ethnic group but rather that they were all Guineans.

Denying Political Space

The situation changed no less than a few weeks later. In February 2007 the mili-tary had violently squashed more demonstrations in the larger cities, and as nego-tiations for a change of government were haltingly under way in Conakry, callers

from abroad received a cooler welcome. Even when callers' Guinean descent or nationality was not necessarily doubted, their entitlement to (publicly) voice an opinion was questioned. The callers often urged the local population to present demands to the political leaders so as to 'improve negotiations' regarding governmental changes and achieve a 'true democratic turn' in the country. One of their main arguments is summarized in this message from a U.S.-based caller to RFI:

> It is now that pressure must be applied, it is now that people have to risk everything and maybe even strike again and lose their lives – otherwise our children will not live in a better country.

This and similar opinions voiced by Guineans calling from abroad stirred many responses among the population of Forécariah. While the possibility hung in the air that the current negotiations would fail, just as they had in 2006, and with new rounds of demonstrations being cautiously considered locally, hearing such demands from abroad aroused loud and emotional reactions. Replies came in many forms:

> Let him speak, he is far away [in Philadelphia], he does not matter! (Forécariah, February 2007)

> It is not him who will be shot; it is not his children who have died in January [2007]. He has no idea what he is talking about! (Ibid.)

> Our children? His children are safe, well-fed, healthy, going to good schools, they have a future. They have nothing in common with our children here who are dying every day of diarrhoea or malaria. We are not the same; he has no right to make demands like that! (Ibid.)

Through such reactions, local discussants negated the political space that callers had demanded for themselves. Their entitlement to contribute to the debate of the future Guinea was revoked on the grounds that they did not share the same everyday concerns of the local population.

The shared experience of (personal and collective) suffering constitutes an important part of the Guinean national consciousness (Kohl and Schroven 2014). It draws on memories of the colonial experience, strongly influenced by the redefinition of that period as promoted by the anti-imperial ideology of the First Republic. Today, the period of the First Republic itself has been redefined as a period of suffering under an authoritarian regime and failing economic system. Yet this period is not simply dismissed summarily due to the negative experiences; rather, it is also lauded as one that lastingly shaped the people in Guinea into a nation and made them modern citizens. According to popular observations, the

Guinean level of national identification surpasses that of neighbouring countries, where ethnicity remains more important in everyday life than national belonging (Rivière 1977, 1978; Straker 2008). Even against the background of an acknowledged difficult past, Guineans take great pride in this pervasive national awareness and present it as one reason why the country has not experienced civil war, though many of its neighbours have.[12] Today, the shared experience of suffering under a (distant centralized) government – in both the past and present – forms a key part of being Guinean and therefore excludes those migrants who do not share this experience in their current lives.

Contesting the Political Rights of Guineans Abroad

The local population's increasing reluctance to liberally grant political space to the *ressortissants* became even more pronounced in mid 2007 when the political parties resumed activities, prompted by the successive installation of new prime ministers and promised preparations for long-overdue parliamentary elections. Many parties held meetings for members and even political rallies, asserting their intentions for the upcoming elections. These activities took place outside of Guinea. Many local commentators criticized the party leaders for paying more attention to the electorate abroad than to the 'real Guineans' who lived in the country:

> It's the money, they [opposition party leaders] know that they get their money from the *ressortissants,* so they are going shopping [*fait la course,* collecting campaign contributions] now, even before the real election-run begins. (Forécariah, July 2007)

Other local commentators were more pointedly critical of the fact that many party leaders and politicians had spent considerable time abroad, either in actual political exile or as a cautious move in light of the unpredictability of the government:

> It's the same all over again. When in 1993 [legislative] elections were coming, politicians turned up from all over Europe, from the U.S. They never even lived here for decades. They had no idea what life was about here. … They stirred up things, and when at the demonstrations people were shot, they were far away … running to the airport and off to their big villas in Europe. (Ibid.)

Another chimed in:

> Let them just do their thing now in Conakry. This politics business is for rich people from abroad, it serves the interests of the people abroad, not of real Guineans. (Ibid.)

Whereas people in Forécariah often construed national politics as a distant affair for 'politicians' in the capital (Schroven 2010: 137 ff.), in this case it was depicted as the provenance of the Guineans living abroad. Many opposition leaders were closely associated or even equated with the *ressortissants*, as they and their immediate family spent significant parts of their lives abroad, accumulating considerable wealth and fitting the general image of successful migrants. They were portrayed as visiting home occasionally, demonstrating their success abroad with conspicuous displays of wealth in the face of a poor population and demanding gratitude or allegiance in return for small gifts, without much consideration of the lives the local people were leading. 'They lack respect for the family! As Guineans they should know better', was an often-heard summary of the behaviour of such visitors.

In mid 2007, commentators in Forécariah argued that Guinea's political space, where the *ressortissants* were very much present, was a space that the common people in Guinea did not share. They conceptualized the *ressortissants* as taking part in an elite discourse of 'politicians' – a term popularly used to describe easily corruptible, politically unrooted opportunists without links to the lives of ordinary Guineans. The transnational space that had been shared by the politically active *ressortissants* and the local population at the beginning of 2007 was now separate spaces – to the perceived disadvantage of the local population. They now saw the migrants as intruders usurping a political space that seemed to have opened up briefly to participation after the national strikes and was very precious after nearly fifty years of authoritarian rule. As a consequence, the popular mood turned against the party leaders and their entourages from abroad, as well as against *ressortissants'* general claims of participating in a shared political space. Politics now happened not only far away in Conakry, but even farther away in emigration centres abroad.

In the eyes of local commentators, shared nationality – with its 'constituents' of collective ancestry and history, and the mutual feeling of belonging and striving towards a joint future – was thus not enough to link these groups of people separated by physical distance. The crucial missing ingredient was the struggles of everyday life that the *ressortissants* did not share. Full political citizenship for the *ressortissants,* in the sense of the possibility of participating in Guinean politics, was at the least questioned, if not denied, by the local commentators.

Conclusions: Who Is a Guinean Citizen?

The accusation contained in the opening quote – 'They are not Guineans!' – originates from a debate about *ressortissants'* right to participate in Guinean politics during a phase of both great hope and great insecurity concerning the country's future. It reveals a particular notion of citizenship that goes beyond the mere demand for shared origin or nationality. According to this notion, the rights to

vote for presidents or parliament and to make political demands of the Guinean people are linked to the experience of shared suffering. Thus, such rights are not simply granted by one's Guinean nationality. The lack of participation in everyday life in Guinea with all of its attendant socioeconomic hardships and political insecurity thus invalidated any claims Guinean emigrants made to legitimately enter into political debates following the 2007 strikes – at least from the perspective of the local population. While the *ressortissants* demanded space on a national level, at the local level they were deemed unqualified to participate in decision-making processes for the future because they lacked experience of everyday life. The pervasive visibility of the transnational public space, which by mid 2007 was dominated by (opposition) party politics and 'their' politicians, limited the space the local population was willing to grant the *ressortissants.* In Forécariah, the *ressortissants'* visibility suggested to the local population that they would not have political space for themselves in a future Guinea.

This stands in contrast to an earlier phase of the ongoing debate, when Guineans living abroad had been envisioned as spokespersons or ambassadors of the local population. In that inclusive phase, the idea of solidarity was invoked based on an implicit agreement to share tasks and responsibilities between the *ressortissants* and local Guineans. Exchanges between the two groups were not always harmonious, but the local population emphasized common belonging, shared interests and mutual responsibilities to justify the demands they placed on emigrants, who in turn were expected to send remittances, participate in community life even from abroad and assist in situations of need – such those resulting from suppression and violence experienced at the hands of government forces.

This particular notion of solidarity eventually gave rise to criticism of the *ressortissants,* who, it was said, had not complied with the expectations placed upon them. Furthermore, the emigrants' demands – voiced over the radio – for more demonstrations in Guinean cities, more pressure to be exerted on the government and therefore more sacrifices to be endured by the local population were met with dismay by the local audience in Forécariah. At that moment the differences between the two groups came to the fore – so much so that the local population even began to question the *ressortissants'* right to their Guinean citizenship.

The varying emphases of the above debate are part of wider negotiations about the public space that emigrants are to be granted. From a local perspective, the recognition that *ressortissants* receive from the government and political leaders is undeservedly dominant in the debate and thus needs to be challenged. More generally, however, the question arises as to how local populations perceive a politically active emigrant population and what space they wish to grant it under changing conditions within the shared home country.

Nationality and citizenship form a basic part of the local debate. Throughout the period discussed in this chapter, people in Forécariah did not necessarily specifically question the nationality of the *ressortissants,* but they did question the po-

litical space the *ressortissants* were occupying – as citizens actively engaged in the debating and decision-making of Guinean politics. From the local perspective, even though a common past and heritage amounted to a common nationality, emigrants' nonparticipation in the everyday struggles within Guinea disqualified them from political citizenship.

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Notes

1. Ethnographic fieldwork in Guinea was conducted between April 2006 and July 2007 in the context of the project 'Local Authorities and Oral History in Processes of Conflict and Integration in Guinea' at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle (Saale). I thank the conference participants, the anonymous reviewers and the editors for their constructive engagement and valuable comments on previous drafts.
2. Initially popular suffrage was not practised, but village and canton chiefs, war veterans and high-ranking clerks were among those who formed the core group that expanded over time to include other groups of people. Only with the passage of the *Loi Cadre* of 1956 was popular suffrage (extended to all adults, regardless of status, employment or sex) formally achieved (de Benoist 1982).
3. The so-called Complot Peul with its violent aftermath in 1976 is one example of the political targeting of ethnic Peul during the First Republic (Sow 1989; Groelsema 1998). When multiparty elections first took place in the 1990s, Peul leaders demanded reparations and equal opportunities in the political and administrative arenas (Groelsema 1998).
4. Yaguine Koita and Fodé Tounkara, two Guinean youths who froze to death while travelling clandestinely on a Europe-bound plane, have become symbols for the youth, predominantly male, who try to make their fortune abroad.
5. The Guinean migration and transnational community has not yet been researched. The above considerations are based on personal communications with Guinean migrants living in Germany, Belgium and the United States.
6. In the context of limited funds and the restricted availability of top-up phone credit, (bulk) text messaging was a convenient way to share information and mobilize politically. Disabling this means of communication forced people to make phone calls, which were significantly more expensive and reached a much smaller audience. With one state-owned

phone company (SOTELGUI) and a single commercial competitor at the time, the government was able to effectively manipulate mobile phone communication and curb already fragile Internet capacities in January 2007.

7. Most commonly, both callers and commentators were male. Women discuss their political opinions, but usually in a setting more private than street-side bars or neighbourhood courtyards.

8. For more details of the events see ICG (2008) and McGovern (2007).

9. For the sake of the current argument and in order to emphasize the locally perceived differences, I follow the emic nomenclature of grouping Guineans abroad together into a single entity, the *resortissants*.

10. Throughout January and much of February 2007 the very limited Internet infrastructure in Guinea was further curbed by the government-ordered shutdown of Internet cafés. Private or office Internet access – very limited to begin with – was blocked in February 2007, when martial law was declared for two weeks (IFEX 2007).

11. The following excerpts originate from conversations with established interlocutors and from conversations in the semipublic setting of a roadside café frequented daily by a fairly closed circle of male customers.

12. One might argue that in Mali and Senegal, long-lasting conflicts with internal rebellions and secessionist movements did not constitute civil war. However, many Guineans see these events as evidence of failed nation-building processes.

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