

## **Youth and Democratic Change in West Africa: Some Reflections on the Students' Movement in the Nationalist Project.**

By

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### **Abstract**

In most parts of Africa, youths have played significant roles in the process of engineering political and democratic changes. They were prominent actors in the process of decolonisation, active in the resistance movements' against political dictators and tyrants that emerged in the post-colonial era, and were at the fore of the struggle for the "second independence", that is, the current surge for democratisation in Africa. From Nigeria to Ghana, Benin Republic, Senegal and Burkina Faso, South Africa, Zambia and Ethiopia, youths particularly students have played critical and sometimes decisive role in fostering political changes. Yet youths remain a neglected social category in the discourse and analysis of political changes in Africa. Their role is either inscribed in a footnote, trivialised, or completely ignored. Indeed, most of the current discourse about youths in Africa is about their violence, criminalisation or anti-social conduct, all meant to push the youths further into the margins of social history. They are denied a voice or space in society and history, and simply regarded as a transitory social category driven by emotions, unstable behaviour and erratic conduct. However, there is need to reconstruct social and political discourse and analysis that incorporates the role of youths in society especially in fostering political and democratic changes. This is the only way a holistic analysis of the process of political change in Africa can be undertaken.

The paper seeks to analyse the role of students as a youth category within an organisational context of the students' movement and their involvement in the nationalist democratic project in West Africa. It gives a historical and retrospective view of their role in the process of decolonisation, their engagement in the post-colonial project, and their contemporary efforts at the re-democratisation and consolidation of democracy in the sub-region. I shall examine the history, nature, orientation, and organisation of the students' movement and the nature of their intervention in the political arena from the colonial to the post-colonial era, especially with regard to facilitating the process of political change and democratisation in West Africa.

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