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**إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين**

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**Western Representations of Africa: A Genealogy of  
Donor Discourses on Guinea-Bissau**

*Teresa de Almeida Cravo*  
*University of Coimbra*

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## **Introduction**

This paper explores the genesis and evolution of the West's representation of Guinea-Bissau since independence. It begins with the country's initial embrace and celebration by western donors during the war of liberation before considering when and how the country's representation mutated into one of failure and disappointment. The latter has, the paper suggests, become entrenched in the recipient country's relationship with the western aid community and given rise to the identification of Guinea-Bissau with "failure". The specific 'tipping points' which produced and reproduced this label of failure are identified, revealing how the country's status within the international realm became temporarily fixed. For analytical purposes, the paper delineates six distinct phases in the western aid community's relations with Guinea-Bissau: a 'honeymoon period' during the liberation war and early independence when Guinea-Bissau was embraced by donors; early donor disillusionment in the late 1970s; growing donor scepticism, despite economic and political liberalization, in the mid-1980s and 1990s; civil war from 1998 to 1999; a subsequent escalation of negative donor discourse due to enduring political instability and a growing rhetoric of 'failed states'; and the identification, in the late 2000s, of Guinea-Bissau as a 'narco-state' with an attendant focus on security threats.

The paper argues, with reference to this genealogy, that Guinea-Bissau's standing within the western donor community, characterised by its association with failure, is discursively produced and constituent of international power relations. More broadly, this research looks at the process of identity creation in international relations, arguing that engaging with the western discursive production of Africa is a necessary stepping stone for the renegotiation of the continent's overall international standing.

### **1960s-1970s: The Liberation War and Independence –The 'Honeymoon Period'**

Rarely talked about in the West and, when discussed, referred to as a "small swampy West African enclave" (Garrison, 1963: 32) and a "miserable territory" (The Economist, 1968), Guinea-Bissau—then known as Portuguese Guinea—began to be noticed with the start of a liberation war against colonial rule. As the PAIGC's decolonisation

strategy<sup>1</sup> took off and became increasingly inspiring, it drew the attention of anti-colonial movements and states, solidarity groups, academics and journalists eager to support and report on the cause of defeating the last European colonial power. Amílcar Cabral, the movement's founder and leader and a remarkable revolutionary theorist, caught the world's interest and became known as one of Africa's greatest thinkers and guerrilla strategists. Guinea-Bissau would become an extraordinary example and an essential element of the demise of the Portuguese dictatorship and of Southern Africa's decolonisation, paving the way to armed struggle in Angola, Mozambique and later Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa (Chabal, 1981: 75).

That Guinea-Bissau would become the source of such important transformations in the history of decolonisation could not but come as a surprise. Indeed, the idea of a viable and successful armed struggle coming out of "the smallest and most backward of the Portuguese colonies" (Chabal, 1981: 79) was difficult to entertain. After a few unsuccessful attempts to organise workers in Bissau against the colonial regime, the PAIGC transferred its headquarters to Conakry, in neighbouring Guinée, in 1960, to prepare for armed struggle. From 1960 to 1963, Amílcar Cabral was able to convince his countrymen of the seriousness and feasibility of the movement's peasant mass mobilisation strategy. When the war began, in 1963, the movement appeared to the world well prepared, united, and skilful. Starkly contrasting with the country's prior external image, the party's organisation "within this disinherited wilderness" rapidly gained a reputation as "impressive" (The Economist, 1968). Even those hostile towards the revolution, like John Biggs-Davidson, a British MP from the Conservative Party, recognised the guerrilla war in Portuguese Guinea was "perhaps the most vital because of the effects of its outcome on Portuguese resistance elsewhere, and the consequences for Rhodesia and South Africa of a Portuguese collapse" (Biggs-Davidson, 1971: 385).

The 'unexpected success' of Amílcar Cabral's PAIGC soon exerted fascination over those cheering for the defeat of Portuguese and other remnants of colonialism in Africa. Journalists rushed to cover the liberation war and meet the reputed leader. The academic community was charmed by developments in Guinea-Bissau and wrote

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<sup>1</sup> The PAIGC was created in 1956 – by Amílcar Cabral, Luís Cabral, Aristides Pereira, Fernando Fortes, Eliseu Turpin and Júlio de Almeida – and was fighting for the independence of both colonies, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, with the aim of creating a unified independent state.

profusely on the reasons for the movement's successes throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. Numerous books and articles on the liberation struggle revealed admiration for the PAIGC and optimism for the possibilities the movement was opening in the war against colonialism, such as: Gerard Chaliand, *Lutte Armée en Afrique*, 1967; Basil Davidson, *The Liberation of Guiné: Aspects of an African Revolution*, 1969; Jennifer Davis, *The Republic of Guinea-Bissau: Triumph over Colonialism*, 1974; Lars Rudebeck, *Guinea-Bissau: A Study of Political Mobilization*, 1974; or Henry Bienen, "State and revolution: the work of Cabral", 1977. The country's struggle against colonialism even featured in Chris Marker's documentary *Sans Soleil*. Guinea-Bissau would never again be in the spotlight – and benefit from such favourable accounts – as during these years.

The major reason for such enthusiasm was undoubtedly Amílcar Cabral, "PAIGC's most important asset" (Chabal, 1981: 81). Academics devoted pages to his striking personality and achievements. For example, Ronald Chilcote, in his 1968 study, "The political thought of Cabral", writes in glowing terms about Cabral's political thought, as did Patrick Chabal in his *Amílcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War* (1983, reprinted in 2002), and many others. In fact, long after they had ceased to celebrate Guinea-Bissau as an example of a successful revolutionary movement, they continued to dedicate pages to Amílcar Cabral and his thought. Amílcar Cabral was admired and favourably presented in the Western press as "Africa's most distinguished guerrilla leader" (The Economist, 1973). Even those more conservative journalists presented him as a "businesslike, Westernised" leader, assuring the reader that, notwithstanding the use of "communist weapons and communist theories of revolutionary warfare", he was "clearly not a communist" (The Economist, 1968). Moreover, Cabral enjoyed a reputation of being fair, ordering his forces to avoid killing civilians of any race, turning over Portuguese prisoners of war to the Red Cross, and exhibiting a seemingly endless willingness to negotiate with Lisbon an end to the war and the country's self-determination (The Economist, 1968, Howes, 1972).

This kind of positive exposure was not only welcome but the product of intense diplomatic planning. The PAIGC was very clear about the need to garner external support and invested in its foreign relations from its inception. On the basis of the historic UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960, *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People*, Amílcar Cabral sent

regular information to the UN about the struggle and received encouraging feedback from the organisation. Portugal was at this time repeatedly condemned in General Assembly Resolutions. In 1971, Guinea-Bissau, represented by the PAIGC, became an associate member of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (Diggs Jr., 1973: 31). Besides cooperation from Guinea-Conakry and Senegal, the movement also received military assistance, primarily from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, China and Cuba. It also rapidly added financial assistance from anti-colonial countries and movements, such as Sweden, as well as private organisations such as the World Council of Churches, and UN agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation UNESCO (Chabal, 1981: 90).

Yet, it was not only the armed struggle that interested the world. There were two pillars to the PAIGC's success in the eyes of both internal and external actors: the liberation war to end Portuguese colonialism and the construction of a new society free from any kind of exploitation and oppression. Amílcar Cabral was showing evidence of a "consciously applied strategy" to "challenge (...) the social, political, and economic *status quo* of underdevelopment" (Rudebeck, 1972: 1).

The powerful revolutionary elite, formed and strengthened by the armed conflict, gained increasing influence over the course of the struggle and began to establish a prototype of 'people's power' in the areas removed from Portuguese control, the so-called "liberated areas" – which the movement claimed covered two-thirds of the country and fifty per cent of the population. These zones were to become the basis of the subsequent independence phase; they were social experiments of the new ideology voiced by the hard core of PAIGC cadres devoted to socialism. The movement's gradually aligned with a Marxist-Leninist line, although it preferred not to use the label. Strong organisational measures, envisaging a profound cultural transformation, were designed and implemented. These concerned the idea of 'people's power': village committees, people's courts, people's stores, agricultural production, women's empowerment, educational and health projects were successful examples of the PAIGC's capacity to govern. Lars Rudebeck, visiting in November/December 1970, noted the movement's success in transforming itself into a *de facto* state in the liberated areas:

“...the days when the PAIGC was just a rebel movement had thus passed long ago. It is easy to confirm this opinion after having spent some time in the liberated areas of the country. There can be no doubt that the PAIGC today is a revolutionary movement building a new society with broad popular support, and a small but well-organised people’s army.” (Rudebeck, 1972: 4-5)

From 2 to 8 April 1972, the UN sent a Special Mission, composed of dozens of observers from various member-states, to visit the liberated areas in Guinea-Bissau in order to confirm the party’s reported achievements – a major diplomatic success for the liberation movement. The UN’s Special Mission report praised the PAIGC’s efforts in health and education, conveying the party’s achievements which, by 1972, included the establishment of 200 clinics in the controlled territory; the enrolment of 20,000 children, taught by a staff of 251 teachers, in around 200 primary schools; the enrolment of 495 people in high school and universities in allied countries; and the training of 497 high and middle level civil servants working in the liberated areas. The contrast with Portuguese colonial legacy was striking: under the colonial regime there were no doctors outside the main cities, over 90 percent of the population was illiterate, the first and only high school had been built in the 1950s and, as Basil Davidson reports, in the 1960s, under the colonial regime, only fourteen Guineans had had access to university (Davidson, 1969: 28). Based on the Special Mission’s report, the Special Committee on Decolonisation adopted a resolution on April 13, 1972 expressing “its conviction that the successful accomplishment by the Special Mission of its task – establishing beyond any doubt the fact that *de facto* control in these areas is exercised by the PAIGC, the national liberation movement of the territory – constitutes a major contribution by the United Nations in the field of decolonization” (para.5). The Mission “was impressed by the enthusiastic and wholehearted cooperation which PAIGC receives from the people in the liberated areas and the extent to which the latter are participating in the administrative machinery set up by PAIGC and of the various programs of reconstruction” (para.2).

The UN General Assembly and the Security Council reaffirmed the right of Portuguese Guinea’s people to self-determination and independence in General Assembly Resolution 2918 (XXVII) of 14 November 1972 and Security Council Resolution 322 (1972) of 22 November 1972. Moreover, as proposed by the Special Committee on

Decolonisation, the Fourth Committee of the twenty-seventh UN General Assembly recognised the PAIGC as “the only and authentic representative of the people of the territory”. The May 1973 Working Paper prepared by the UN Secretariat (A19023/ADD.3, 19 September 1972) reviewed very favourably the party’s achievements.

Women’s role in the liberation struggle was also a matter of international attention. Stephanie Urdang’s first-hand account draws a particularly favourable picture of PAIGC’s achievements in this area:

“The involvement of women in the revolution, a goal from the very beginning, was not an afterthought (...). When the first mobilizers went into the countryside in 1959-60, the program of political education for which they were trained by Cabral included raising the consciousness of both women and men about the oppression of women and the need to fight against it. At first few women attended the meetings called by the mobilizers; those who did relayed the message to the women of their village and encouraged them to attend. Attendance by women slowly increased. By the time I visited the country just over a decade later, men and women were attending meetings of the population in equal numbers. Half the speakers that I heard were women, who told me of their participation in the revolution and who spoke with confidence before hundreds of people.” (Urdang, 1975: 30)

Urdang continues, listing how “the PAIGC helped pave the way for increased freedom of women” (Urdang, 1975: 31): in order to fight against discrimination against women in education, girls’ enrolment in primary schools was considered a priority and girls were sent abroad to study at allied countries’ secondary schools; rice provision for the guerrilla, for the most part in the hands of women, became a political task from which women began to derive power and status; two out of five elected village councillors had to be women, thus including them from the inception in the grassroots political leadership; this was also visible at higher levels, for instance, of the three political workers, corresponding to the three war fronts—northern, eastern and southern—responsible for the social reconstruction and political education program, two were women; there were women directors of schools, heads of hospitals and chief nurses,

many coming from peasant families; oppressive traditional customs such as absence of divorce and forced marriage were reversed and the People's Courts were instructed to intervene; polygamy was forbidden for Party members, in the hope of slowly changing this ingrained custom. Urdang refers only to one serious remaining inequality, the lack of women in combat roles, yet she shows confidence that Guinean women are aware that after defeating Portuguese colonialism, they will still have to defeat the other one – coming from men, and looked prepared for it (Urdang, 1975: 30-34).

In 1972, in the midst of the guerrilla warfare, the PAIGC put its ideals into practice by organizing elections in the liberated areas for regional councils that would later elect representatives for the People's National Assembly<sup>2</sup> – “steps toward democracy” considered “impressive” by the *Economist* in 1973 (The Economist, 1973). This democratically chosen political organ was meant to enable the mass participation of villagers and establish their connection with the highest level party officials, reaching 52,000 voters – “a measure of the guerrilla's success in bringing democracy to Guinea-Bissau” (Grimond, 1973). It served therefore two purposes: to allow ordinary citizens to participate in the decision-making process and confer on the ruling party the power and legitimacy to decide the country's future (Forrest, 1992: 32).

The PAIGC leadership gained more and more sympathy from outside groups which won it the epithet of “the most successful of the African movements attempting to end Portugal's rule” (Johnson, 1974a). Amílcar Cabral was mainly responsible and the recipient of internal and external's optimism and high expectations. As PAIGC's external capital grew, Portugal's rapidly diminished. When the promising Cabral was assassinated, contrasting attitudes towards the two countries were patent in Western coverage: “The night of Jan. 20, 1973, Amílcar Cabral's death became the final sacrifice to the cause for which he had dedicated his life. (...) In Portuguese Guinea (...) Lisbon clings to an African colony fighting for independence, aided and abetted by the freedom-loving Atlantic Alliance” (Pike, 1974); “...there seems little prospect of the war in Guinea coming to an early end. Mr Cabral's achievement was to make the PAIGC into a force which fought with schools, clinics and ballot boxes as well as with weapons, and which can sustain its momentum even without his leadership” (The

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<sup>2</sup> There were no elections in the areas under Portuguese control at the time: Bissau, Bolama, Bijagós Islands and Bafatá.

Economist, 1973). The UN General Assembly Resolution 3113 (XXVIII) of 12 December 1973 condemned “in the strongest possible terms” Portuguese military forces for “the brutal massacre of villagers, the mass destruction of villages and property and the ruthless use of napalm and chemical substances in order to stifle the legitimate aspirations of those peoples for freedom and independence”(1973b).

Emboldened by criticism of Portuguese colonial policy, the PAIGC grew robust enough to overcome the tragic assassination of its acclaimed leader and actually intensified the anti-colonial war against, at that point, 35,000 Portuguese troops.<sup>3</sup> Only a few months after such a considerable setback, and purposefully coinciding with the General Assembly’s annual meeting, the PAIGC held a People’s National Assembly session with its 120 deputies in the liberated region of Medina de Boé, which unilaterally declared independence of the “Republic of Guinea-Bissau” on September 24, 1973, based on “the *de facto* existence of an efficiently functioning State structure” (Guinea Bissau People’s National Assembly, 1973: 28). Amílcar’s half-brother, Luís Cabral was formally elected President of the State Council. The declaration was attended by foreign reporters from Sweden, Soviet Union, Eastern Germany and China (Diggs Jr., 1973: 30).

The ‘honeymoon period’ is particularly visible at this point, with Guinea-Bissau warmly welcomed into the international community of states. A series of diplomatic achievements rapidly followed the unilateral declaration of independence. Less than a month later, the new state had been officially recognised by 54 countries (Johnson, 1973). In his speech at the 1973 UN General Assembly meeting, on October 5, General Gowon, then President of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), appealed to all “friends of Africa” to accommodate the new nation’s “rightful position as a proud member of the international community” (Diggs Jr., 1973: 31). On November 4, 1973, when the first black scholar was elected president of the African Studies Association (Absolom Vilakazi), Guinea-Bissau went straight to the top of the agenda, with the association calling on the US to recognise the country (Fraser, 1973). In November 20, 1973, the PAIGC was officially admitted to the OAU as a full member (The New York Times, 1973) and Luís Cabral later elected deputy chairman (The New York Times, 1974c). On December 3, 1973, Guinea-Bissau participated in the third UN Law of the

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<sup>3</sup> Reference to Soviet new weapons supplies (anti-air rockets).

Sea Conference, despite Portuguese vehement protests (Teltsch, 1973a). Similarly, the 28<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly adopted a Resolution welcoming Guinea-Bissau's accession to independence, notwithstanding objection from Portugal, the US and Britain, amongst others (Teltsch, 1973b), and strongly condemning "the policies of the government of Portugal in perpetuating its illegal occupation of certain sectors of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau and the repeated acts of aggression committed by its armed forces against the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde" (1973a). In March 1974, Guinea-Bissau was granted observer status at the United Nations and was admitted with full voting rights to the International Conference on Rules of War in Geneva—in contrast with other liberation movements which were granted only observer status (The New York Times, 1974d). Besides political recognition, the PAIGC was also proving capable of capturing financial and material support: in April the OAU announced the establishment of a US\$450,000 fund for the territory under the PAIGC's control and Libya pledged an additional US\$500,000 (The New York Times, 1974a); following FAO's earlier recognition of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, the World Food Program decided to make food aid available to peoples in liberated areas in African colonial territories, acknowledging the decision had been made with Guinea-Bissau, as well as Angola and Mozambique, in mind (Pace, 1974).

By then, criticism of Portugal's African wars, and demands for the colonial power to concede defeat and start political negotiations, were accompanied by popular support for PAIGC's liberation struggle in various Western countries and concomitant pressure on domestic parliaments to recognise Guinea-Bissau (Kemezis, 1973). Important personalities in the US, for instance, made passionate pleas for the recognition of the country's independence, making parallels with French and North American revolutionary history. Charles Diggs Jr, then Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa, of the US House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Affairs, publicly called on his government to recognise the state of Guinea-Bissau: "Let us not, on the eve of our Bicentennial, turn our back on the words of Jefferson in 1792 in reference to the revolution in France: 'It accords with our principles to acknowledge any government to be rightful which is formed by the will of the nation, substantially declared'" (Diggs Jr., 1973: 32). George Houser, then executive director of the American Committee on Africa, a private organisation which supported African independence, also wrote an enthusiastic article for the *New York Times* calling on the US to recognise

the liberation movement's declaration of independence, going so far as to compare it with that of the US in 1776 (Houser, 1974).<sup>4</sup> Western powers were careful not to publicly confront their NATO ally, yet while Portugal and the PAIGC were still holding negotiations for the transfer of power, the UN Security Council unanimously recommended that Guinea-Bissau be admitted to the UN (Kihss, 1974).

These events were an undisputable confirmation of the movement's exceptional international standing. By the time of the Portuguese revolution, on April 25, 1974 the PAIGC had been recognised by 82 countries as the official government of Guinea-Bissau (Johnson, 1974b) – more countries than the ones the Portuguese dictatorship had diplomatic relations with at the time. It was widely recognised then that the bloodless military coup which ousted the dictatorship and initiated the democratic transition of the former colonial power had begun with an army mutiny for which the PAIGC's military success was directly responsible (Heinzerling, 1977). Several months before any other Portuguese colonies, Portugal finally recognised Guinea-Bissau on September 10, 1974. The country would become a UN member on September 17, at the opening of the General Assembly's 29<sup>th</sup> session.

Eastern and Western states and movements and international institutions which had supported the liberation rushed to help build the new country. Support flowed strongly from the Soviet Union, Cuba, East Germany and China, as well as Sweden, Holland, Norway, Denmark, Portugal (following initially strained relations), France, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Britain, Finland, Yugoslavia, some Arab states, along with the European Economic Community (EEC) and the UN. Luís Cabral rejected foreign military bases in the country (The Economist, 1977) and insisted on non-alignment in order to keep the doors open to both dominant geopolitical blocs and secure funds from multiple sources (Guinea Bissau People's National Assembly, 1973: 29). Reports emphasised that none of the major industries had yet been nationalised and that Portuguese and Lebanese traders who had left when the country became independent

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<sup>4</sup> The recognition of Guinea-Bissau's independence by the US was problematic, given the superpower's use of the Azores military base in the 1973 Yom Kippur war, in exchange for which Lisbon had demanded political and military support for its colonial policies and wars. As was Britain's position at the time, ambiguously moving between opposition to the abovementioned General Assembly's Resolution which welcomed Guinea-Bissau's independence and attempting in the background to mediate between the PAIGC and Portugal in order to safeguard its own relations with sub-Saharan Africa. For more detail, see Norrie MacQueen, "Belated Decolonization and UN Politics against the Backdrop of the Cold War: Portugal, Britain, and Guinea-Bissau's Proclamation of Independence, 1973-1974" (MacQueen, 2006).

were returning (Jonhson, 1975). The President was perceived by Western powers as avoiding the more radical Marxist stance adopted by Angola and Mozambique: “To the welcomed surprise of many Western leaders, President Luís Cabral appears to be steering this former Portuguese colony on a course of political moderation and economic pragmatism” (Heinzerling, 1977). He was depicted in the Western press as “a soft-spoken man who wears casual short-sleeves, business suits and smokes British cigarettes” and who does not “speak in the political clichés familiar in “revolutionary” Africa” (Heinzerling, 1977). The New York Times introduced the president to Western readership very favourably as

“a short, stocky man with a well-tended beard and a ready smile (...). Mr. Cabral, a man noted for the openness of his comments, is relaxed and amiable with foreigners. His French and Portuguese are excellent. He apologizes that his English is somewhat less than that. (...) Colleagues credit Mr. Cabral with helping to establish for the nationalist movement a system of jungle stores, hospitals and schools that has been described as among the best on the continent. (...) in the later stages of war, he is said to have blocked younger rebels from using terrorist tactics against Portuguese civilian centers.” (The New York Times, 1974b)

The international community looked upon the new Guinean state, heir to one of the most inspiring and reputed liberation movements in Africa, with confidence and optimism and seemed vested in producing results. Indeed, “at the time I became interested in the decolonisation of Portuguese Africa”, says Odd Arne Westad, a Norwegian working for Students and Teachers International Relief Fund in Mozambique between 1978 and 1979, “Guinea-Bissau was the success story”.<sup>5</sup> Patrick Chabal, a clearly sympathetic academic, summarises succinctly the reasons animating this external representation:

“Guinea-Bissau stands as a symbol of African will against colonial might. The first African country (other than Algeria) to launch a full-scale nationalist war, the first to attain independence through guerrilla war, and the first to attempt to construct a socialist state on the basis of free and fair elections before

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with the author, February 2011.

independence, Guinea-Bissau was in the mid-seventies a beacon of hope for those concerned with the fate of socialism in Africa. Amílcar Cabral, the founder and leader of the nationalist movement (PAIGC) which had achieved so much, was, at the time of his death in 1973, probably the most highly respected nationalist leader in Africa. He was recognised as the architect of what was then and remains today the most successful people's war in Africa and was widely regarded as the most original political thinker of his generation." (Chabal, 1988: 117)

### **Late 1970s-1980s: The Beginning of the Disillusionment**

If Western representations of Guinea Bissau were largely optimistic during the country's liberation war and independence, international attention soon began to fade as hopes for a smooth and successful transition to statehood were progressively crushed in the post-colonial period. Not only did external interest rapidly decline from the late 1970s onwards, mainstream portrayals of the country remained increasingly focused on internal tensions and crises in what would become a pattern for external representations and understandings of the Guinean postcolonial context.

When the PAIGC came to power, following its triumphant struggle in the war for decolonisation, it enjoyed widespread legitimacy, as indeed did most newly independent African governments at this time. The expectations surrounding the symbolism of a transfer of power to an indigenous political movement, however, was short-lived and quickly gave way to disappointment. As Chabal points out, the tasks faced by nationalist movements in power were overwhelming: they had to consolidate the nation-state within colonial borders; take over the colonial state apparatus in order to engage in the exercise of power; and spur socio-economic development—all while upholding democratic rule (1986: 5-6). The demands of state-building—no easy task in the destitute scenario left by the Portuguese, and further impeded by severe economic crisis—rapidly eroded the social and political support, initially widespread, for the new post-colonial government. As Leon Dash wrote in the *Washington Post* eight years after the declaration of independence, "This small nation has had a sharp fall from the euphoric days of 1974. (...) No longer do the Guineans and their Cape Verdian compatriots have the sharp, black-and-white choices of an anticolonial war" (Dash, 1981).

Aiming at the destruction of the colonial capitalist system and influenced by the modernising developmentalist agenda of the time, the post-independence government adopted a centralising and socialist political-economic framework which, if not a necessary concomitant to a one-party state, complemented the concurrent centralisation of power. In order to expand state power in the economic sphere, the government launched a nationalisation programme in prominent social and economic areas, while also monopolising external and internal trade in the hands of the state. Economic success was limited; investment in a project of industrialisation proved a failure, largely because of an absence of parallel investment in the transformation of agriculture activity. Much economic activity, as in the colonial period, remained informal. Moreover, the implementation of socialist centralising and modernising policies provoked significant grievances and opposition among many Guineans, particularly in the rural areas, where they were widely perceived as reinforcing an urban bias in investment and consumption.

If the government failed to make a significant transformative impact on the country's economy, it was more influential in placing its stamp on post-independence political institutions. The party-state system gradually led to the institutionalisation of political authoritarianism (Mendy, 1996: 31). The People's National Assembly exercised little influence over a largely unaccountable government; mass organisations of women (Democratic Union of Women of Guinea-Bissau - UDEMU), youth (Amílcar Cabral African Youth - JAAC) and labour (National Union of Guinean Workers - UNTG) became top-down in their organisational structures and were increasingly deployed as instruments for the party to exercise control over significant parts of society, in a sharp departure from their original purpose and programmes. Peasants, meanwhile, felt increasingly disconnected from a governing elite which had relied heavily on their support during the liberation struggle. A widening 'de-linkage' of the leadership from the ordinary citizenry was increasingly apparent, with the PAIGC tightening its monopoly over politics and banning every kind of entity that sought expression outside the party (Mendy, 1996: 30-31).

Elections continued to be held throughout this early period of independence: Luís Cabral was re-elected President by the People's National Assembly on 13 March 1977.

Nevertheless, they were merely instrumental in the confirmation of an uncontested leader and did not seem to be sufficient to set up a mechanism of intra-party conflict resolution and elite recycling. Moreover, within the one-party system, the leader was president of the State Council, head of state and government, head of the PAIGC and commander in chief of the armed forces – there was no other legal space to challenge him. For a movement which had demonstrated a commitment to democratic principles during its war-time management of liberated areas, these developments seemed out of place and did not augur well for democratic governance. Luís Cabral's regime went further, building up an internal security apparatus and punishing dissent with high levels of repression, ranging from threats and intimidation to arbitrary arrest, torture, disappearance and summary execution, which were later reported.

Relations with foreigners were strained and Western press, such as the *Economist*, was reporting the beginning of the scepticism of donors and aid agents:

“A standing joke among the 90-strong Swedish aid mission in Guinea-Bissau is that there are more Volvo cars per head in Bissau city than in Stockholm. This cynical crack reflects the growing disillusionment of this country's largest single foreign helper with the government of Guinea-Bissau – whose officials (and their friends and relations) owns most of the Volvos. The Swedes, who brought them the cars, mostly use smaller ones themselves. (...) the PAIGC still relies as heavily as ever on the prestige won during the long war with Portugal, even though this prestige is wearing thin. In some areas, unrest has become a serious problem. And the Swedes are not the only foreign donors who are questioning the government's development policies.” (The Economist, 1979)

Grandiose but inadequate development projects also made donors wary:

“One such project, the Cumere agroindustrial complex, scheduled to be completed in november, has cost \$120 million -- three times Guinea's estimated annual budget -- and will be capable, among other things, of processing 70,000 tons of tobacco, a product only 15,00 tons of which was produced in the country last year. A Citroen of France small car factory, with a planned annual production of 500 vehicles for a country whose 700,000 residents are 90 percent

peasant, is closing after its first year, during which it assembled 285 cars. There is no foreign exchange to buy any more of Citroen's assembly packages." (Dash, 1981)

Other examples proliferated, such as the construction of a four-lane motorway connecting the capital to the airport to replace a two-lane road which had cost US\$7 million and was used by only 10 cars per hour (The Economist, 1979). Corruption also started to become a noticeable and problematic phenomenon:

"Last year, a housing project in a needy slum area was stalled for a month after a PAIGC minister commandeered all the cement—apparently for his own use. Not long afterwards all building materials were requisitioned by the foreign ministry, which was adding a new wing to Bissau's best hotel in preparation for the visit of the Portuguese president." (The Economist, 1979)

The report continues, quoting a Swedish official criticising the disappearance of about US\$750,000 intended to buy equipment for the energy sector: "We don't know where it's gone and we can't find out" (The Economist, 1979). It is important to note that, at the time, Sweden was providing about US\$12 million per year in aid, thus being the largest individual donor (The Associated Press, 1980a). In the meantime, the economic situation was worsening: meat was not available in the markets and rice was scarce—when its production levels had been self-sufficient before and during the war. As a result, Luís Cabral's popularity was waning (Dash, 1981). "Ordinary people are beginning to wonder if they are getting the sort of independence they want and fought for" (The Economist, 1979). So too were donors and aid agents.

Disappointment with the new government's performance was apparent not only in media coverage but also in the academy where voices took an increasingly critical tone, as exemplified by Barry Munslow:

"Rice shortages, the swallowing up of resources by the capital and neglect of the rural zones in the south and a wastage of resources on a few large scale development projects were only some of the economic difficulties experienced. There was essentially a two-way blockage. Goods from abroad were getting no

further than Bissau hence the peasants had no incentive to market their agricultural products and in turn feed the capital. The strata occupying the state found themselves relying more and more on foreign aid and less and less on the internal peasant base. The bureaucracy in the city was growing fat and a certain ostentation in the lifestyle of officials was naturally unpopular.” (Munslow, 1981: 111)

The honeymoon period when outsiders rushed to help, and provided glowing reports of the newly independent regime had clearly come to an end. Yet, feelings towards the country were still ambiguous, as reactions to the first military coup proved. After years of intense interpersonal rivalry, on November 14, 1980, the Prime Minister and a famous guerrilla commander, Nino Vieira, conducted a military coup against President Luís Cabral, who was forced into exile. The faction that led the coup called itself the “Readjustment Movement” and claimed to seek to correct Luís Cabral’s mistakes: namely the unity between Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, seen as a source of resentment for Guineans and which the movement put an end to; the human rights violations, which for a short while did diminish considerably; and the socialist development agenda thought to be unsustainable and the source of the country’s economic crisis.

Nino Vieira’s end to Amílcar Cabral’s dream of unity between Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau displeased those in favour of a Pan-Africanist strategy for the continent and enthusiastic supporters of the new-born unified state. As Munslow states, it was a “serious set-back both for Pan-Africanism and for socialism on the continent” (Munslow, 1981: 109). Media reports on the coup depicted a “black revolt” against the “half-caste Cape Verdeans [which] dominated the PAIGC” (The Economist, 1980) and raised concerns regarding the threat of a “racial strife” animated by “black nationalists” against the “predominantly mixed-race Cape Verdeans” (The New York Times, 1984).<sup>6</sup> On a very critical article for the *Guardian*, Basil Davidson considers the

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<sup>6</sup> The PAIGC was in effect an alliance of different classes: the leadership was mainly constituted by a young generation of erudite and assimilated native elite—the African bourgeoisie that had managed to benefit from Portuguese rule, amongst which the lighter skinned Cape Verdeans were prominent—and it included largely workers and peasants in its ranks; it also made a specific effort to become supra-ethnic and representative of the different ethnic groups in the mainland, in order to thwart divisions along tribal lines and ensure national unity. This strategy was quite successful during the liberation war, but, as Munslow puts it, “the strains ran deep” (Munslow, 1981: 110).

coup a “sharp setback into narrow provincialism”, presents the Revolutionary Council as consisting of “men of far less calibre or known competence” than the displaced leaders, and Nino Vieira as unlikely to be “gifted with any particular capacity for statesmanship”; he concludes by alerting the readership to the fact that “the aims and the vision of the liberation struggle may not survive” (Davidson, 1980).

Yet overall western coverage of the military coup *per se* was more indulgent than expected. It is true that a coup d'état within Amílcar Cabral's party would have seemed implausible only a few years earlier—the PAIGC was actually quite vocal regarding coups in other African leaderships, namely in Guinea-Conakry—nevertheless, the deteriorated context in which Nino Vieira's coup took place, and the promises he brought with him seemed to appease some of the likely international condemnation. Indeed, attention focused on Luís Cabral's record of repression and economic disarray while giving the benefit of the doubt to the coup leader. Criticisms were reserved to the ousted President, with the discovery, in 1980, of two mass graves with two hundred bodies of opponents to the regime killed over the previous two years following a failed 1978 coup, and accusations that, over his six-year rule, Luís Cabral had ordered the execution of over 500 political prisoners (The New York Times, 1980b). Reports had now clearly moved away from the positive reviews the President had once won from “[d]iplomatic and other foreign observers” who had given “high marks to Guinea-Bissau's even handed leadership at home” and had assured there were “no mass reprisals against those who fought for the Portuguese, no cult of the personality, no repression or revolutionary rhetoric” (Heinzerling, 1977). Nino Vieira, on the other hand, wanted to take more pragmatic decisions, as foreign observers noted, namely end “the badly run rice monopoly” (Dash, 1981) and introduce private business (The Associated Press, 1980b). The country's new leadership was credited for “groping for new directions after years of ethnic conflict, political power struggles and disastrous financial mismanagement” (Dash, 1981). News covered street celebrations of the coup, thus pointing to the unpopularity of the ousted government and the *de facto* recognition of the takeover (The New York Times, 1980a).

Interestingly, foreigners' reaction to the coup was similar to that of the PAIGC's own members. In interviews with the author, former historic leaders of the party regularly expressed disapproval for the action: “Amílcar Cabral's movement does not resolve

things by means of a coup”, was a typical response, even if followed, seconds later, by a defence of Nino Vieira’s need to react to Cabral’s near “persecution” and the fact that, since the coup had happened already, the PAIGC needed to come to terms with it and move on.<sup>7</sup> This attitude is reinforced by the fact that several important members of the ousted government, and historic leaders of the party, joined the Revolutionary Council presided by Nino Vieira and took functions in its new government, thereby effectively legitimating the post-coup *status quo*.

It did not take long, however, for Nino Vieira’s regime to start raising doubts in the West. By 1982, the *Guardian* confirmed that the new president “appears to have survived the political game”, “but has failed to halt the country’s downward economic slide” (Jolliffe, 1982). The military-rule was prolonged for four years; it was not until 16 May 1984 the first post-coup elections were scheduled, which validated Nino Vieira’s leadership. What little attention was afforded Guinea Bissau in Western media coverage focused now largely on the deteriorating political environment with the new president. The first of many to follow, the 1980 coup d’état confirmed “pervasive intraparty factionalism” had become the norm in Guinean politics (Forrest, 1992: 45). Splinter groups, based on personal antagonism and ethnic tensions, fighting to access power, soon took the upper hand and Nino Vieira’s regime turned out to be as repressive as its predecessor. Following the precedent set in 1980, power struggles in the form of coups, attempted coups or allegedly attempted coups became a pattern in Guinea’s political trajectory. These would be typically followed by a repressive reaction and purges inside the party, in order to fight off the threat of a rival faction. Several episodes were reported as moments of intense power struggle, where the President sought to solve the risk of being ousted from power by sidelining or even annihilating any potential enemy. The case of Vítor Saúde Maria in March 1984, dismissed for allegedly plotting a coup, was reported as the last civilian being ousted from the military regime (The New York Times, 1984, The Associated Press, 1984). In 1986, 52 men were convicted of attempting to overthrow Nino Vieira and— notwithstanding appeals from the Pope, the Portuguese President Mário Soares and former president Ramalho Eanes and Amnesty International—execution by firing

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, the new Constitution adopted on November 10, 1980, had severely cut the Prime Minister’s powers. Moreover, it allowed non-indigenous citizens to run for Presidency in Guinea, but not in Cape Verde and it also introduced capital punishment only in Guinea-Bissau, which reinforced Guineans’ resentment towards Luís Cabral’s leadership and eased opposition to Nino Vieira’s coup.

squad of six of them<sup>8</sup> was announced at a meeting with foreign diplomats in Bissau (The New York Times, 1986). The Guardian's headline "Executions mark Bissau's decline" points to the definitive end of President Nino Vieira's grace period (Jolliffe, 1986). The article underlined "the deteriorating situation in a country which was once regarded as a potential model for the Third World" and noted fears that Guinea-Bissau had been "consigned to the list of orthodox African dictatorships"; it pointed to the president's "increasing dictatorial personal behaviour", which demonstrated "symptoms of paranoia which have led him to turn against those closest to him" (Jolliffe, 1986).

Stories of high repression became the overriding image of the country presented to a Western readership. Formerly enthusiastic academics were already using Guinea-Bissau as an example of a problematic transition from the liberation struggle to socialism—for instance, Basil Davidson's "Practice and Theory: Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde" (1986)—and new scholars working on Guinea-Bissau were focusing on 'what had gone wrong', such as Rosemary Galli and Joshua Forrest.<sup>9</sup>

Financial aid from leftist solidarity movements in Western countries and the Eastern bloc was waning. Progressively, the creation of a socialist regime backed by the Soviet bloc in the context of the Cold War meant western opposition, distancing and ultimately neglect. Economic decadence and grave food shortages made the situation even more precarious (The New York Times, 1984). Contradictions had broken the unitary front of the movement and socialism was failing. In 1983, facing the collapse of the socialist strategy, the economic crisis and internal discontent, as well as the withdrawal of Soviet patronage and the subsequent need to open to the West for financial support, the ruling party revised its economic policy and embarked on a radical shift, from a centrally managed socialism to a liberal market capitalism. This would be the first step of a later, much expected, political opening.

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<sup>8</sup> Those executed for leading the attempted coup were former vice-President of the governing State Council Paulo Correia, former Supreme Court Justice Viriato Rodrigues and military officers Binhanquerem Na T'chanda, Pedro Ramos, Braimo Banquita and Nbana Sambu. All except Viriato Rodrigues were Balanta, the largest ethnic group in the country and the one which had contributed the most to the liberation struggle.

<sup>9</sup> Rosemary Galli, "Amílcar Cabral and Rural Transformation in Guinea-Bissau: A Preliminary Critique", 1986; Joshua Forrest, "Guinea-Bissau since Independence: A Decade of Domestic Power Struggles", 1987; Rosemary Galli and Jocelyn Jones, Guinea-Bissau: Politics, Economics and Society, 1987; Carlos Lopes, From Liberation Struggle to Independent Statehood, 1987; Rosemary Galli, "The Food Crisis and the Socialist State in Lusophone Africa", 1987; Rosemary Galli, "Estado e sociedade na Guiné-Bissau", 1989.

### **Mid-1980s/1990s: Scepticism Despite Liberalisation**

Despite the increasingly apparent autocratic nature of Nino's rule and a growing number of scandals involving the alleged elimination of political opponents, western powers were happy to support the change of course in economic policy. Rapprochement began, as elsewhere, first with "economic *perestroika*", later followed by "political *glasnost*" (Mendy, 1996: 15).

### ***Neoliberal Economic Reform***

In the late 1980s, the *New York Times* reporting on the cancellation of fishing accords between west African states and the Soviet Union, noted "a marked move among Africans back to the West" (Brooke, 1988b). Guinea-Bissau, in particular, was reluctant to put in effect its 1985 protocol with the Soviets, had just made a commercial deal with the European Union and the US was supporting a fish patrol programme, "adding an East-West twist to this battle over sardines and snappers" (Brooke, 1988b). Pope John Paul II's words, in a visit to the country in 1990, were interpreted as urging a definite change away from Communism, even if "wrapped in ecclesiastical phrasings" (Haberaman, 1990). The country was signalling its interest in definitively 'switching sides', clearly in alignment with the major world shift that would not take long to occur. News coverage of transformations in Guinea-Bissau were still relatively rare yet the country served as an example for articles on the expansion of the West's sphere of influence and ultimate path to triumph over the bipolar confrontation.

Indeed, for a neoliberal aid community, the new government could not have been more cooperative. Unlike Angola, with a "soviet-style political elite" suffering from "withdrawal pains", Guinea-Bissau was considered to be "moving steadily in the direction of private industry and free markets" (Brooke, 1988a). Since 1985, the government of President Nino Vieira was seen as

...encourag[ing] more private ownership while lifting price controls and trade restrictions, as had been urged by the International Monetary Fund. The new policy is said to have put more goods in market stalls and to have enabled the economy to grow by an annual average of 5 percent in the last several years. At the same time, diplomats say, Guinea-Bissau has fashioned a foreign policy that is turning somewhat from Moscow toward the West, a shift underlined by the

acceptance of 25 United States Peace Corps volunteers in 1988 (Haberman, 1990).

The good news was accompanied by much needed funds, which flowed from western donors with limited monitoring. The comprehensive stabilisation plan, a structural adjustment programme set up by the Bretton Woods Institutions and aimed at surmounting the acute economic crisis, envisaged the implementation of a panoply of liberal economic reforms intended primarily to increase revenue and reduce expenditures, curb inflation and the country's deficit, facilitate foreign and private investment, deregulate prices, liberalise trade, and privatise state owned enterprises. The new orthodoxy now ascendant in the West and eagerly implemented in Guinea Bissau, increased the dependence on market forces and drastically reduced the role of the state to minimalist functions (Sender, 1999: 101).

Referring to Guinea Bissau's experience of structural adjustment, Galli writes:

No one disputes the need for structural adjustment in economies in which consumption has consistently been greater than production, imports are higher than exports over a long period, savings are almost nil and investment is largely dependent on outside sources. When any of these conditions occurs over a long period, it generally generates pressure for radical intervention to adjust the economy (Galli, 1990: 52).

The initial years of liberalisation brought reasonable growth rates. The abolishment of state monopolies encouraged trade and made available a variety of products, especially in the cities, which reversed shortages and endless lines for basic necessities. Yet, the balance of trade was an inevitable collateral damage of such liberalisation— with mainly the import of consumption goods and even of products, such as rice, that were once exported. The country got progressively indebted and, despite the loans, productive sectors were at a standstill or got worse, to the detriment of small farmers.

Exchange rates were set high in order that industrialists would be able to import raw materials and capital and intermediate goods cheaply. (...) At the same time, governments restricted local producer prices for food and raw

materials. In so doing, they discouraged local production, making the economy dependent on international markets for both agricultural and industrial 'inputs'. High exchange rates prejudiced the competitiveness of export crops, limiting foreign exchange earnings. This, in turn, put a brake on industrialisation. Production in both agricultural and industrial sectors began to stagnate or fall (Galli, 1990: 53).

Also, as happened elsewhere in Africa, the social impact of structural adjustment programs was particularly harmful—highly contributing to the deterioration of the health and education systems. Furthermore, the hasty and obscure privatization process is a classic example of how economic power can be co-opted by narrow national elite connected to state power as well as foreign actors, further marginalizing the poorer peasantry. As Kamphuis points out—and Guinea-Bissau illustrates—'[p]rivatization is no neutral transfer of public assets into private hands; it sheds the cards for the future' (2005: 208). In this case, it meant upholding the overlap between political and economic elite, as well as reinforcing the legacy of the access to the state as the premium prize, making it more patrimonial than before and increasing corruption dramatically. State workers were converted into "public-private intermediaries", heavily dependent on both central authority and external aid for personal enrichment (Pureza et al., 2007: 17). And the culture of dependency grew, for both state and society, until today.

In Guinea-Bissau, as elsewhere, namely in Africa, the newly available funds did not trickle down to the population but remained within the political elite, turning it into an effective rent-seeking elite. Far from the original plans for a developmental state, Guinea-Bissau had turned into an extractive state.

### *The Tortuous Democratic Transition*

Political liberalisation followed economic liberalisation. Under a single-party military regime, highly controlling and statist, increasingly illegitimate and unaccountable, political freedom was extremely limited. And yet the party grew weaker by the day, torn by internal divisions and sidelined by an increasingly personalised power. Caving in to international and internal pressures, President Nino Vieira announced in 1991 the beginning of the democratic transition, finalising, that same year, the necessary

constitutional amendments to enable a multiparty system and guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms. At this point in time, the democratisation wave was sweeping the African continent and Guinea-Bissau did not remain aside. Hence, along with the process of economic reform, Guinea followed as well the international donor community's prescriptions for the long hoped political opening. After twenty years (from 1974 until 1994) of authoritarian rule, pro-democracy activists, mainly the educated urban elite, were able to create political associations and parties and contest the PAIGC's monopoly of politics.

However, the PAIGC chose the most favourable method (Hondt) and number of electoral circles to determine seats in Parliament and, even though the opposition combined had more votes than the winning party, the PAIGC managed to win 62 of the Assembly's seats in the parliamentary elections of July 1994, as we can see from Table 1 (see annex). The liberation party thus managed to maintain its unquestionable grip on power and come out unscathed from the first big test of the transition from a one-party system to an open multiparty competition. Elections worked more as an instance of regaining power, rather than actually seeing it restricted. However, the presidential elections did reveal a decrease in popularity of Nino and a growing frustration and disapproval of his rule (Table 2, see annex). Two rounds were required for Nino Vieira to remain in power and he was close to losing to Kumba Ialá, who would later succeed him as president in 2000. Little changed, though, besides the opportunity to express this dissatisfaction on the ballots.

When compared to setbacks in multiparty elections in Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau seemed to be doing well and have a smoother path ahead. For instance, US Ambassador Dennis Jett said at the time that Mozambique had to choose to become "a South Africa or a Malawi or a Guinea-Bissau as a place where democracy works, and not a Rwanda or a Somalia or a Liberia" (Richburg, 1994). Also, the academic community interested in this democratisation wave referred to Guinea-Bissau as one more example of a country turning from socialist authoritarianism to multiparty democracy and evidence of liberalism's triumph in the continent. Most notably, Bratton and van de Walle's widely-read book on *Democratic Experiments in Africa*, whose case studies referred to the period between 1990-1994, cited the country as one of the continent's 'successes', along with Mozambique (Bratton and Walle, 1997: 120).

Yet the satisfaction with the transitional process was short-lived. By the time the book was published in 1997, Guinea-Bissau's 'successful' transition to electoral democratic status was already questioned.

International coverage of the transition process was quite limited. The *Economist* and the *New York Times*, did not cover the elections. In fact, in an article from October 1991, the *Economist* had claimed multiparty elections had already been held in Guinea-Bissau, amongst other countries, showing lack of knowledge regarding this specific political transition (The Economist, 1991). The *Guardian* had only a two-line reference to the parliamentary elections in which it alluded to the "confusion and poor organisation" which had "disrupted Guinea-Bissau's first ever multiparty elections in the capital", acknowledging, however, that polling in the rest of the country had proceeded normally (The Guardian, 1994b). It also mentioned very briefly Nino Vieira's "narrow lead" in the presidential elections over his opponent Kumba Ialá, referring to his remaining in office in depreciative terms as "clinging to power" (The Guardian, 1994a). The lack of interest was clear.

History regarding those very first multiparty elections in Guinea-Bissau was then revised a few times, depending on perceptions of the country held then in the West. For instance, the *Economist* recognised in 2000 Guinea-Bissau as "making a brave bid, in a particular troubled region of Africa, for political pluralism" at the time (The Economist, 2000). Yet, in 2001, the PAIGC was perceived as having built a socialist state and "then trying half-heartedly to reform it" (The Economist, 2001b). In a *Guardian Supplement* of countries' profiles from 2009, the history of Guinea-Bissau moves directly from "the dictator" Nino Vieira who "ruled the longest until a military mutiny and civil war forced him out in 1999", not even mentioning that he had been democratically elected in the first presidential elections of 1994 (Guardian, 2009).

The adoption of liberal democracy, as prescribed by the West, in the end, allowed the party to retain political control and have it legitimised. Local elections were never held (until today) despite permanently postponed plans to hold them at some point – a clear setback when compared to elections held all over the country in the liberated areas and the socialist government. What could be an important contribution for the democratisation of the country with the decentralisation of power was prevented by

those wishing to keep it concentrated in the capital's small political elite. Moreover, multiparty competition brought with it the instrumentalisation of ethnicity, which started to play a crucial role in Guinean politics (Forrest, 2005: 247). This divisive and unstable scenario has prevented the consolidation of democracy in Guinea-Bissau and made the post-multiparty elections environment resemble a lot like the previous one. One way to account for this resemblance is the persistence of coups or allegedly attempted coups up until today, despite the political opening, which confirms the momentarily choice of force over democratic procedures to solve political stalemates.

A year after elections which it did not cover, the *Economist* seized on Guinea-Bissau as an example of "the core of the poor-country debt crisis" in which developing countries, "as a group", were "well and truly bankrupt". The country's economic woes were the sole animating concern for the magazine's coverage: "[t]here is little remarkable about the country – like many countries in Africa it is very poor – except its indebtedness," the article continued. "The value of the country's outstanding debt amounts to a horrendous 1,105% of its exports (which are mostly cashew nuts). (...) This measure is, in effect, an indicator of how close it is to bankruptcy" (The Economist, 1995). The article failed to mention, however, that just two months earlier the Paris Club of creditor nations had vowed to forgive 50 percent of Guinea-Bissau's debts (The New York Times, 1995). The country joined the World Trade Organisation shortly after the announcement, on June 1, 1995, and in November it was elected a non-permanent Security Council member for the following two years starting in January 1996.

At this time, security concerns were becoming prominent in the relationship between Guinea-Bissau and its western counterparts and determining the interest of new donors. *El Pais*, for instance, covered the deportation of illegal African immigrants from Spain to several countries with which the European state had protocols, amongst which Guinea-Bissau. The west African country served as a transit platform where immigrants deported from Spain would arrive and then be sent to their countries of origin in Africa, in exchange for which Guinea-Bissau received financial compensation – a measure strongly criticised by human rights organisations (Ordaz, 1996b). Illegal immigration was being referred then in European countries such as Spain as "a chronic problem" (El Pais, 1996) and the solution found had been an arrangement with an African intermediary. The return to the countries of origin was,

however, harder than initially expected with undocumented Africans being detained in Bissau and rejected by their home countries. Neither Spain nor Guinea-Bissau looked good in *El Pais's* portrayal of this “shameful situation” (Ordaz, 1996a).

Scandal after scandal showed the intractable problems of Guinean internal politics and the problems with its transition to democracy. By the end of the 1990s, the donor community was showing signs of exhaustion. Criticisms accumulated and finally withdrawal from like-minded donors, such as Sweden, mirrored the uneasy relations between them and Nino's government. Japan followed suit proving this a trend which we would see repeated in the future. A trend only to be reinforced by what triggered the fourth phase of this relationship: the civil war of 1998-1999.

#### **The 1998-1999 Armed Conflict and ‘Politics as Usual’**

On June 7, 1998, what began as a small revolt led by a group of soldiers discontent with Nino Vieira's rule and loyal to the Army Chief of Staff Assumane Mané—who the President had just fired over allegations of smuggling arms to Casamance separatists—turned into a full-scale war. It would directly involve most states of the sub-region through ECOWAS (Economic Community of West Africa States) and, in particular, neighbouring Senegal and Guinea-Conakry, which rushed to send troops in support of Nino Vieira—the conflict was, hence, “almost immediately regionalized” (Rudebeck, 1998: 484). Considered by many Guineans an “invasion”, Senegalese and Conakry forces only further increased government unpopularity and sparked a nationalist reaction against foreign intervention. Those who only two decades earlier had fought together for the liberation of the country from Portuguese colonial yoke now found themselves on opposite sides of the battlefield.

The war was initially perceived as a confrontation within the same neo-patrimonial PAIGC elite, a war between rivals: “[t]he short-term explanation for the conflict lay in the deteriorating relationship between President João Bernardo Vieira and his former army chief of staff, General Assumane Mané. The disintegration of the relationship between the men led to the division of the country's army into rival factions supporting Vieira and Mané” (Adebajo, 2002: 111). The war was also initially portrayed as an army mutiny—“army renegades angry at the dismissal of the army chief of staff” (The New York Times, 1998b)—and just ‘one more coup d'état gone

wrong' – "[t]he fighting, which began June 7 when a former army Chief of Staff, Brig. Ansumane Mane, attempted a coup, has degenerated into near civil war around the capital" (The New York Times, 1998a).

These accounts further reinforced the idea of a 'hopeless' country. Interpreted as a personal problem turned national, the conflict appeared to prove right those showing evidence of a severe lack of trust on Guinea-Bissau's government and ability to maintain stable relations with foreign agents. There were no strong emotional ties left connecting the Western community with Nino Vieira's regime—unlike what had prevailed throughout the liberation war with Amílcar Cabral. There was, naturally, rejection of the idea of a military coup ousting a democratically elected government but no special effort made to portray the long-standing president in flattering terms. On the contrary, academics took the opportunity to present their understanding of the reasons behind the war, as well as their perspective on Nino Vieira's rule:

"Legality and political legitimacy appear in this case to be far apart. Constitutional democracy reigns in Guinea-Bissau since 1994, true enough. But dissatisfaction with the corrupt presidential power and the harsh conditions of life is rampant, both among common people and within the power apparatus, not least the military. After the first days of the war, the president appeared politically isolated and abandoned by most of his army." (Rudebeck, 1998: 484)

Indeed, 90 percent of the armed forces joined the self-proclaimed military junta (Mendy, 1998: 649) and the population is reported to have widely supported the rebels (Smith, 1998a), proving the lack of support for the democratically elected government. Reports of the grave consequences of having Senegalese troops stationed at the National Institute of Studies and Research in Guinea-Bissau, which in weeks destroyed most of the only national archives the country possessed, also portrayed the supported national regime as contributing to this national disaster (Mendy, 1998). International involvement was regarded as destructive, with Senegal's presence and French backstage support contributing to prolonging the war by allowing the government to refuse negotiations with the rebels (Rudebeck, 1998: 486, Adebajo, 2002). News of 250,000 refugees "facing starvation and disease", with Senegal turning them away at the border "at gunpoint" and the only large airport in the capital "at the centre of the

fighting” added to the perception of Nino Vieira and its allies as responsible for the proportions the conflict had taken (Smith, 1998b).

Guinean politics was now an example of misrule which made donors uncomfortable and received unfavourable media and academic attention: “In the 1970s, Guinea-Bissau was widely seen as a political and economic model of a successful African peasant revolution. (...) Despite the great expectations raised by the attainment of independence, the liberation struggle soon degenerated into a feast of corruption and repressive misrule, as Guinea-Bissau’s peasant revolution devoured its own children” (Adebajo, 2002: 113). Yet Guinea-Bissau’s problematic region tends to make internal problems easily contagious to the rest of the neighbouring countries—something the international community was keen on avoiding. Senegal and Guinea Conakry’s intervention, following an appeal from Nino Vieira, reflected the concern over the propensity of an armed conflict to expand beyond borders, in addition to very clear strategic interests (The New York Times, 1998c). Portugal and France—both former colonial powers in the region and aiming to retain their influence—rapidly engaged in negotiations. And so did regional powers such as Nigeria. ECOWAS, the sub-region’s security organisation, became involved later in order to force a cease-fire (see Adebajo, 2002).

Peace talks mediated by the CPLP produced a ceasefire on July 26, 1998. Yet fighting broke out again. Emma Bonino, the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, mediated negotiations between Nino Vieira and Ansumane Mané in February 1999, wishing to jump start peace talks and lead the way to a transitional government (Vidal-Folch, 1999). Yet fighting would resume until government troops finally surrendered on May 8, 1999, and Nino Vieira sought refuge in Portugal. Coverage of the end of the conflict reflected popular support for the end of the regime: the *Guardian* reported “The fall of President Vieira, the country’s leader for the past 19 years after taking power in a coup, was applauded by residents in battle-scarred Bissau” (The Guardian, 1999); a reputed academic on Guinea-Bissau, Lars Rudebeck, noted the “absence of any noticeable support for the legal government” (Rudebeck, 1998: 486); the *Economist* claimed when Nino Vieira was ousted by the Military Junta and forced into exile in Portugal, the population seemed “glad to get rid of him” (The Economist, 1999).

From June 1998 until May 1999, when the Abuja peace agreement was finally signed, mediated by the UN and the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, a bloody war took thousands of innocent lives and caused vast material damage, leaving an open wound on Guinean history that is still felt today.

Not only did the war create a material impediment to development and cooperation between donors and Guinea-Bissau's leaders, it also had a crucial psychological impact on donors. The armed conflict was sudden and followed the implementation of the neoliberal agenda, supposed to help countries build a peaceful and developed state. Economic decadence, despite (and due to) the structural adjustment, was already visible before the conflict erupted and this inherent contradiction was pointed out by voices blaming the neoliberal transition for it. The adoption of the CFA franc in 1997 – a stabilisation measure supported by the western community, especially France – saw living costs skyrocket. Indeed the change of currency from Guinea-Bissau peso to the CFA franc led to a dramatic increase in the cost of living for much of the population which was not dealt with. Moreover, the West had been involved in promoting the reduction of the Guinean armed forces – between 1991 and 1997, the armed forces were reduced from 12,000 men to 7,000 and payments hitherto made to 700 non-existent soldiers were cut. Nevertheless compensation measures were difficult to access and made the environment inside the army particularly unstable and ultimately explosive. There were incisive criticisms of the West's role in Guinea-Bissau which pointed towards blame beyond internal actors.

Following the end of the war, the aid community shifted to a post-conflict programme. Donors were determined to tie new relations with new attitudes: as Kovsted & Tarp put it, "Guinea-Bissau's relatively good pre-conflict performance might allow the country to qualify for debt relief, but much will depend on whether the new government's dialogue with the BWIs is constructive" (Kovsted and Tarp, 1999: 21).

### **2000s: Kumba Ialá, Nino Vieira and the Problem of Intractable Leadership**

A transition government, presided over by General Mané and Kumba Ialá, organised elections which were reported to have involved a clash between rival supporters but were considered fair by international observers (The New York Times, 1999). There was, for the first time, a rotation of political parties in power, with the victory of PRS

(Social Renovation Party) and its leader, Kumba Ialá, replacing the PAIGC, the party in power since independence, and defeating its presidential candidate.

It seemed Guinea-Bissau had “a chance for a fresh start” (The Economist, 1999). The restoration of democratic rule through elections was, however, short-lived. Ialá’s rule was extraordinarily unstable and patrimonial, filled with presidential interventions such as dismissing governments, dissolving the National Assembly, neither vetoing nor promulgating the new constitution, which left the country in a limbo in terms of rule of law and on the verge of going back to authoritarian rule. Educated guesses of a probable coup against Ialá were being presented in the West, particularly as relations between the President and General Mané deteriorated (The New York Times, 2000a). “The UN Security Council has warned General Mane that it will hold him to blame if the country slides into chaos. Direct military intervention, he has been told, could lead to international isolation, and an end to the foreign assistance that is crucial for the country’s reconstruction” (The Economist, 2000). Some hinted at the possibility of renewed conflict: “Barely recovered from one civil war, this small West African state was showing at midweek some alarming signs of being consumed by another” (The Economist, 2000). In November 2000, an attempted rebellion led by General Mané was later suppressed and he was killed, leaving unresolved the tension building up since Ialá had come to power (The New York Times, 2000b).

Not only Guinean politics is described to be in a limbo in the aftermath of the peace agreement. As David Hetch for The New York Times reports, “The surrounding jungle is slowly engulfing the tiny capital of this former Portuguese colony. More than a year after a devastating war, little has been rebuilt. The new president, elected in January, doesn't even have his own office, and his presidential palace, like many government buildings, is a burned-out shell. The broken streets are mostly empty by day.” (Hetch, 2000). In an article on the insecurity devastating West Africa, the *Economist* includes Guinea-Bissau “on the critical list”, joined by Nigeria, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali and in a more serious security situation, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea (The Economist, 2001a).

In December 2001, the President was thought to have “fake[d] a plot against himself” (The Economist, 2001b), in order to “silence officials” linked to the late General Mané

(BBC Monitoring Africa, 2001). The picture painted by the *Economist* was of an unpredictable and untrustworthy leader:

“When MPs thwarted him, Mr Yalla threatened to suspend parliament for ten years. As part of a vigorous but diffuse anti-corruption drive, he promised to sack 60% of the civil service. After an impromptu visit to the foreign ministry, Mr Yalla dismissed his foreign minister, Antonieta Rosa Gomes. Two newspapers have been suspended, and two radio stations have received cautions. Senior judges are in detention, accused of misappropriating funds. Charitable diplomats call the president’s behaviour ‘erratic’. (...) Guinea-Bissau can ill afford all this. (...) the short-term prognosis is bleak.” (The Economist, 2001b)

In fact, this is a common thread when characterising the President:

“...his three-year rule has been dominated by ministerial sackings, summary arrests, alleged coup plots, dramatic policy switches and government attacks on both the judiciary and the independent media. Yala has been accused of concentrating power in his own hands, stoking tribalism by favouring members of his own Balante ethnic group and failing to provide coherent leadership. He dissolved parliament in November 2002, but fresh elections scheduled for February, were put off until April, before being postponed again until June and then October. His current government was supposed to be a caretaker administration, appointed to rule for 90 days. But it has been in place for nine months. The Prime Minister, Mario Pires, is the fourth to be appointed by Yala in less than four years.” (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2003b)

During Ialá’s presidency the IMF and the World Bank suspended aid to the country after accusations of mismanagement and a string of sackings in the government (we shall develop this topic below). Tensions were growing between the military and the government, namely when “the government failed to pay six months of outstanding salaries”, and the political situation was rapidly deteriorating with ministers being “dismissed or arrested by presidential decree for alleged “slandorous statements”” (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 2003).

Foreign actors were increasingly losing patience, as the UN confirms: “It is more than four years since the last shot was fired, but the peace has been marked by disappointments and setbacks. (...) David Stephen, who heads the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), says the UN’s patience has been severely tried. His reports to UN headquarters in New York, like those of his predecessor Samuel Nana-Sinkam, have become increasingly critical, stressing the need for constitutional legality and institutional stability” (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2003b). Indeed democratic elections that could legitimately remove Kumba Ialá from power seemed to be wishful thinking in Western capitals and the world organization – hence the emphasis on the prompt scheduling of elections:

“The future of Guinea-Bissau, a poor small and largely forgotten country on the coast of West Africa, depends on the government's ability to hold credible parliamentary elections on October 12 that have been postponed three times already. If the elections go ahead and are judged to be reasonably free and transparent, Guinea-Bissau is likely to receive a much-needed economic lifeline. Western donors are expected to loosen their purse strings, ending a period of international isolation and donor fatigue, much of it blamed on the erratic policies of President Kumba Yala. (...) Business leaders, trade unionists and foreign donors all acknowledge there will be no upturn in the economy until Guinea-Bissau's main political problems have been resolved and there is a credible administration in place, with a clear electoral mandate and a coherent vision of the future.” (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2003b).

Relations were clearly strained on both sides. From the Guinean government’s perspective, the international community was too quick to blame and not quick enough to follow up on its own promises. The country’s Foreign Minister, Fatoumata Djau Balde, complained of the absence of actual cash to materialise pledges of foreign aid (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2003b). Indeed, trapped in a complicated vicious circle, Guinea-Bissau has seen little of over US \$200 million pledged to help the country’s post-conflict reconstruction at a donor conference organised by UNDP in Geneva in May 1999 and the follow-up conference held in June 2000 in Bissau. Trying to ease the tension, José Ramos Horta, then East Timor’s Foreign

Minister, visiting Guinea-Bissau as a special envoy for the CPLP, said “I would hope that the international community does not give up on Guinea-Bissau, that they give them a second chance” (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2003b).

Many Guineans placed the blame for the country’s negative external image squarely in Kumba Ialá’s behavior. Former Foreign Minister Antonieta Rosa Gomes—fired by the President in November 2001—states: “When I was in office we worked really hard to rebuild relations with the outside world, both bilateral and multilateral partners, and we did well. But all that has been thrown away now. The image of the country needs to be re-launched with a new philosophy of government, with a proper respect for the constitution. We need all that to win back our partners” (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2003b).

Following Ialá’s dismissal of Parliament and refusal to call new elections, the military led by the army chief of staff, General Veríssimo Correia Seabra, intervened on 14 September 2003, ousted the president and created a committee to oversee the transition and organise new elections (The New York Times, 2003b). An interim government led by a businessman, Henrique Rosa, was created and made responsible to organise new elections.

International institutions despite naturally officially condemning the coup appeared relieved—a general feeling that was picked on by the coup leaders themselves. The *New York Times* reports on the “apparently bloodless putsch, the latest in a series of uprisings to hit President Kumba Yala's administration”, quoting General Verissimo Correia having “absolutely no fear about possible international pressure to reinstate the previous government” (The New York Times, 2003a). Western coverage of the newest episode of political instability hinted quite frankly it was about time to oust “the fiery demagogue in the red bobble-hat”, even calling it a “popular coup” (The Economist, 2003). *El Pais* claims that Kumba Ialá, once highly regarded, revealed himself to be “a little dictator” and the coup was “totally peaceful” (Pinto, 2003). The *Economist* added impressions from diplomats in Bissau saying “[f]oreign donors complained of corruption and erratic shifts in policy. Diplomats acknowledged that Mr Yala could be excellent company, a first-rate mimic, a devoted football fan, an enthusiastic drinker and so on, but they could not take him seriously” (The Economist,

2003). The UN pointed out that Ialá was “widely identified as the main culprit for Guinea-Bissau's political and economic malaise, antagonising the country's political class, engaging in clumsy stand-offs with the media, the judiciary and foreign donors” (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2003a). The *New York Times* reinforced the idea that Kumba Ialá “had dissolved Parliament and repeatedly resisted calling new elections”, quoting the statement from the new junta where they claim to have acted “to save democracy” (The New York Times, 2003b).

In March 2004, parliamentary elections brought the PAIGC back to power, with Carlos Gomes Júnior as the Prime Minister, which pleased the donor community. Yet, as had previously happened, the Armed Forces Chief of Staff who led the coup against a standing President, General Veríssimo Correia Seabra, was killed by mutinous soldiers not long after. In a Security Council meeting, on October 22, 2004, the UK Ambassador Jones Parry, holding the presidency of the Council at the time, stated that “Guinea-Bissau is at “grave risk” of becoming a failed State. (...) We have an interest, as the international community, in coming together and trying to take it forward. (...) States in this position need help. If we don't help them, we pay the consequences” (UN News Service, 2004). This statement was followed by the beginning of external interest in reforming the security sector reform which will be developed in the next section. Shortly afterwards, The *Economist* placed Guinea-Bissau on a list entitled “Candidates for failure”, selected from another list by the World Bank of “Low-income countries under stress” (The Economist, 2005).

The presidential elections in 2005, for which Nino Vieira, back from six years of exile in Portugal, and Kumba Ialá, ousted in 2003, were allowed to run despite a ban from seeking political office, represented a new moment of tension with the international community. International coverage of the elections caricatured the presence of both candidates:

“A throng of thousands poured into the streets of the capital, Bissau, to celebrate the return of a former president, João Bernardo Vieira, who came to power in a military coup in 1980 and lost power in a military coup in 1999. (...) He is barred from participating in politics, but thousands of his supporters have signed petitions asking him to run for president. Another former president,

Kumba Yala (...) who was overthrown in a coup in 2003 and who is also barred from politics, has said he plans to run and will mount a coup if anyone tries to stop him..." (Polgreen, 2000)

The country's standing with the West suffered renewed strain, with Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative to West Africa, issuing a statement on 29 March urging "all key political stakeholders, in particular former high officials, to resist the temptation of political manipulation on ethnic and religious grounds", as well as "refrain from any action that could divide the country, the army and its institutions" (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2005a). The *New York Times* reported on "[f]ears of post-election violence" focused on Kumba Iala who had "declared himself president" in March (The New York Times, 2005). Donors voiced concern over the potential destabilisation deriving from both former Presidents' new bid on power (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2005b). Kofi Annan, in an attempt to facilitate "peaceful and credible" presidential elections in Guinea-Bissau, appointed Joaquim Chissano, Mozambique's former President, his special envoy. Chissano was to join efforts with another Mozambican, João Honwana, at the time head of UNOGBIS (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2005c).

Nino Vieira won the elections (see annex) and, as had happened immediately after the democratic transition in the 1990s, his autocratic behaviour never really changed. Multiparty politics had little impact in his way of viewing or conducting politics. Therefore, tensions between the Prime Minister, the Assembly and the President grew deeper and led to several political confrontations and recurrent government reshuffling. Adding to this unremitting political instability, a new tension, originating and destined abroad, would deteriorate the situation even more.

#### **Late 2000s: Guinea-Bissau, 'A Narco-State'**

Most recently, Guinea-Bissau once again attracted attention in the West, this time due to its association with the growing problem of drug trafficking. Well located, in terms of the traffic coming from Latin America into Europe (and possibly also from Southeast Asia into the US), impoverished and lacking state institutions and law enforcement, Guinea-Bissau has become, since 2007, a central transit point for the illegal traffic of

cocaine and the organised crime networks controlling that traffic.<sup>10</sup> There is little control or monitoring of sea or air, and corruption of police and other officials is common, making control of the country's 350km of coastline (fragmented into 82 islands) near impossible. A senior US DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) official, quoted in the *Guardian*, noted the lack of institutional obstacles in this "failed state" to those controlling the illicit trade in drugs, analogising it to "moving into an empty house" (Vulliamy, 2008).

Western newspapers, already generally prolific in their coverage of the phenomenon of drug trafficking, rapidly turned their attention to the country that very quickly "won the dubious honour of becoming Africa's drug-distribution hub" (The Economist, 2007). With catchy headlines such as "Drug boom, lost hope" (Bernard, 2008), or, more bluntly, "How a tiny West African country became the world's first narco state" (Vulliamy, 2008), articles painted a dark image of the country. "Take a long jagged coastline, a collapsed state, a collection of powerful politicians and soldiers keen to make a buck or more and you have a drug peddler's paradise", reported the *Economist* (The Economist, 2007). Guinea-Bissau, "the crumbling former Portuguese colony, perched on the western tip of Africa, oozes decay", wrote the *Mail & Guardian* (Lewis, 2007). "Welcome to Africa's first narco-state, a country with just 1.5 million people but a roaring drugs trade", describes the *Independent* (Miller, 2007). Guinea-Bissau "faces the prospect of becoming a unique type of failed state—a "narco-state"—run mainly for the benefit of drugs gangs", warns the *BBC News* (Ferrett, 2007). The *New York Times* explains that a "tide of drugs smuggled through the country is undermining efforts to restore stability after decades of chaos" (The New York Times, 2008). Amid those articles, colourful references were made to how life in the country had become a Guinean version of "The Wire", the U.S. television series about drug culture and attendant criminal networks in Baltimore, as portrayed by the Executive Director of the UNODC, António Maria Costa:

"When I went to Guinea-Bissau, the drug wealth was everywhere. From the air, you can see the Spanish hacienda villas, and the obligatory black four-wheel-

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<sup>10</sup> According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), a quarter of all cocaine consumed in Western Europe is trafficked through West Africa.

drives are everywhere, with the obligatory scantily-clad girl, James Bond style. There were certain hotels I was advised not to stay in.” (Vulliamy, 2008)

An “ideal host for the parasitic drug trade” (Kraft, 2009), Guinea-Bissau’s dismal economic situation added a growing concern to difficulties in tackling the problem: “[s]truggling with heavy debt and a collapsing economy”, not having paid public workers “for months” (The New York Times, 2007) and grappling “with truly biblical levels of want and distress” (MacQueen, 2009), the risk of ‘dirty money’ penetrating various sectors of society was high in this “desperately poor country” (The New York Times, 2007). In particular, the armed forces and government officials were suspected of deep involvement in the drug trade. This was recognised in the UN Security Council’s report on March 20, 2007 and reported by the LA Times:

“Guinea-Bissau has been an easy mark for the world’s drug cartels. The country’s navy has a single aging ship to search for smugglers, and the head of the navy fled the country amid accusations that he was involved in the drug trade. When a Gulfstream jet from Venezuela landed last year at the Bissau international airport, its \$250-million cargo of cocaine was whisked away in army trucks before police arrived. A judge freed the three Venezuelan pilots, including one wanted on an arrest warrant from Mexico.” (Kraft, 2009)

Journalists themselves become protagonists in these stories, sharing with the reader their daring encounters with local politicians, thus adding flavour to the account:

“Your correspondent and local colleague were hauled before the interior minister and threatened with prison after the local man wrote a report, picked up by Portuguese radio, airing allegations that the armed forces were dealing in cocaine.” (The Economist, 2007)

Already “plagued by chronic political instability and poor social and economic conditions” (Zounmenou, 2008: 1), the rise in corruption and the increase of tensions brought by drug trafficking, media reports were quick to warn, threatened a relapse into violence and augured poorly for the future.

The precariousness of the security situation formed the backdrop for the contemporary phase of relations between the country and the Western aid community, one marked by the securitisation of development policies. From the late 2000s, donors have shown a renewed interest in Guinea-Bissau, arguably triggered by the country's unfortunate involvement in the drug trade. As Claud Young, a spokesman for the United States Embassy in Dakar, explained in 2007, "[n]arco-trafficking is a tremendous concern" (The New York Times, 2007). Indeed, after having spent "billions on counter-drug policies such as Plan Colombia and the European Union's drugs strategy (2005-12)", Western countries were worried the recent route through West Africa could "undermine years of hard work" (Bernard, 2008). Indeed, the US rapidly decided to "step up its anti-drug presence there" and the Europeans launched "a Portugal-based anti-drugs task force" (The Economist, 2007). Alarmed with the newest hub for cocaine traffickers from Latin America, the US reopened, in July 2007, a diplomatic office in Bissau – which had been closed for a decade – and plan to return to Guinea-Bissau with a full diplomatic presence within the following five years (The New York Times, 2007). The US State Department included Guinea-Bissau in the list of "countries/jurisdictions of primary concern" and stated that "[o]f all West African countries, none has been so thoroughly penetrated and corrupted by Latin American drug cartels as Guinea-Bissau" (US Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2011).

Yet Guinea-Bissau's perceived threat to the outside world goes beyond drug cartels: "arms-traffickers have also settled down in the area and there is a high risk that terrorist networks may follow suit", reports insisted as the decade drew to a close (Bernard, 2008). Also attracting attention in Western aid circles was the problem of illegal immigration. José Augusto Duarte, a Portuguese diplomat, argues that the combination of these factors represents not merely a threat to domestic stability, but "a major threat to all the countries in the region". It cannot, he insists, be considered "just as a regional or sub-regional problem. In fact it is an international concern since it represents a threat that goes far beyond West Africa" (Duarte, 2010: 9).

A further source of apprehension for Western donors is the rapprochement between Guinea-Bissau and China. A surge in Chinese construction projects, along with a series of fishing agreements highly advantageous for the Chinese, elicited caution from the

West: “What is clear is that Chinese influence has seeped deeply into the African soil” (Fox News.Com, 2007). If instability had fuelled reluctance on the part of most Western donors to deal with Guinea-Bissau, the competition posed by Chinese involvement encouraged them to reconsider.

Western discourses on Guinea-Bissau at this juncture largely reflect a binary opposition between order and chaos—a discourse which allowed the ‘ordered European’ to introduce order in the ‘chaotic Guinea-Bissau’, as evidenced by newspaper headlines such as “Donors have ‘last chance’ to save Bissau from chaos” (Flynn, 2007). Naturally, ‘managing’ Guinea-Bissau’s chaos meant intervention—an intervention in conformity with Western strategic goals, delineated in the mid 2000s and taking firm hold by the end of the decade.

The security situation in Guinea-Bissau was, therefore, never really “internal”, since it was immediately defined as a security issue for Europe. Indeed, the identification of a situation deserving of Western concern was always a representation from without. As Doty had pointed out already in the 1990s, “[w]hat was “internal” was defined externally” (Doty, 1996: 86). The security situation was, in fact, born international, thus *naturally* inviting intervention from the outside. That is, the space where the security concern arose was always defined externally, in this case by the West, and in particular Europe, given the geographical proximity and the fact that, of all major threats—main destination of drug trafficking and illegal immigration, and possible target of terrorism—Europe saw itself as “directly related to this growing instability” (Duarte, 2010: 9). The extent of the threat the security situation in Guinea-Bissau posed ultimately reflected how threatening Guinea-Bissau was perceived to be to Europe’s stability.

Given its position as Guinea-Bissau’s largest donor and the absence of a bilateral partner willing to take charge, the EU led initial efforts to reform the security sector in the country (Bahnsen, 2010: 262). Europe’s renewed interest was also an opportunity for the EU to test its common foreign policy in a peripheral state with respect to which there existed few incompatibilities of interests between EU member states. Indeed, this situation of organised crime in a small state, which did not endanger cohesion amongst European partners, offered an appealing experiment of managing the threatening

periphery. Moreover, as Bahnson explains, given EU missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan—much more complex and high profile situations—this opportunity to act in a country of Guinea’s size and proximity appealed to the European Commission: “if we cannot do it here, we can do it nowhere” (Bahnson, 2010: 262).

### *Security Sector Reform in Guinea-Bissau*

Donors emerged, then, with a largely one-item agenda: security. Already in 2005, profiting from the truce permitted by the strategic alliance struck between President Nino Vieira and the Army Chief of Staff Tagme Na Waie, UNOGBIS began to investigate the possibility of reforming the security sector. Rapidly following the above mentioned remark by the UK Ambassador in the Security Council alerting to the failure of the Guinean state in October 2004, the British Security Sector Development Advisory Team (SSADT) intensified its efforts and undertook missions to the field in 2005 and 2006, accompanied by other international partners, in order to assist with a draft for a national security sector reform (SSR). The SSR Strategy Document (October 2006) was presented to donors for funding in November—the outcome of a process somewhat rushed which fell short of the original request for a wide consultative process (Bahnson, 2010: 261). The document outlined several objectives: resizing and modernising the defence and security sectors; clarifying the status of former national freedom fighters; consolidating sub-regional security; building capacities and enhancing efficiency in the justice sector; mobilising national and international resources for the reform; and involving the civil society (Bahnson, 2010: 261). A Steering Committee was created incorporating representatives of the Ministries of Defence, Interior, Ex-combatants, Justice and the Armed Forces headquarters, civil society and the international community. However, as Bahnson argues,

“the strategy fell short on a number of key issues. For one, the issue of security sector governance was largely ignored in spite of it being at the core of the problems experienced by the country since independence. Hence the strategy did not envisage any activities to be undertaken as attempts to re-focus the blurred line between the military and politics, either through strengthening the Government’s own accountability institutions nor those of external oversight mechanisms such as parliament, the media and civil society. The area of justice

reform was also treated almost as an afterthought, with very few links to the other sectors. In addition, the strategy was developed at a time when the international community had just started focusing on Guinea-Bissau as transit hub for the narcotics trade between South America and Europe and counter-narcotics measures were therefore not explicitly included as an issue in the final document.” (Bahnsen, 2010: 261-262)

Moreover, recurring political instability undermined the follow-up process. Amid “increasingly bitter disputes” between the Parliament, the Government and the Presidency, the assassination of the former Navy Chief of Staff—Lamine Sanhá, the attempted arrest of Carlos Gomes Júnior—the popular former Prime Minister sacked by President Nino Vieira<sup>11</sup>, and protests by soldiers and guards over pension and salary arrears, “momentum in security sector reform stalled” (2007: 1-5). Indeed by March 2007 “most of the financial pledges made at the donors’ round table at Geneva in November 2006 remain[ed] outstanding” (2007: 3, para.12) and the Steering Committee met for the first time only on 12 March 2007 to review activities and an implementation plan (2007: 4, para.18). Drug trafficking was then increasing and drug seizures at this time revealed the extent to which the country was falling hostage to international cartels (The Economist, 2007).

Security concerns dictated Guinea-Bissau’s inclusion, in December 2007, on the agenda of the UN Peace Building Commission (PBC)—a body created following the 2005 UN reform to assist countries in their post-conflict trajectory and thus avoid a relapse into war.<sup>12</sup> Trying to revive the process, the government officially established an SSR program on January 23, 2008, which was later presented at another donors’ conference. Simultaneously, a UNDP study presented the state of affairs of Guinean armed forces: a total of 4493 active military personnel, of which 1869 officers (41.9%), 604 under-officers (13.5%), 1108 sergeants (24.9%), and 867 foot soldiers (19.7%)—that is, “an inverted hierarchical pyramid” and “a ratio of 2.73 military per 1000 inhabitants,

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<sup>11</sup> Carlos Gomes Júnior, a former Prime Minister and the head of the PAIGC, took refuge in UN premises in Bissau on January 10, 2007, to request protection from a warrant for his arrest by the Minister of the Interior, and only left on January 29, after guarantees for his safety were given and the warrant was withdrawn (2007: 1-2, para.3-8).

<sup>12</sup> Following a referral from the Security Council, Guinea-Bissau joined Burundi and Sierra Leone. Currently these three countries, along with Central African Republic, are on the Peacebuilding Commission’s agenda.

compared to the sub-region's average of 1.23 military personnel per 1000 inhabitants" (UN Peacebuilding Commission, 2008: 2, para.9).

A 2007-2009 investment plan for SSR was created with an estimated budget of US\$184.3 million, of which only 23 per cent—about US\$43.2 million—had been pledged by bilateral and multilateral partners such as: the EU, Portugal, Brazil, Spain, UK, Italy, UNDP, China, France, Germany, the Peacebuilding Fund (UN Peacebuilding Commission, 2008: 3-4, para.10-14).

On February 12, 2008, the EU, under its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), decided to establish the "EU SSR Guinea-Bissau" mission to "provide local authorities with advice and assistance on SSR in the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, in order to contribute to creating the conditions for implementation of the National SSR Strategy, in close cooperation with other EU, international and bilateral actors, and with a view to facilitating subsequent donor engagement" (Council of the European Union, 2008). The EU mission was deployed in June and assisted local authorities with basic and secondary legislation underpinning the sectors of defence, police and justice.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the new momentum again "ground to a halt" (Bernard, 2008). The parliament's stability pact collapsed in July 2008 and President Nino Vieira took the chance to dissolve the National Assembly and once again replace the Prime Minister. Furthermore, an alleged attempted coup by the Navy Chief of Staff Bubo Na Tchuto stirred Bissau yet again: "In a country where the army regularly intervenes in the political sphere and where divisions within the armed forces caused a full-blown war in 1998-99, these developments are disturbing" (Bernard, 2008).

Western press was again not kind in their depictions of Guinea-Bissau: unfavourable accounts of "this wreck of a country" (Vulliamy, 2008) were common whenever it entered Western consciousness. In particular, although already visible in earlier years, a shift in the wider discourse regarding the liberation struggle became manifest. The culprit responsible for the country's instability became associated in this discourse with those groups which had fought for independence, their members still prominent in the higher ranks of the armed forces and who supposedly refused to step down and retire.

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<sup>13</sup> Initially for a period of 12 months, the mission was eventually extended up until September 30, 2010.

From liberation heroes to bullies, ex-PAIGC combatants were accused of almost annihilating the homeland. By the end of the decade, the liberation war was discussed by foreigners solely in terms of its negative impact on the country. Little reference was now made to the achievements of the anti-colonial struggle. The armed forces' capacity to impose its will on political power—visible from earlier years and subsequently reinforced—was criticised and attracted a criticism of the liberation struggle itself which had created the problem of Guinean veterans. It is apparent in these depictions that the liberation war is reduced to merely one more violent event in a history now described as “one of torment” (Vulliamy, 2008): “after 13 years of bloody guerrilla conflict, [Guinea-Bissau] won independence from Portugal, spent the first years under a Marxist Leninist dictatorship, then 18 under João Bernardo Vieira, until he was ousted by a military rebellion” (Vulliamy, 2008). Reporting on the situation, the Peacebuilding Commission states: “The present situation of the security and defence forces of Guinea-Bissau is attributed to *the long and difficult years of the national liberation struggle (1963-1974)*, and subsequent post-independence internal conflicts, marked by military interventions in politics, clashes between various security and defence forces, and the armed conflict of 1998/99” (UN Peacebuilding Commission, 2008: 1, emphasis added). Other new interpretations of the liberation war cast it as responsible, too, for the endemic poverty now gripping the country: “When it was a colony, Guinea-Bissau was poorer and less advanced than its French-controlled neighbors, and after the cataclysm of the war for independence it was in worse shape still” (Gable, 2009: 177).

In the meantime, the situation was rapidly deteriorating with a serious cholera outbreak (Polgreen, 2008) and an economic and social crisis aggravated by a drastic increase in food prices and subsequent protests and riots (Zounmenou, 2008: 3). Pressure was brought to bear on Guinean politicians to resolve the most recent political deadlock in the country, in order to proceed with the SSR. As a consequence, parliamentary elections were scheduled for November 2008 with the international community's support. The popular vote in 2008 showed a deep concern with stability (see annex). Guineans voted in large numbers for the PAIGC, led by former Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior, so it could have a clear majority in parliament, form a government without needing to resort to a coalition and thus slowly bring the country back from disarray. Guinea-Bissau's Western partners, weary of 'narco-money' having an impact in the run-up to the elections, were clearly pleased with the new choice for

the national interlocutor<sup>14</sup>. The International Crisis Group confirms the good standing the new Prime Minister had with the West: Guineans “voted in large numbers and calmly, and the overwhelming support they gave Gomes Júnior showed a desire to break with the malpractices that have characterised political life since independence. His profile contrasts markedly with those of the political heavyweights who traditionally have dominated affairs, and his effectiveness in an earlier stint as Prime Minister (2004-2005) is widely acknowledged” (International Crisis Group, 2009).

Nevertheless, just a few days after parliamentary elections were internationally recognised as free and fair, an attack on the presidential residence was interpreted as “a stark reminder that the army remains a major obstacle to sustainable peace” (Zounmenou, 2008: 1). Only a few months later, the news of the killings of President Nino Vieira and Army Chief of Staff Tagme Na Waie in March 2009 was unexpected but not necessarily a surprise. Assassination attempts had already been made on both and the personal animosity between the two powerful men inspired caution about their future and that of the institutions they controlled. Tagme Na Waie was killed first, on March 1, with a bomb placed in the army headquarters, a very atypical choice of weapon within Guinean history of military-driven instability; Nino Vieira was killed on March 2, in what was explained as a retaliatory action against the death of his archenemy—both were said to be deeply involved in the country’s drug trade (McGreal, 2009).

As Gable puts it, “the event was an occasion, yet again, to trot out the clichés about corrupt and violent West Africa and to situate Guinea-Bissau today right in the center of that lurid map” (Gable, 2009: 167). Lydia Polgreen from the *New York Times* reported: “The events that have unfolded here in the past week are so improbable they could easily have been ripped from a cheap spy thriller.(...) Mr. Vieira (...) and General Tagme Na Waie, have dominated each chapter of the country’s history, a chronicle of misery so absurd and acute it is almost a composite caricature of the post-colonial African state” (Polgreen, 2009). Kaye Whiteman, for the *Guardian*, calls Nino Vieira “damaged goods” who managed to return to power in 2005 for being a “known devil”

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<sup>14</sup> The author witnessed several off-the-record conversations among senior officials from the diplomatic corps while serving as an election observer for the CPLP in November 2008, where comments were made regarding concerns over drug trafficking influencing politics, as well as compliments to Carlos Gomes Júnior leadership.

and concludes that he “was dragged down not just by the impossibility of running a *hopeless country*, but by his own shortcomings” (Whiteman, 2009: emphasis added). Francesc Relea for the *El Pais* claims Guinea-Bissau “is headed towards self-destruction”, it has “all the ingredients of a failed state”, in fact, institutional fragility, the overwhelming power of the military and the narco-traffic “place this African country on the verge of collapse” (Relea, 2009b).

The international community was again at odds with the political future of the country and consequently its relationship with the leadership. The *New York Times* quoted a diplomat anonymously, shortly after the assassinations: “Nobody knows who is in charge (...) Nobody knows what the army will do” (Polgreen and Cowell, 2009). Mohamed Ibn Chambas, on behalf of ECOWAS, said: “It’s not only the assassination of a president or a chief of staff, it’s the assassination of democracy” (Polgreen and Cowell, 2009). Pessimism reigned: “The tragedy for Guinea is that there is no prospect of a new and better post-Nino future” (MacQueen, 2009).

The killing of the President initially appeared to be an attempted coup, as his death had come at the hands of discontent soldiers. Quickly, however, the army officially stated the murder had been the deed of an isolated group of mutinous soldiers who were being investigated; the constitutional order, the army insisted, would be upheld. They were hence murders ultimately left unexplained. In the space of two days, the political situation in the country appeared to return to normal and the risk of a renewed conflict between the factions that supported one or the other of the two deceased leaders seemed to fade away. On March 31, the Portuguese Foreign Minister, Luís Amado, declared the CPLP’s willingness, along with ECOWAS, to deploy troops to the country to help restore security, but the government rejected the offer.

Three months after the abovementioned assassinations, two candidates in the 2009 presidential elections, Baciro Dabó and Hélder Proença, and a former minister, Faustino Fudut Imbali, all prominent politicians close to Nino Vieira, were accused of plotting a coup and were killed by the security forces. The international community reacted immediately, expressing grave concern over the apparent deterioration of the country’s political and military situation. The Secretary General stated his concern about “the emerging pattern of killings of high profile personalities in Guinea-Bissau

(...) these criminal acts are a tragic setback for efforts to restore the rule of law and democratic processes in the country” (Nossiter, 2009). The *El Pais* called it a “new blood bath” (Relea, 2009a).

However, 2010 seemed to bring renewed confidence, with Joseph Mutaboba, Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS)<sup>15</sup>, claiming the year “could be a turning point for the country as its Government continued to re-engage international partners while pursuing its reform agenda”: an “unprecedented window of opportunity” not to be missed (UN Department of Public Information, 2010). Giuseppina Mazza considered 2010 “crucial for Guinea-Bissau”, given the launch of the UN-backed new Poverty Reduction Strategy Program, which “will help establish a cycle of stability, economic growth and human development” (ReliefWeb Report, 2010). National leadership seemed finally committed to a successful SSR and Maria Luiza Viotti, Chairperson of the Guinea-Bissau Configuration of the Peacekeeping Commission, called on member states to expedite approval of a second tranche of the Peacebuilding Fund so as to reward progress made (UN Department of Public Information, 2010). Yet, only a few weeks later, on April 1, 2010, the Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces, António Indjai, took control of the armed forces headquarters, overthrew his General Chief, Zamora Induta, and held him against his will, and also placed the democratically elected Prime Minister, Carlos Gomes Júnior, under house arrest, threatening to kill him if the population which had in the meantime come to the streets to demand his release did not retreat (The New York Times, 2010). Western media coverage of Guinea-Bissau reinforced the image of instability the country had earned in previous years. This incident reinforced the “well-established notion of how fragile the political-military situation remained in Guinea-Bissau” (Seabra, 2011b: 5) and “sparked outrage and caused disappointment among donors and partners” (Zounmenou, 2010b). At the time, the Western community voiced, once more, exasperation over the evident lack of results of the country’s SSR strategy. Then Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luís Amado, reflected donor frustration over the last politico-military turmoil in the country—in his words “this is the last opportunity for Guinea-Bissau”.

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<sup>15</sup> UNIOGBIS, set up in 2010, succeeded UNOGBIS, which had been in the country since 1999, after the end of the country’s civil war.

Notwithstanding international donors' protests, President Bacai Sanhá, elected in 2009, contrary to prosecuting those responsible, was essentially forced to confirm Indjai as Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and later reinstate Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto as Navy Chief of Staff thus consolidating their influence and revealing the weakness of the higher civilian institutions in the country. The former and current Navy Chief of Staff had been named a "drug kingpin" –along with the Air Force Chief of Staff, Ibraima Camará –and had seen his US-based assets frozen by the US Treasury (BBC News, 2010). The *New York Times* depicted the country as "effectively fallen into the hands of a drug baron", Na Tchuto, while the president is merely "nominally in charge" (Nossiter, 2010). The article goes on caricaturising Na Tchuto's glorious comeback from exile and refuge in the UN compound<sup>16</sup> after an arrest warrant for treason was issued in 2008 for an attempted coup:

"Mr. Na Tchuto rides around this crumbling West African capital in an outsize pickup truck flanked by a personal guard of soldiers, offering his booming greeting to well-wishers. (...) At his hearing on the lingering treason charges last week, Mr. Na Tchuto looked relaxed, showing up with his military guard and joking on the front porch of the military tribunal building with the officers who were going to judge him. It was all a mere "formality," he said later." (Nossiter, 2010)

The article also connects Na Tchuto to the liberation war, quoting his angry remarks in an interview –"I am a former guerrilheiro. (...) People say I am a criminal! I am a patriot!" –thus adding to the interpretation of the struggle as producing the current veterans problem. The reporter also seems to joyfully entertain Na Tchuto's attempt at manipulation: "By turns genial and explosive, Mr. Na Tchuto appeared hurt by the American accusations, insisting that he admired America deeply, had dreamed about President Obama and had a large American flag in his living room" (Nossiter, 2010).

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<sup>16</sup> The UN suffered harsh criticism for having harboured Na Tchuto while he carefully took part on the preparation of the April 1 coup (Gorjão, 2010: 3, Nossiter, 2010).

Subsequently, the US suspended its military cooperation and the EU its participation in the SSR and both threatened to withdraw; ECOWAS warned the authorities of the possibility of targeted sanctions (Zounmenou, 2010b). The situation took months to resolve itself, the EU SSR mission was ended and forces abandoned the country while Zamora Induta was still held at a military camp. The EU mission closed on September 30, 2010, with the official explanation that it had completed its mandate to provide advice and assistance to local authorities on SSR. The Council of the European Union stated the mission “assisted Guinea-Bissau in developing a complete package of basic laws and some secondary legislation. The Guinea-Bissau authorities now have a solid legal framework to start implementing the national SSR strategy, restructure the Armed Forces and establish new police bodies.” And it went on to explain that

“[a]lthough the mission has achieved significant results, political instability and the lack of respect for the rule of law in the country make it impossible for the EU to deploy a follow-up mission, as originally foreseen, without compromising its own principles. Following the mutiny of April 2010, the EU repeatedly expressed its concern regarding the violation of constitutional order, illegal detention of civilian and military leaders and impunity of perpetrators. The EU intensified its political dialogue with the Guinea-Bissau authorities and asked for clear signs of commitment to the principles of the rule of law. The recent nomination of General Antonio Indjai to the post of Chief of Defence Staff constitutes another setback to the process of democratic consolidation and confirms that the conditions for deployment of the new mission are not met.” (Council of the European Union, 2010)

Despite the official claims of success, Bahnson explains the significant problems that plagued the mission, and it is worth quoting her at length:

“The reform of the security sector in Guinea-Bissau having low priority as a foreign policy issue was therefore in general tackled as a purely financial and technical issue, investing heavily in technical assistance, infrastructure and equipment to military, police and justice. While many of challenges of the security sector were indeed in great need of such assistance, the heart of the problem was more complex and required significant ‘political investment’ from

national as well as international players. Such type of investment was minimal from European actors. The Commission Delegation did not have a dedicated political section nor a more analytical governance team and the Head of Delegation was in effect the only interface with the Bissau-Guinean political system. (...) The EU SSR had a pragmatic Head of Mission with little diplomatic experience and only one political adviser who was concurrently the mission's reporting, public affairs and protocol officer. The lack of 'investment' in political steering and engagement at the top EU level and in the capacity to generate profound and up-to-date political analyses on the ground diminished the impact of the technical and financial investments as well as exposed the EU to a number of risks." (Bahnsen, 2010: 268)

Academics predicted that as long as the nominations of the Chief of Staff and the Navy Chief remained an issue, donors would "remain reluctant to provide much-needed funds to complete the reforms" (Zounmenou, 2010a: 23). Yet on May 7, 2010—only a month after the coup—the IMF approved a three-year Extended Credit Facility (ECF) arrangement with Guinea-Bissau of US\$33.3 million. Moreover, under intense pressure from the international community who was increasingly doubtful of the national authorities' capacity to proceed with the SSR on its own, on August 1, President Bacai Sanhá officially asked for a stabilisation force to be deployed. The request found accommodating answers from the AU, ECOWAS and CPLP, which had already been insisting on the need to take concrete action, seeking to prevent a spill-over to the neighbouring countries (see Seabra, 2011b).

Consecutive visits of President Bacai Sanhá, Chief of Staff Indjai and Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior to Angola confirmed the Lusophone peer's willingness to cooperate with its Guinean counterpart—a move corroborating Angola's interest in boosting its foreign policy in Africa. Carlos Gomes Júnior called for cooperation in matters of economy, defence and security and asked for financial support in terms of both budget and a line of credit: "This process requires many human, technical and financial resources. We are sure that Angola is in a good position to help our country in this massive undertaking due to your experience in these matters. On the other hand, we are convinced that advancing with the reforms to our security and defence sector will lead to a brighter future in Guinea-Bissau" (BBC Monitoring Africa, 2010a).

Angola, while chairing the CPLP, promised to help support Guinea-Bissau's efforts to secure peace and security. President Eduardo dos Santos told the press: "The Angolan government is willing and ready to establish a technical and military agreement between our two countries, so as to contribute towards the creation of a military certification and reform system, rehabilitate and update military training centres, recruit and train military and police force personnel, as well as provide training on technical and material means" (BBC Monitoring Africa, 2010a).

The exact configuration of the stabilization mission remains unclear. As Seabra points out, doubts arose from the inception to whether this mission would be a sort of buffer to protect civilian leaders, a technical advisory mission taking on from the EU's SSR, or a full-scale military operation on the ground (Seabra, 2011b: 8). Moreover, who would assume the leadership of such a mission became a contentious issue between regional powers wishing to play a prominent role in the restoration of order in Guinea-Bissau. On September 10, Guinea-Bissau and Angola signed a Technical and Military Assistance Protocol. This immediately led to a turf war between Angola and ECOWAS, with ECOWAS chairman and Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, claiming that "the formal responsibility for solving Guinea-Bissau's problems lies with us" and that ECOWAS would be "completely in charge" of a stabilization mission (Panapress, 2010). In January 2011, the AU's Special Representative Sebastião Isata also announced a trilateral AU-ECOWAS-CPLP stabilization mission. Nevertheless, many months later uncertainty and ambiguity still linger and only Angola has stepped up to lead the initial effort, launching in March an Angolan Security Mission—MISSANG/GB—composed of 200 Angolan military with an advisory role throughout the coming year (Seabra, 2011a: 1).

The UN kept a critical discourse for the months following the April mutiny. On November 5, 2010, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon presented his report to the Security Council pointing to the political and security instability in the country (reference). His Special Representative, Joseph Mutaboba, said the April events "will undoubtedly increase the reluctance of some international partners to engage with the authorities of Guinea-Bissau as it underlines the lack of civilian oversight over the armed forces and the existing environment of impunity in the country" (UN News Service, 2010b). On November 23, 2010, the UN extended its mission UNIOGBIS until

December 31 in order to promote stability in the country, voicing “concern about the lack of civilian oversight and control of the armed forces and the continued detentions without due process of law that followed the events of 1 April” (UN News Service, 2010a).

The European Commission escalated its tone as well, proposing in December a consultation with EU member states to discuss Bissau’s situation, based on Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement between the EU and ACP countries, which encompasses the possibility of punitive measures (O’Shea, 2010)<sup>17</sup>. The army chief of staff was finally freed, more than eight months later, on December 22, “after the EU threatened to cut aid to Guinea Bissau” (BBC Monitoring Africa, 2010b).

Yet while the EU was taking a harder line, the discourse on Guinea-Bissau coming from the international financial institutions began to change. The IMF mission to assess Bissau’s performance under ECF and HIPC, in September 2010, was quite positive, “amid challenging political circumstances”, declaring performance under the 2010 ECF-supported program through June “satisfactory”: “All performance criteria were observed, and all structural benchmarks for the first review were met” (International Monetary Fund, 2010b). On December 15, the IMF Executive Board completed the first review under Extended Credit Facility and explained its decision for a US \$3.71 million disbursement as follows:

“The authorities’ commitment to sound policies has been crucial in maintaining macroeconomic stability in Guinea-Bissau amid challenging political and financial circumstances. Performance under the ECF-supported program has been satisfactory and substantial progress with structural reforms has been achieved. Benefitting from a rebound in the price of cashew, growth is expected to accelerate slightly in 2010, while inflation is projected to be within the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) target. (...) Guinea-Bissau has qualified for debt relief, including topping up assistance, but its debt ratios remain high, and the authorities are committed to meeting their external financing needs through grants and highly concessional loans. Going forward,

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<sup>17</sup> The EU introduced provisions to suspend aid in the event of a sudden and persistent interruption of democracy in the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states in 1995.

the authorities intend to build on their recent efforts to normalize relations with all external creditors and to maintain their commitment to the successful implementation of economic reforms.” (International Monetary Fund, 2010a)

On December 20, the IMF and the World Bank decided to support US\$1.2 billion in debt relief, thus cutting the country’s external debt by 87 percent, after it qualified under the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) (International Monetary Fund, 2010c).<sup>18</sup> On May 25, 2011, the IMF Executive Board completed the Second Review under the ECF and approved the disbursement of US\$3.85 millions given “satisfactory policy implementation” under “challenging conditions”, while praising the government’s “sound macroeconomic policies, strengthened institutions and debt relief” for having “stabilized the economy and supported confidence building” (International Monetary Fund, 2011). By February 2011, the UN’s Secretary General had joined the IFIs’ more optimistic disposition, reporting to the Security Council being “encouraged by the noticeable progress that Guinea-Bissau has made (...) and the positive steps taken by the leadership”, and claiming a renewed “window of opportunity presented by the recently announced debt relief arrangement to build on the positive momentum created” (S/2011/73).

However, apart from the UN’s most recent vote of confidence, pessimism reins. Gorjão calls it “the inescapable feeling of *déjà-vu*”, where things change in order to remain the same (Gorjão, 2010). Indeed, many doubt another foreign mission will prove any different, given both internal and international actors’ propensity to actual engagement that goes beyond minute commitment to reform. Eleven years into the new millennium, problems clearly remain unresolved and Guinea-Bissau is still perceived as “an arena for political drama” (Zounmenou, 2010a: 19).

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<sup>18</sup> The total debt relief effort consists of \$703 million under HIPC, \$107.9 million from the Paris Club group of creditors, \$230.3 million under topping-up assistance and \$139.2 million under the MDRI (International Monetary Fund, 2010c).

## Conclusion

Revisiting the enthusiastic and optimistic representations of Guinea-Bissau at the eve of its independence from Portugal's colonial yoke helps provide a clear image of the country's downfall in the eyes of the West.

Indeed, for a country previously referred to as a "Scotland-sized piece of swamp" (The Economist, 1968), it would have been hard to start off one's membership to the interstate community on better grounds. Guinea-Bissau had fought an eleven-year long anti-colonial armed struggle, morally and politically supported by the widespread international community, and financially and militarily supported by a significant number of both Eastern and Western states, along with solidarity groups and private organisations. The PAIGC had provided evidence of a remarkable capacity to govern the liberated areas from the Portuguese and had risen to independence and power in the midst of widespread popular support—from both domestic and international audiences. What then went so wrong that the same country, some thirty years later, would be regarded with suspicion by the Western community and labelled a "failed state" and a "narco-state", with its once inspiring liberation struggle perceived now as "bloody" and the original culprit for the country's current state of affairs?

It is first important to notice that Guinea-Bissau's story of disappointment does not stand out within the usual gloomy accounts of Africa's deterioration into political instability and economic decadence from the mid-seventies onwards. In fact, many of the problems identified throughout this chapter are analogous to those suffered by its African partners, from authoritarianism, to social fragmentation, economic decline and armed conflict. In that sense, Guinea-Bissau is not so much an exception as an example of the rule. But the rule that most interests us in this context is not the internal and external dynamics of the country's ruin—although it is the partial understanding of this demise that legitimises a particular western discourse—but how representations of African countries tend to pick and choose, how images change at the hands of those describing them, how labels serve the labeller's interests.

Here the story, as it is told by Western discourse, from warm welcome, to the first setbacks to the ultimate disgrace of becoming a threat to the international community, reveals an imbalanced encounter of asymmetric actors. In this "ideology of the gaze",

as David Spurr convincingly argues, the observer “preserves, on a material and human level, the relations of power inherent in the larger system of order” (Spurr, 1993: 15; 17). Western donors, aid agents, academics and journalists, whether supporting or defying the mainstream analysis, all reinforce this order of things.

This paper does not argue the overall portrayal of Guinea-Bissau is simply wrong, or that the country’s obstacles to its development are not, to a great degree, of its own making. It wishes, however, to call the attention for how given interpretations pave the way to solutions which are themselves part of the problem. As was clear by the genealogical account of this uneven relationship, representations have performative effects. A country labelled as ‘unreliable’, ‘difficult’, ‘intractable’ will spur half-hearted interventions, suspension and withdrawal, thus contributing to the instability accused in the first place to be the reason for the country’s dire standing with the aid community. Outside actors, therefore, although blaming only local actors for the climate of mistrust, also play a determinant role in a rapport ultimately disruptive for a consistent national development project. The cycle of instability is therefore a mutually reinforcing domestic and external entrapment—and, unfortunately, one which both Guineans and foreigners are finding extremely hard to get out of.

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