

Young People's Political Socialization through Historical Facts in the City of Zinder, Niger Republic

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Abstract: *This article explores the impact of some historical facts in the city of Zinder on the young people's political socialization, as well as the role of certain historical events in political appropriation. In addition, some political events that took place throughout Niger such as the motions of censure, the extension of the mandate of the president of the Republic or Tazartché (in Hausa) and others are also examined. We are concerned with how these events began and the role they played in the political socialization of Nigeriens in general and young people in the city of Zinder in particular. The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, case studies and direct observations. The results showed that in Niger, from a political point of view, Zinder is considered the most politicized and revolutionary city. Accordingly, it is perceived to be the epicentre of political contestation and events. These contribute to political education and also demonstrate the level of political engagement of the population of this city.*

Keywords: *Young People's Political Socialization, Historical Fact, Niger Republic, Zinder, Political Event.*

Résumé : *Cet article analyse l'impact de quelques faits historiques de la ville de Zinder dans la socialisation politique des jeunes ainsi que le rôle de certains événements historiques dans l'appropriation de la chose politique. Par ailleurs, certains événements politiques ayant eu lieu dans l'ensemble du Niger tels que les motions de censure, la prolongation du mandat du président de la République ou Tazartché (en haoussa) et autres sont aussi examinés. Ce qui nous intéresse est de savoir comment ces événements ont débuté et le rôle qu'ils ont joué dans la socialisation politique des nigériens en général et spécifiquement des jeunes de la ville de Zinder. Les données ont été collectées principalement à partir des entretiens semi-directifs, des focus group, des études de cas et des observations directes. Les résultats obtenus montrent que Zinder est considérée comme la ville la plus politisée et la plus révolutionnaire du Niger. En conséquence, elle est perçue comme le foyer de contestation et des événements politiques. Ces derniers contribuent à la formation politique et en même temps montrent le niveau d'engagement politique de la population de cette ville.*

Mots clés : *Socialisation Politique des Jeunes, Fait Historique, République du Niger, Zinder, Événement Politique.*

I. Introduction

Many authors have debated the political socialization issue. Several studies have been published on this subject in France (Bréchon, 2006; Cautrès and Muxel, 2011; Percheron, 1982; 1984; Muxel, 2001), in the United States (Eliasoph, 1998; Hyman, 1959; Greenstein, 1965), in Israel (Parizot, 2004), in Türkiye (Öztay, 2020; Taşdelen,

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2010; Alkan, 1979), in Hungary (Szabo, 1987) or in some African countries. The most investigated issues were focused on the roles of primary socialization institutions such as family and school in the transmission and transfer of political choices and identities to children. Indeed, the research findings of these authors show the importance and role of parents in the political and ideological choices of their children.

Most research findings were limited to children and the transmission of political values and attitudes towards voting within the family. Moreover, few studies have been carried out on secondary agencies of political socialization such as; the media, peer groups, trade union associations and organizations, professional environments, political parties, and so on. However, these secondary socialization agencies are significant in shaping young people's political choices and behaviour. Indeed, Pagis (2010) points out that in a dynamically changing world, the family has no monopoly on children's socialization. The spread of both traditional media and the Internet has reduced the power of the family as an institution. The rise of the mass media allows especially for a large amount of information to reach and influence young people. Through various cultural and especially political broadcasts on TV and radio, in addition to what young people learn from their parents, these programs have a significant effect on their political views. In this context, Alfredo (1997) showed that the media's effects are more relevant with the introduction of internet, which gives the youngest voters the possibility to access through social media a considerable amount of information liable to influence their political choices. Therefore, before young people reach adulthood, there are many other socialization agents challenging the values they learn from their parents. This article looks at the roles of historical facts and political events in young people's political socialization in the city of Zinder. It should be noted that many authors have emphasized how the context and certain political events affect the socialization, mobilization and electoral participation of voters. Accordingly, during the 2002 presidential elections, Muxel (2002: 521-534) notes the arrival of the far-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round as an event that triggered the engagement of many young people in France. The figure of Jean-Marie Le Pen, his racist ideas and his political rhetoric have awakened a sense of political and civic engagement among young people, who are known to be disengaged and largely abstain from elections. As a result of this awareness, the voter turnout was high and Jack Chirac was elected President of the French Republic in May 2002 with a significant proportion.

Likewise, Ihl's (2002: 128-129) study on socialization and political events provides an interesting insight. The main issue is how experiences such as election campaigns, social movements, military interventions or the death of a famous person can influence the political choices of individuals. In an attempt to explain this relationship between socialization and political events, he sets out the debates that have been going on for several years around the explanatory models of individuals' political behaviour. These models include the rational choice theory, the psychosociological model and the sociological model. In conclusion, he stated that these three approaches are not perfect, but they have their shortcomings and do not take into account the whole range of elements that determine individuals' political behaviour and socialization. He also added that for a long time, the political event has been neglected or ignored as an element of socialization, although it can play an important role in this process. Accordingly, in countries such as the United States and France, certain events such as the Vietnam War, Watergate, the Kennedy murder and the May 1968 movements have influenced the political behaviour of voters and their socialization (Ihl, 2002). This article is structured around two main points. The first point deals with the influence of some historical aspects on young people's political socialization in the city of Zinder. The second point is a retrospective analysis of some political events that started in the city of Zinder and others elsewhere in Niger but whose effects have affected the social and political life of a significant number of citizens. These include the motions of censure, the extension of the mandate or Tazartché (in Hausa), the anti-Charlie Hebdo protests and the anti-Covid-19 barrier protests. The purpose is not to give the genesis of these events. What interests us is to try to understand the extent to which they contributed to the emergence of political interests among Nigerien citizens in general and the young people of the city of Zinder in particular.

II. Method

This paper is based on a qualitative survey (snowball and a purposive sampling approach) conducted from 12 July to 11 September 2021 in the city of Zinder. The survey included direct observations, semi-structured

interviews, case studies and focus groups with young people engaged in politics or not, media actors, civil society actors, political analysts or specialists, and customary and religious leaders. Data processing included content analysis (Leray, 2008; Sallan Gül and Kahya Nizam, 2021). Firstly, all recorded and unrecorded interviews are synthesized. Secondly, a grouping by theme of similar information was followed. At the end of each transcription, we synthesized the information and proposed a plan based on the collected data. The different plans were crossed to produce a general plan after all syntheses. Finally, the collected information was examined, discussed or interpreted and compared with other published sources.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1. Some Historical Aspects of Zinder City

One of the factors that contribute to young people's political socialization is the historical aspect, which is important, if not essential. The reputation of Zinder as a political showcase in Niger is based on solid foundations. In fact, it should be emphasized that it is above all the first political and administrative capital of the country. This is significant with regards to what the status of a capital represents for a country. It is the place where the administrations are based and at the same time the centre of decision-making that engages the social and economic life of a country. In addition, Zinder is labelled as a pioneer and one of the most active symbols of resistance during the colonial occupation. The assassination of Captain Cazemajou² on 5 May 1898 and various struggles by the Damagaram Sultan against the Voulet-Chanoine mission³ are important moments that are forever engraved in the memory of Nigeriens in general and Zinders or *Damagarawa* in particular (Danda, 2004: 254). Even after independence, all struggles between Sawaba and PPN/RDA supporters would have started in Zinder, or at least there they would have gained much more momentum. With the coming of democracy, things have come back again in a recurrent manner. According to several observers of the Nigerien political scene and some of those interviewed, the city of Zinder was at one time considered to be the Benghazi of Libya, the breeding ground for revolution and resistance against established order. In this regard, Danda (2004: 272-273) adds that the spirit or reflex of protest is the hallmark of Zinder. A particular feature of this town is the rejection of the state's authority and that of its regional branches. In case of any tension, protest or political phenomenon, if Zinder is not on the first list, it is on the second one. Some examples of protests and political events that either started or exacerbated in Zinder will be mentioned later. Therefore, Zinder's history and the way in which this city is embodied, it is primarily the first Niger capital, filled with heroes, whose glorious past is appropriated by the young. In this regard, people from Zinder embody this spirit of resistance that dictates or influences in one way or another their socialization, militancy, political education and engagement. This explains why all political parties are interested in Zinder, creating a kind of myth around the city. According to Zakari et al (2021: 92), as the second city, Zinder is also considered the political capital of Niger. In this regard, this respondent expressed his views in the following terms:

“In the city of Zinder, while people are burying the dead, others are talking about politics, meaning that Zinder is the most politicized city in Niger. Some of them continue the political debates as soon as they return from the funeral. The level of political discussion at weddings and baptisms is unbelievable”. (Interview realized on August 31, 2021, in Zinder with a Political analyst).

This shows that politics is not unknown in the city of Zinder. Instead, it occurs including in places where it would not be expected. Indeed, regarding the way politics is perceived by a large part of Nigeriens, political topics are to be avoided in cemeteries.

3.2. The Role of Political Events or Phenomena in Political Socialization

3.2.1. Motions of Censure

² He was a French officer and explorer, born in 1864 in Marseille and died in 1898 in Zinder.

³ It was a Central African expedition led by two French officers, Paul Voulet and Julien Chanoine. The mission was known for its brutality and violence (Bernussou, 2009).

In Niger, some events provide opportunities which contribute to young people's political socialization and that of the population as a whole. One of them is motions of censure against governments. The National Assembly of a country uses this legal means in parliamentary and semi-presidential systems to express its disapproval of a government's policy by forcing it to resign. Such events are broadcast live on national radio and television in our country in order to allow citizens to follow them. Due to the stakes involved and the debates generated, they attract a huge number of people. People turn on their television or radio and follow with interest the discussions between the majority and opposition members of the National Assembly. Most citizens are interested in these events, as many of the deputies' interventions are in national languages, allowing everyone to understand the content without discrimination. There is huge mobilization around a motion of censure, especially in the big cities. The National Assembly debates were rich and contradictory between deputies. Young people are immersed in reflection on the concepts used, the constitutional articles and other legal texts cited, creating a kind of political self-training. As noted by Seidou (2014: 92-93), during the period 1999-2004, several motions of censure were submitted to the National Assembly against former Prime Minister Hama Amadou. However, the opposition, in complicity with some of the majority members of parliament, succeeded in removing him from office in May 2007. Many Nigeriens seem to have become aware of what a motion of censure is and of many other political notions during this motion. Moreover, many used the opportunity to read about the Niger constitution and at the same time understand and discuss the meaning of the different articles that make it up. In the fieldwork for this study, many people mentioned the 2007 motion of censure in response to the question of whether there was a particular event that contributed to their political socialization. In this framework, one respondent said:

"The motion of censure against Hama Amadou has been one of the moments during which I learned a lot in politics. I can remember the day when, at the Fada⁴, we used to discuss the issue with our friends. For example, we had debates on political conspiracies and also made predictions about the future prime minister of Niger". (Interview realized on September 11, 2021, in Zinder with a young politician).

It should be noted that motions of censure are sometimes the result of political and institutional crises in Niger. In addition, these are times of intense debate and quarrelling between both political and civil society actors. Therefore, they are also events that influence young people's political socialization.

3.2.2. Tazartché, the Anti-Charlie Hebdo and Anti-Covid-19 Barriers Protests

There are other events besides motions of censure that have played an important role in the construction of young people's political identities in Niger. These included the extension of the mandate or *Tazartché* (in Hausa) (Abdoul Azizou, 2010 and Seidou, 2014), the anti-Charlie Hebdo protest (Olivier de Sardan, 2015) and the Covid-19 protest (Dagobi, 2020). The reason why Zinder is considered the most politicized city or political capital of Niger is certainly not fortuitous. As underlined by Zakari et al (2021: 92): "political phenomena generally start from this city and spread to other cities in Niger as illustrated by the '*Tazartché*' movement or extension of the mandate in 2010 and the 'anti-Charlie march' in 2015 after the Nigerien president's attendance at the Republican march in France". Likewise, Seidou (2014: 93) wrote that the 'official launch of the *Tazartché* movement was held on October 27, 2008, when the foundation stone for the oil refinery in Zinder was laid. During this event, the President's placards and T-shirts praised the merits of the government, while slogans were chanted by other individuals calling on Mr Tandja to continue his agenda'.

It should be emphasized that the phenomenon of *Tazartché* has provoked recurrent and intense debates between specialists in constitutional law and political leaders, but also between citizens in general. According to the article 36 of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, the President's mandate was limited to two terms. Accordingly, some people including law scholars believed that it was illegal and unconstitutional for the President to exceed two terms in office. On the other hand, there is a view that in exceptional situations it is

⁴In Niger, the fada in local languages are groups of young people who gather around tea and discuss various topics.

allowed for the president of the Republic to legally continue beyond two terms. As Seidou (2014: 95-96) points out, political and juridical debates between *Tazartché* supporters and opponents have become more pronounced with the President's dissolution of the National Assembly and the Constitutional Court respectively on 26 May and 29 June 2009. Both sides have been trying to convince citizens about the right and relevance of their arguments and positions. Throughout this period, a significant number of Nigerien citizens, especially young people, were focused on these debates. They tried to understand both the constitution's content and the circumstances in which its articles can be explained and implemented in practice. At the same time, individuals attempted to explain and interpret the situation according to their comprehension and the side they supported. Political and social actors such as the media, civil society and political leaders were converted to political scientists or analysts by default. This reveals the pre-eminence and relevance of discussions. These had significant effect on young people's political socialization by providing opportunities to understand and assimilate the constitution and several other political concepts. They have also motivated many young people to be interested in politics. The following case study about a young political leader summarizes the role that the *Tazartché* movement and beyond that the former President Tandja's mode of governance had played in his political socialization.

3.2.2.2. Case study

"I was one of the people who actively participated in the Tazartché movement. The day Tazartché was launched, I was part of the young people who went to the airport to welcome former President Tandja. At the time, we were together with President Dan Dubaï of the Gimshiki party. Tazartché was undoubtedly an important event in what aroused political interest in me. In addition, I learned from this movement that in politics, it is necessary to respect the law. Moreover, the personality of President Tandja, his approach to government, was a trigger for my political engagement. President Tandja was a source of inspiration for almost all Nigeriens, especially those who wish to be political leaders. He was a patriot who wanted Niger's development, independence and sovereignty. During his rule, I learnt a lot especially from his program called " the President of the Republic's special program " which advocated grassroots development. Today, I have copied a lot of his program to the point where even in our party's anthem, we talk about grassroots development". (Interview realized on March 12, 2022, in Zinder with a young political leader).

This case study shows that this young man's political trajectory was influenced by the *Tazartché* movement. It can be seen that the movement influenced both his political choices and the lessons he learnt about governance. Therefore, political events and the governance patterns of some politicians can be used as a school for young people interested in politics. As well as *Tazartché*, the anti-Charlie Hebdo protests also started in Zinder in January 2015 before spreading to other Niger cities. This followed the 11 January so-called Republican march in Paris after the Charlie Hebdo attack. The former Nigerien president Mahamadou Issoufou participated as one of six Africans presidents. The newspaper *Jeune Afrique* (2015) reported that his *"We are all Charlie"* broadcast on the airwaves provoked a wave of anger in Niger's population, which is over 90% Muslim. It added that the protests started in Zinder, which comes as no surprise, as it is a "rebellious city, a bastion of systematic contestation against central power". Moreover, this explains why President Issoufou claimed at the time that these protests were not about Islam, but political and manipulated by the opposition political parties (Olivier de Sardan, 2015: 2). According to available information, it is possible that the President of the Republic was right about opposition parties' manipulations, although the fact remains that all religious matters, including Islam, in Niger, and more specifically in Zinder, leave no one unmoved. Similarly, in March 2020, young people organized protests against Niger's government measures related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The protests started in Niamey, the capital, but quickly spread to Mirriah, one of Zinder's departments located 18 km to the east, before reaching the other regions (OMCT et al, 2020). It should be emphasized that the Covid-19's arrival in Zinder and in several other Niger localities affected, and eventually upset, relations between the population and political authorities. The government's measures to limit gatherings in places of worship, religious ceremonies and many other public places were criticized by a significant number of people. In addition, Nigerien citizens, including radical youths, perceived these measures as an international conspiracy led by the Jews in order to

prevent Muslims from practicing their religion. In fact, there are people or even most Niger's population do not believe in Covid-19 disease, which they consider as a simple cold. However, the common cold is considered by popular opinion to be an everyday illness in Niger and the Sahel countries in general. As a result, such drastic measures as suspending attendance at mosques were not necessary. Populations have difficulties with this approach.

These protests and declarations, aimed specifically at challenging the State's authority, also raised the issue of the implementation and appropriation of the rule of law and its relationship with citizens (Tidjani Alou, 2001). By taking certain measures, the government expected to protect the population and therefore to fulfil its regalian missions. But citizens do not trust them, resulting in a trust crisis between the state and the citizens. On the other hand, they showed some political awareness and engagement by citizens through other forms of political participation.

IV. Conclusion

This paper aimed to explore the effect of historical facts and political events on young people's political socialization in the city of Zinder. In this regard, the paper shows that Zinder's social and political history and its glorious past have an influence on people's political behaviour and attitudes, drawing on previous research on this issue. In fact, Zinder is considered the most politicized and revolutionary city in Niger. Accordingly, it is seen as the epicentre of political contestation and events. These contribute to political education and at the same time show the level of the population's political engagement. However, it must be noted that these findings have to be nuanced due to the fact that we based our analysis on a small proportion of Zinder's young people. This research could be extended in different ways by including other variables and people categories. However, other difficulties related to the data heterogeneity may arise, due to the different realities of these cities.

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