

**NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN GUINEA-BISSAU
SINCE INDEPENDENCE**

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Abstract

This article explores national integration in Guinea-Bissau since independence in 1974. I argue that the level of national integration is quite strong – despite the ethnic diversity prevalent in the country. As I will show, national integration is due to the ideology and policy of the former independence movement and the early postcolonial state that advocated a national-unity-in-ethnic-diversity-model. Bissau-Guineans know to separate between the state and the nation, a distinction sometimes neglected in analyses. As my findings suggest, Bissau-Guineans victimize their nation while confronting it with the state. A foreign invasion during the 1998-99 Military Conflict fostered national integration even more.

Keywords: Guinea-Bissau, ethnicity, nationalism, nation-state, postcolonialism, conflict

Resumo

O artigo explora a integração nacional na Guiné-Bissau desde a independência do país em 1974. O nível de integração nacional é – no meu modo de ver – relativamente forte, apesar da diversidade étnica naquele país da África Ocidental. Como vou demonstrar, a integração nacional baseia-se na ideologia e política do antigo movimento independentista e no jovem Estado pós-colonial, que advogavam um modelo de unidade-nacional-na-diversidade-étnica. Os guineenses sabem diferenciar entre o Estado e a nação, uma distinção às vezes negligenciada nas análises. Como sugerem os resultados da minha pesquisa de campo, os guineenses vitimizam a sua nação enquanto confrontam a nação com o Estado. Uma invasão estrangeira durante o conflito militar de 1998-99 reforçou ainda mais a integração nacional.

Palavras-chave: Guiné-Bissau, etnicidade, nacionalismo, Estado-nação, pós-colonialismo, conflito

Guinea-Bissau achieved its independence in September 1974 as first of Portugal's African colonies. This event was preceded by a decade-long liberation war that had started in early 1963. The armed struggle was led by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde or *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC), pushing aside rivaling political movements (see e.g. Rudebeck, 1974; Chabal, 1981; Lopes, 1987; Dhada, 1993; Silva, 1997, 2005). After 1974 the victorious leftist PAIGC established a one-party state that sought to control and command society, economy, and culture (Forrest, 1987, 1992, 1993). In November 1980 Guinea-Bissau was rocked by a first successful violent political overthrow that was followed by economic and political liberalization. Although this processes culminated in the first free multi-party elections in 1994 (Koudawo, 1994, 1996), the country continued to be characterized by political authoritarianism, power struggles within the political and military leadership – resulting in various putsches and coup attempts – and socio-economic crises. An antagonism between the ruling state-president and the dismissed supreme commander culminated in the *Conflito Militar* in June 1998 that lasted for ten months. This conflict remained largely restricted to the area of Greater Bissau (Gomes, 1998; Viegas and Koudawo, 2000; Koudawo, 2000; Drift, 2000; Zeverino, 2005). Although Guinea-Bissau returned to constitutional rule in 1999-2000, political authoritarianism, coups and coup attempts, the autonomization of the army, the alleged involvement of top officials in the drug trade, and socio-economic problems have since then dominated the perception of the country (see, e.g., Ostheimer, 2001; Kohl, 2008, 2009b). These entanglements soon gave way to depictions of Guinea-Bissau as a “fragile” (Forrest, 2003, 2010), “collapsed” (Roque, 2009) and “weak” (Ostheimer, 2001; Ferreira, 2004, 2005; International Crisis Group, 2008, 2009a) state, resulting in attempts by the international community to reform the security sector and other parts of the state apparatus (see, e.g., Roque, 2009; Telatin, 2009; Thaler, 2009; Monteiro and Morgado, 2009). To my understanding the assessment of the Bissau-Guinean state as “fragile”, “collapsed” and “weak” is at times accompanied by the mostly implicit assumption that the country's ethnic and religious heterogeneity prevent Bissau-Guineans from a strong national consciousness and solidarity, implying a weak or non-existing national integration (see e.g. Silva, 2002: 121; Gacitua-Mario *et al.*, 2007: 29). Authors have repeatedly suggested that ethnic fragmentation triggers ethnic tensions that may finally induce ethnic conflicts (see, e.g., International Crisis Group, 2009b: 2/fn 1, 4, 5/fn, 8, 10, 31).

I refer to Kohnert (2010: 16) who – while acknowledging the unifying role of the “common Creole language” and stating a shared “basic feeling of national

identity” – called for a grassroots nation-building as a pre-condition for state-building. I hold that the postcolonial spread of some creole manifestations have in fact contributed to the (creole) project of the nation, arguing, therefore, that national cohesion is quite strong in Guinea-Bissau (cf. also Davidson, 2002: 419) – despite her ethnic heterogeneity. Indeed, many scholars have underlined the important contribution of creoles in the achievement of independence and the construction of postcolonial nation- and statehood in Guinea-Bissau (Chilcote, 1972; Rudebeck, 1974; Chabal, 1981; Galli & Jones, 1987; Forrest, 1992; Dhada, 1993; Trajano Filho, 1998; 2005; Mendy, 1994; Silva, 1997; Havik, 2004; Wick, 2006; etc.).

This article seeks to analyze Bissau-Guinean nationhood, focusing on national integration both *from above* and *from below*. I will start by developing a theoretical framework. Secondly, I will shed light on the foundations of the Bissau-Guinean nation. Thirdly, I will explore how specific representations of creole culture – using the example of the lusocreole lingua franca Kriol, *manjuandadi* associations, and carnival – have contributed to an increasing countrywide cultural integration since independence. Creoles have constituted a small but influential minority in Guinea-Bissau for centuries (Galli and Jones, 1987: 17-32; Havik, 2004). Fourthly, I will show below that the issue of ethnicity is largely exploited by politicians to serve their own purposes. Fifthly, I will analyze how people distinguish between the nation and the state. I will examine how Bissau-Guineans construct their nation from below, while victimizing the nation in its confrontations with the state. Finally, I will shed light on the aftermath of the military conflict of 1998–99, exploring how the nation was, in fact, welded together by the violent conflict.

The ethnographic findings result from socio-anthropological fieldwork in Guinea-Bissau – including Bissau and the interior (including Bafatá, Geba, Bolama, Farim, Cacheu, amongst others) – from April 2006 to May 2007 and a previous stay from August to December 2004 (in Bissau, Bolama, Cacheu, the Bijagós Islands etc.). My research that focussed on creole culture and identity was primarily carried out in Kriol, to a lesser extent in Portuguese, conducting formal and informal interviews with individuals of various ethnic backgrounds.

Theoretical approach

My theoretical approach is based on a constructivist understanding of both ethnicity and nationalism as propounded most prominently by Barth (1969) and Anderson (1999), emphasizing the social constructedness of such identities.

According to Elwert nations are we-groups which, in contrast to ethnic groups, refer to either an existing state or one that is to be formed, thus implying citizenship. He defined a nation most generally as a “[...] (loose or definite) social organization which claims an enduring character, is treated by the majority of its members as an (imagined) community, and refers to a shared state apparatus” (Elwert, 1989: 446; original in italics, my own translation). The reference to a common state apparatus does not mean, however, that a nation and a state are congruent or closely related to one another. Rather, nations express their willingness and objective to live together, in principle, in *their* own nation-state. Given the absence of ethnic and cultural homogeneity in most newly independent African countries, popular as well as academic discourses have contested that these heterogeneous societies constitute “real” nations (Knörr, 2008: 30-31; 2010: 360). Consequently, African nations have been repeatedly dismissed as artificial nations (see e.g. Hill, 2005: 147-148, 151 as an example; cf. however Young, 2007: 241; Knörr, 2008: 31; Kersting, 2009: 7).

As mentioned above, many African states have been qualified as “fragile,” “weak”, “failed”, or “collapsed” states in recent years, mostly by political and economic analysts (see e.g. Reno, 1997, 2005; Ferreira, 2004: 54; Vaz and Rotzoll, 2005). Although these assessments imply a breakdown of the people’s commitment to nationhood, the respective nations have, nonetheless, survived. Scholars have repeatedly not differentiated between nations and states, using these notions synonymously (Gellner, 1998: 5-6; Barrington, 1997, 2006: 4). However, it is important to analytically separate the concepts of the state and nation. Even if a state is declared to be entirely *dysfunctional* – that is, its functioning does not correspond to the classic European model in Max Weber’s rational-legal sense of the term (Weber, 1978 [1922]: vol. I, 217-226; see also Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006: 4-5) – the state can continue existing if it is characterized by a pronounced national identity and a weak identification of the nation with the state (Young, 2007: 241; Knörr, 2008: 38). This can be observed in many countries that are ranked “critical” or “in danger” in the Failed State Index (Foreign Policy, 2010).

The reasons for the insufficient differentiation between nation and state may be located in the past. The European ideologues of nationalism were convinced that political and national entities (state = nation = people) are congruent (Gellner, 1998: 1; Hobsbawm, 1999: 22-23). It was believed that a culturally and ethnically homogeneous population or *nation* constitutes its own state – a nation-state. This classic European model of the nation has been paramount to date. Instead of evaluating the African state in terms of the European model, we can regard Africa as an arena that is used to negotiate between different international and

local stakeholders, thus giving rise to varying conceptualizations of the state (for instance, a liberal minimal state, a regulatory welfare state, or a ubiquitous command state). The separation of the nation from the state is also made by many Africans: my own ethnographic evidence that I will present below suggests that the Bissau-Guinean nation positions itself against the state.

The foundations of the nation

A new batch of illegal nationalist movements emerged after the Second World War. Most of them were short-lived (for an overview, see Chilcote, 1972: xxxvi, 603-607; Dhada, 1993: passim; Silva, 1997: 28-34; Pereira, 2003: 80-88, 113-126). The PAIGC eventually got the upper hand and emerged victorious from the war of independence. The movement owed its success also to its charismatic leader Amílcar Cabral, himself a Guinea-Bissau-born Cape Verdean. Cabral stood out because of his effective and strategic political self-marketing and leadership qualities (see Chilcote, 1972: xiii-xiv). In contrast to African leaders like Touré, Nkrumah, or Machel, Cabral did not aim at the erasure of ethnic identities in favor of a new national identity. Although Cabral was convinced that the era of ethnic groups in Africa was over (see Cabral, 1976: 143), he did not consider ethnicity as a problem, *per se*, but believed that it could become one if it was exploited by self-interested, *detrribalized* opportunists. He urged Bissau-Guineans to unite: “[...] [W]e, Balantas, Pepels, Mandingos, sons of Cape Verdeans, etc., we can be united, advancing together [...]” (Cabral, 1976: 145; my own translation; cf. however Cabral, 1976: 128).

By referring to different *natural* ethnic groups, Cabral revealed that ethnic heterogeneity did not stand in the way of national unity. He was apparently confident that ethnic feelings would vanish as soon as the new nation-state was established. It appears, therefore, that Cabral supported a *national-unity-in-ethnic-diversity* model of the nation: according to Cabral, national culture (patriotism, development, humanism, solidarity, etc.) would then co-exist with popular culture, which embraces indigenous cultural traits. According to Cabral, however, the former was not a synthesis of the latter (Cabral, 1976: 232-233; cf. Mendy, 2006: 14; Wick, 2006: 55-59).

The early postcolonial nation-state was built from a party (see Lopes, 1987: 69, 72): the victorious PAIGC conferred its own structures, including those developed to administer areas previously liberated from colonial rule, to the territory of the entire state. Hence, a left-wing, autocratic, centralized one-party state was subsequently established (see Forrest, 1993). Mass organizations were responsible

for mobilizing the population. The transformation of post-independent society was characterized by political surveillance and tight control over the domestic sphere, economic planning that involved a closing-off of the economy to the outside world, an expanded state bureaucracy, and the exclusion and elimination of any political dissenters (cf. Forrest, 1992: 47-55; 1993; Mendy, 1996: 36-37). Since media, schools, and mass organizations, especially in urban contexts, were controlled by the state, Bissau-Guineans were strongly influenced by the state ideology, which in turn was mostly founded on Cabral's ideals. After independence, when the Portuguese officials left the country, their positions in public administration were taken over by Bissau-Guinean bureaucrats who had previously been in subordinate positions. While the top elites (military and political leaders) were replaced, there were hardly any changes within the middle strata of the state bureaucracy, at least until the introduction of multiparty democracy in the early 1990s (Lopes, 1987: 69, 85-90; Cardoso, 2002: 17-18, 20, 25; Schiefer, 2002: 153-159).

The narrative of the struggle for independence was henceforth monopolized by the PAIGC. The struggle for national liberation consequently became the founding myth of the new state, because it had also welded people together across ethnic boundaries and generated solidarity. Lopes (1987: 43) stated:

The national liberation movement achieved an outstanding mixing of inter-ethnic groups. During the armed struggle the different ethnic groups shared a common cause. They interacted. They believed in the same watchwords. They discovered collective purposes.

Ever since independence, Bissau-Guineans have proudly referred to the victorious war that liberated Guinea-Bissau. Meanwhile, the ongoing war waged against Portugal even caused the overthrow of the Portuguese dictatorship in April 1974.

Thereafter, the war served as a positive example of national unity. After independence, it became a normative taboo to speak about *tribes*, owing to the fear of fostering divisions along the lines of *tribalism*. On the contrary, national development was intended to benefit all people, regardless of their ethnic affiliation (Ribeiro, 1994/95: 3). Against the background of this hegemonic *national-unity-in-ethnic-diversity* discourse, ethnic identities were considered to be of subordinate importance. In the 1970s, for example, a former senior PAIGC politician remembers that ethnicity was relegated to the cultural sphere:

[T]he question of national identity dominated completely the debates or reflections of the [Bissau-]Guineans to the extent that the pulsation of ethnicities [...]

remained relegated to a [...] simply or substantially cultural, not really political, field (Silva, 2003: 152; my own translation).

The leadership of the PAIGC was dominated by middle-class individuals of urban origin, the colonial local elite (Lopes, 1987: 90). Some of them were influenced by the originally European idea of nation- and statehood. In conjunction with European Marxist anti-imperialism, this ideology promised liberation from colonial domination, subjugation, and exploitation. While constructing a post-independence state, leading party officials reverted to originally creole cultural features, such as Kriol, *manjuandadis*, and carnival, which subsequently spread all over Guinea-Bissau – as portrayed in the following section. Despite announcing their intention of constructing an entirely new and better society, the party leaders did not succeed in shaking off the past in a double sense: on the one hand, they continued to stick to aspects of their creole heritage by employing them for the integration of the new nation, and on the other hand, they relied on a social and state order that often paralleled structures cultivated by the fascist colonial state, as evinced by practices such as authoritarian repression, political monopoly, and mass-movementism that were employed by the ruling party.

National integration through expanding creole cultural representations

As I showed elsewhere (Kohl, 2009a), creole culture is based on heterogeneous cultural origins, serving as an umbrella for people of diverse ethnic origins. Creole culture and identity in Guinea-Bissau can be therefore regarded as microcosms of postcolonial nationhood, or as a nation *in small*. Because they were not ascribed to a specific ethnic group, creole cultural representations proved to be suitable for a countrywide expansion.

Let me first talk about the language Kriol: my own observations during my sojourns in Guinea-Bissau suggest that Kriol is rapidly continuing to gain ground and is at present understood by possibly more than 80% of Bissau-Guineans, even in the countryside (compared to 44% in 1979 and 51% in 1991; see Lopes, 1986: 280, Instituto Nacional de Estatística e Censos, 1996: vol. I, tables 6.5A, B, C, D). For the time being, Kriol remains the most prevalent language for interethnic verbal communication.

The origins of Kriol can be traced back to the sixteenth century. Its development was intimately connected with the foundation and development of trade settlements (Rougé, 1986: 36) that were nominally controlled by the Portuguese in the mid- to late nineteenth century. After the turn of the penultimate century,

Kriol was propagated further inland by Cape Verdeans who relocated to the country's interior (Havik, 2007: 58-59) – despite attempts by the colonial authorities to suppress Kriol (Couto, 1994: 54). In the early 1920s Kriol was hardly understood in the countryside. Only thereafter did it spread more rapidly, coincident with the expansion of colonial rule and infrastructure, which caused many people to migrate to the towns (Carreira, 1984: 122-123).

The emergence of nationalist movements in the 1950s was strongly connected with urbanized speakers of Kriol. When the war of independence broke out in the early 1960s, Kriol served as a crucial means of popular mobilization. During the war, Kriol was employed as the training language for recruits as well as the communication medium in the fast-spreading basic primary schools run by the PAIGC. Moreover, the PAIGC also started to broadcast messages, propaganda, and its ideology in Kriol on *Liberation Radio* at that time (Carreira, 1984: 122-123; Bull, 1989: 78, 116-119; Couto, 1994: 59; Embaló, 2008: 105).

However, it was only after 1974 that Kriol manifested its full importance. Through its use, the different ethnic groups could bridge the linguistic diversity prevalent in Guinea-Bissau, being conducive to the project of nation-building. In this way, Kriol was transformed from a commercial language to a language of resistance and liberation and of national unity. Kriol was declared the national language, spoken all over the country's territory (Scantamburlo, 1999: 16). Currently, Kriol is not only a *language of unity* and interethnic communication but also a means of "[...] business, practical communication at work, and personal contact in almost any local community" (Almeida, 1991: 3). The spread of Kriol is certainly also facilitated by the fact that the numerous radio stations throughout the country broadcast primarily in Kriol (cf. Embaló, 2008: 103, 105).

Let me now move on to *manjuandadis*: Trajano Filho (1998: 399-405) characterized this institution as one that is based on the principles of mutual assistance and sociability. In general, the *manjuandadis* express solidarity among their predominantly female members by providing mutual aid and support. Members foster friendly relations with each other by having fun together, drinking, eating, and chatting among themselves.

At present, Bissau-Guineans use the word *manjuandadi* to refer to both systematically organized permanent associations and loosely organized, mostly ad-hoc networks of extended family members, neighbors, co-workers, and friends. Third parties often associate musical shows, singing, dancing, and the wearing of identical costumes with the (organized) institution of *manjuandadis*.

Until the mid-twentieth century, *manjuandadi* associations were exclusive to creole communities. They started to spread throughout the country at the time

of independence – a process that was encouraged by both the single-party PAIGC and the independent state. Independence signified not only a fresh start for *manjuandadis* but also their gradual transformation into organizations that were supposed to support the politics of the postcolonial state and mobilize women (cf. Trajano Filho, 1998: 402). Ideally, all women were required to take membership of the party's women's wing, the Democratic Women's Union of Guinea (UDEMU). For the first two leaders of UDEMU were familiar with creole culture (cf. Urdang, 1979: 267-268, 275-276), it seemed only logical to use *manjuandadis* for mass mobilization (cf. Trajano Filho, 1998: 319, 402). When UDEMU would invite *manjuandadis* for gatherings, the associations were requested to communicate political messages via their songs. Part of UDEMU's strategy was to mobilize female folklore groups from Guinea-Bissau's Muslim communities.

The introduction of multiparty democracy and the accompanying withdrawal of the state stripped UDEMU and PAIGC of their monopolistic character. In view of these changes the *manjuandadis* had to find new sources of funding. The strategies that were finally employed by the *manjuandadis* led to their commodification and politicization. Looking for new partners and sources of funding, the *manjuandadis* established ties with other political parties apart from the PAIGC, lent themselves to prosperous NGOs in order to communicate their agendas, and, supported by radio stations and cultural activists, began to market their music effectively.

Due to the rapid spread of Kriol in the past decades, the term *manjuandadi* has been adopted by the population in the country's interior. These people have attached the notion to their age-set groups. Similarly, representations (such as rotating credit and savings associations) that are based on the principles of sociability, solidarity, and mutuality are likewise increasingly referred to as *manjuandadis*. Such formal or informal institutions can be found not only in the capital but also in the countryside – thus also including regions that are dominated by Islam. The spread of *manjuandadis* has been occurring despite a general distinction of Christian from Muslim *manjuandadis*. In the mid-1990s, the vast majority of *manjuandadis* (86%) in Bissau were multiethnic in their membership (Domingues, 2000: 466-467).

Let us come now to the third representation, carnival. What began as a creole cultural representation has more recently been transformed into a mass event that has rapidly spread beyond the boundaries of the former creole communities. Formerly a loosely organized festivity, shortly after independence carnival turned into a state-run competition. It was only later, after the state and its ruling party had partly withdrawn from its organization, that carnival became a na-

tionwide celebration. Today, carnival enjoys such mass popularity that it is even staged in remote areas.

The post-independence one-party state reorganized carnival as a competitive event under its aegis in the late 1970s, thus politicizing the festivity. Interestingly, carnival – which is actually characterized by anti-structure, disorder, critique, and resistance – was transformed into a ritual of structure and order. Hence, carnival was turned into an instrument to mass-mobilize the population and to communicate agendas and slogans on behalf of the state and its ruling party. Against this background, carnival eventually managed to spread all over the country, reaching new sections of the population, in both ethnic and geographical terms.

The party-run youth organization African Youth Amílcar Cabral (JAAC) was mainly responsible for the post-independence revival and reshaping of carnival. The takeover of the central carnival organization by the General Directorate of Culture in 1984 marked an important step toward the wider spread of carnival. Since the 1980s the public administration generated new sources of income by issuing licenses to those who wish to take pictures of the carnival or set up sales stalls for drinks and food. Moreover, the authorities have introduced participation fees for those wishing to compete (Sigá, 1995: 12-14).

The concentration of carnival festivities in Bissau after 1974 popularized the festivity among a large group of migrants from the hinterland, for the population of the capital had grown tremendously during and after the war of independence. These people, mostly young men and women, continued to stay in contact with their rural kin and thereby transported the idea of the carnival to the countryside. In this way, carnival became popular in the countryside (see also Barcelos *et al.*, 2006: 189; Pink, 2001: 106) – thus including areas influenced by Islam –, independent of the official carnival contests. Thus, the integrative transformation had already become visible at that time.

In the period following the introduction of multiparty democracy in the early 1990s carnival was able to shake off the state's paternalistic intervention and partially renew its critical attitude toward the state and politics, continuing to spread throughout the country. Carnival has remained a festivity that promotes sociability and conviviality among people at the community level, irrespective of their ethnic affiliations and beyond the sphere of official contests.

The expansion of carnival – a process that has not yet been completed as the festivity continues to spread – has been significantly facilitated by its multilayered character. The congruency of different meanings represented in carnival depends on the participants' or observers' individual cultural backgrounds. People of different origins, therefore, are able to retrieve their respective cultures

through carnivalesque performances. Despite, or more correctly, because of these different meanings, carnival has managed to create a common identity among its participants as well as observers.

The nation and ethnic fragmentations

A number of scholars have held the view that a Bissau-Guinean nation would not exist for long – “[...] on ne peut pas pour autant parler de nation guinéenne” (Silva, 2002: 121) – while pointing to the high degree of ethnic and religious heterogeneity that prevails in Guinea-Bissau (cf. Lyon, 1980: 165-166; Ostheimer, 2001) to explain this lack of national identity. Repeatedly, some scholars and other observers have reinforced the picture of an ethnically divided country unable to achieve national unity. In consequence, social conflicts in Guinea-Bissau have repeatedly been explained in terms of ethnic or religious conflicts.

I wish to follow a different approach, though, based on the concepts of “moral ethnicity” and “political tribalism” (cf. Berman, 1998: 324-330). *Moral ethnicity* can be understood as a vertical moral-economic behavior pattern among politico-economic patrons and clients on an ethnic basis, whereas *political tribalism* refers to horizontal competitions between different ethnic patron-client networks (Berman, 1998: 324-330, 338-339). Against this background, I would like to argue that politicians in Guinea-Bissau (like those elsewhere) attempt to exploit their ethnic ties in power games, thus seeking to ensure their own and their respective networks’ access to power and resources while eliminating rival politicians and parties. In this attempt, the network leaders are under pressure from their clients. For example, Vigh has pointed out how clientelist networks in Guinea-Bissau generally depend on access to power and resources. This access is very important in a country which is marked by the possibility of comparatively rapid upward and downward mobility. This does not mean, however, that social positions are subject to constant change in Guinea-Bissau, where “[...] many cultural and social understandings and practices are relatively enduring [...]” (Vigh, 2006: 145). Hence,

[If a] network is disempowered, as a result of elections, conflict, or war, the result is radical social change that affects the entire network. A small minority within the “declassed” network will most probably have secured themselves a relatively strong economic foundation, yet for most the resources gained will already have been redistributed, through social and political networks, meaning that political changes entail entire networks and societal groups becoming without means, losing positions and possibilities that dramatically affect their everyday existence (*Ibid.*)

In the process of empowering their networks, ethno-political entrepreneurs try to reify and exploit ethnic identities. If they succeed, their attempts result in the political fiction of a unified ethnic group (Brubaker, 2004: 37). In Guinea-Bissau, for example, former state-president Kumba Yala has been repeatedly accused of manipulating and exploiting ethnic ties in order to garner votes and support. To this end, as part of his populist style, Yala employs symbols and rhetoric that are well-received by Balantas (Nóbrega, 2003b: 294).

The flip side of such a strategy of ethnic mobilization consists of negative ethnic campaigning. During the presidential election process of 2005, for instance, according to my informants, João Bernardo *Nino* Vieira attempted to fuel fears of his Muslim rival candidate Malam Bacai Sanhá's coming to power, warning the people to resist an impending islamization of Guinea-Bissau. Indeed, Vieira was able to win a clear majority of votes in areas characterized by non-Muslim populations, such as Biombo (often regarded as Vieira's stronghold) and Bolama (see the results in Vaz and Rotzoll, 2005: 540). Simultaneously, Vieira and his network attempted to represent Sanhá as a Mandingo even though Sanhá regards himself as a Beafada. This was part of a deliberate strategy to discredit Sanhá in the eyes of the Fula voters, since many Bissau-Guineans think of Fulas as historical slaves to the Mandingos.

Despite these attempts of electoral mobilization on ethnic grounds, the peaceful conviviality of Bissau-Guineans has not (yet?) been affected. This is because, as Temudo argues, politicians in Guinea-Bissau have so far failed to instrumentalize ethnicity, as part of their moral ethnic strategies, to such an extent as to result in political tribalism (Temudo, 2008: 260). This means that horizontal competitions of various extensive ethnic networks – which may cause third parties to believe that ethnic groups form a unified monolithic bloc – have not yet come into existence in Guinea-Bissau.

So far, external observers are actually taken in by the leaders' groupist rhetoric while at the same time overlooking internal discrepancies or other, more complex, and sometimes cumulative (for instance, emotional, economic, value-rational, or affectional) underlying reasons. In the end "[...] high levels of groupness may be more the result of conflict (especially violent conflict) than its underlying cause [...]" (Brubaker, 2004: 45). In other words, the mere existence of ethnic diversity does not automatically lead to violent conflicts.

As regards Guinea-Bissau, so far there is limited support for ethnic groupist rhetoric, and no political party has presented itself overtly as an "ethnic organization" (Temudo, 2008: 260). Further, even though the majority of Balantas voted for Yala, it is unlikely that they voted unanimously for him. Moreover, election

results suggest that Yala gained major support from Muslim voters in the run-off election of 2000, even in the stronghold of his rival Sanhá (Rudebeck, 2001: 71; Nóbrega, 2003a: 71). In addition, when it came to the 2005 presidential run-off election, Sanhá and Vieira ran neck-and-neck in the eastern region of Gabú, an area wherein the majority of inhabitants are Fulas (see Vaz and Rotzoll, 2005: 540), thus proving that Vieira's strategy was least successful.

The victimization of the nation

The postcolonial state has been characterized by “[...] crisis and decline: that is, of political, institutional, economic, and even identificatory deterioration” (Vigh, 2006: 144) for numerous years. In the light of these challenges, many Bissau-Guinean informants, especially the disadvantaged ones, expressed their dissatisfaction with the state and its actions, while nostalgically recalling better times in the past. In this section, I will examine how Bissau-Guineans continue to be committed to their nation despite their dissatisfaction with the state.

In particular, those Bissau-Guineans who are excluded from power networks that are able to provide people jobs, benefits, and other income opportunities have a reason for lamenting the widespread corruption that has led to the decline of Guinea-Bissau, which is coping with a difficult economic situation. This disempowered, poor, and disadvantaged majority of the country's population raises its voice in the “parliaments of the poor”, as Vigh has described them. The term describes a loose social space that is based on friendship, solidarity, and mutual cooperation. The parliaments of the poor are characterized not by political action but by routinized irony, which only emphasizes the political and social marginalization of the disadvantaged and excluded participants (Vigh, 2006: 146-148).

Contrary to Vigh, who located this social space solely among the young, urban population, my own observations suggest that this kind of social institution from below, in a broader sense, can indeed be observed throughout Guinea-Bissau, across all age groups. Following my own experiences and observations, Bissau-Guineans use this social space, as do people elsewhere, to vent out their anger at the socioeconomic challenges, blaming the government for bad governance, incompetence, and corruption. At the same time, they portray themselves as defenseless, powerless, and helpless victims in the face of an ignorant, egoistic, and inscrutable state apparatus that has been eaten away by clientelism and personal interests.

As a result of the dissatisfaction with the Bissau-Guinean state apparatus, national cohesion is achieved by Bissau-Guineans' collective discursive self-as-

assessment as innocent victims of an incompetent, corrupt, and anonymous state apparatus. In short, Bissau-Guineans tend to portray themselves as a *solidarity community of victims*.

Trajano Filho (2002: 154-157) has described this way of representing the nation as the “ethos of *koitadesa*”, referring to Bissau-Guineans as a nation of “*koitadis*”. The Kriol term *koitadesa*, derived from Portuguese, means “poverty”, “infelicity”, and “misery” (cf. Scantamburlo, 2002: 313), thus depicting a mode of life in resignation, deprivation, and suffering (Trajano Filho, 2002: 155-156).

Past experiences under authoritarian rule, both in colonial and postcolonial times, seem to foster this collective self-affirmation, for they allow Bissau-Guineans to regard themselves as powerless and oppressed.

The colonial state was characterized by a discriminatory attitude toward the people of Guinea-Bissau. Even citizens did not enjoy full civil liberties, political participation was restricted, and the political arena was dominated by state-controlled organizations. While the regime changed after independence, political authoritarianism continued. The PAIGC, which formed the state, continued to control both society and the economy through repressive means, while maintaining a centralized state structure and imposing dogmatic indoctrination on Bissau-Guineans.

Just like colonial times, post-independent Guinea-Bissau was characterized by a discrepancy between official ideology and everyday life. Although political liberalization allowed for the introduction of multiparty democracy in the early 1990s, politics has continued to bear an authoritarian tenor, marked by the continuing violation of human rights and democratic procedures. Authoritarian experiences in the political arena have often been compounded by a patriarchal socialization in extended families. In other words, generations of Bissau-Guineans have become accustomed to complying with patriarchal social and political values and norms. As my observations and conversations with informants suggest, citizens feel unprotected and exposed to hostile attacks – first and foremost from the state.

Moreover, this fear complex consists of a socio-economic component. While the late 1970s and early 1980s were characterized by a general shortage of basic consumer goods, as my informants remembered, Bissau-Guineans have been faced with limited employment opportunities, reduced earning power, lack of infrastructure, and omnipresent corrupt practices for numerous years. Bissau-Guineans are “[...] faced by a system in which they feel they cannot succeed, but must participate in and thus perpetuate in order to survive” (Pink, 2001: 112). The sense of powerlessness and dependence has apparently been aggra-

vated by projects and payments from the international development co-operation. The international assistance that followed the country's armed struggle for independence after 1974 seems to have transformed Guinea-Bissau into an *aid orphan* characterized by a rentier economy (see Schiefer, 2002). Therefore, observers have attested that Bissau-Guineans developed a "mentality of dependence" (Acção para o Desenvolvimento, 1993: 41, my own translation). In particular, the time immediately after the military conflict was marked by a sharp decrease in international commitment and financial support, which severely impacted the socio-economic and rentier foundations of many Bissau-Guineans. As a consequence of these experiences and developments, people suffer not only physically and materially but also mentally due to structures that, the people believe, they are powerless to influence.

Theoretical models that were created on the basis of European post-socialist countries act on the assumption that people who have been subjected to authoritarian political systems reveal a demanding attitude toward the state as an almighty allocator of goods and benefits; such a state is also characterized by the pursuit of social equality and a preponderance of personal views that conform to the politically desired positions (see Strohschneider, 1996: 40).

Collectively experienced socio-economic distress that has been historically charged and politically fostered can weld a nation together. The feeling of collective victimization has a long tradition in Guinea-Bissau. During the liberation struggle, the PAIGC portrayed the Bissau-Guinean nation-to-be as a suffering collectivity that was contained, exploited, and oppressed by Portuguese colonialism. Through this portrayal, the independence movement intended to appeal to the people's emotions, hoping to mobilize and win the people's support.

The victimization of the nation consists of two components, representing external and internal dimensions respectively. On the one hand, a mechanism that vaguely resembles balanced antagonism – first analyzed by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) – provides for the construction and maintenance of a social boundary, attempting to unite the nation across ethnic and religious boundaries and positioning it against a generalized, collective other. On the other hand, the exploitation of the feeling of distress tries to ensure that the nation is portrayed as a collectivized victim suffering from socio-economic crises and hardships.

Similar mechanisms weld people together in contemporary Guinea-Bissau, hence providing for national cohesion. As mentioned above, Bissau-Guinean politicians and civil servants are perceived by citizens mostly as antipodes of the nation. Since the citizens hold them responsible for political authoritarianism, economic mismanagement, and social grievances, they do not believe that

these political players are serving the interests of the nation. The othering of state representatives under political authoritarianism and an overwhelming sense of socio-economic deprivation form the backbone of the subaltern discourse of collective victimization in contemporary Guinea-Bissau.

The integrative effects of the military conflict

The external dimension of the social phenomenon that resembles balanced antagonism was manifested during the military conflict. This conflict is a prime example of how a heterogeneous population can close ranks together in the face of alien intruders who are collectively perceived as enemies of the nation – despite an ethnic dimension attributed to it by some scholars (e.g. Vigh, 2006: 52-54; cf. however Gomes, 1998: 60-61; Sangreman *et al.*, 2008: 8-9).

The armed conflict (on the preceding events see e.g. Induta, 2001; Rudebeck, 2001: 17-20; Zeverino, 2005: 55-81) broke out on June 7, 1998. Following the putsch attempt by the dismissed supreme commander Ansumane Mané and army factions under his command, state-president Vieira called for military assistance from the governments of Senegal and Guinea. Senegalese and Guinean army troops entered Guinea-Bissau. What followed was a military conflict that predominantly affected the capital of Bissau until peace was officially restored on May 11, 1999. Nevertheless, Guinea-Bissau's interior was mostly indirectly affected by the armed conflict.

Both warring parties claimed to represent and fight on behalf of the Bissau-Guinean nation. On the one hand, the Vieira faction insisted on the constitutionality of the government and depended on existing agreements of mutual military assistance that were signed with both Senegal and Guinea. On the other hand, the so-called military *junta* formed by Mané and his allies claimed to be fighting for the nation's welfare and accused Vieira and his entourage of extreme corruption and bad governance. The Mané faction also stressed the poor living and working conditions of army soldiers and former war of independence veterans (Drift, 2000: 40-41; Rudebeck, 2001: 18; Vieira C6, 2001: 32, 67-71; Zeverino, 2005: 82). These self-representations indicate the respective logics of action employed by the warring parties.

At that time, the majority of Guinea-Bissau's population, however, sided with the *junta*. This occurred because the foreign troops were largely considered to be invaders, and were therefore treated as a threat to independent nationhood. Widespread popular outrage and misery were triggered by heavy bombardments of residential quarters and a hospital – for which the Senegalese army was

reportedly responsible – and the fact that Bissauans had to obtain permission from the commandant of the Senegalese troops, not from the Bissau-Guinean authorities, to leave the capital.

History conspired to defend Bissau-Guinean national cohesion, because both neighboring Senegal and Guinea, as well as their former colonial power France, were known to have vested interests in the small country in between. As early as in the nineteenth century, France had attempted to acquire political and economic influence in Guinea-Bissau, which was only nominally controlled by Portugal. While French traders dominated Bissau-Guinean commerce until the early twentieth century (Bowman, 1987: 98-99), France had clashed with Portugal over the control of the Casamance, the Rio Nunez and Rio Cacine in the late nineteenth century (Roche, 1973, 1985; Bowman, 1980: 165-169, 180; Esteves, 1988). In the 1960s, the impending independence of Senegal had raised fears among Portuguese military officials that Guinea-Bissau could be incorporated into a federation of independent West African states (Henri Labéry in Chilcote, 1972: 314; Keese, 2003: 119). In 1964, Guinean president Touré laid secret claims to large parts of the territorial waters of Guinea-Bissau (Davidson, 1981: 62). These historical developments have left their mark on the contemporary Bissau-Guinean national consciousness. Widespread oral narratives among Bissau-Guineans keep circulating that both Senegal and Guinea were planning to divide their reputedly rich neighbor Guinea-Bissau between themselves. In this context, a considerable number of Bissau-Guineans believe that it was Touré who masterminded the assassination of Amílcar Cabral (see also Forrest, 1992: 38) – a view backed by journalistic research (Castanheira, 1999: 277-281).

The insurgents under Mané's command were therefore considered to be fighting against a regime that was widely held responsible for bad governance and the invasion of foreign troops. The vast majority of Bissau-Guineans would have supported the following statement:

[T]he war in Guinea-Bissau has been a war of a president and his foreign allies against the majority of the political parties, against parliament, against the Bishop and all prominent actors of civil society, as a matter of fact, against the people of Guinea-Bissau (Drift, 2000: 41).

In this way, Bissau-Guineans again imagined and portrayed the nation as a collective victim of state affairs. In addition, those Bissau residents who succeeded in fleeing as refugees from the combat operations in the war zone met with a high level of solidarity from their fellow citizens in the countryside. Bissau-Guinean solidarity across religious and ethnic boundaries was even intensified

by the fact that the international community was helplessly watching the unfolding of events. For example, the World Food Programme was unable to deliver any staple food to Bissau during the first six months of the civil war (Trajano Filho, 2007: 377-378). Left high and dry by foreign countries and their aid, Bissau-Guineans must have felt like victims yet again. Moreover, the fact that French soldiers and diplomats openly supported the Vieira faction, in line with their geopolitical interests, not only increased the Bissau-Guineans' resentment against France (cf. Zeverino, 2005: 104-105) but also may have reinforced the persisting impression among citizens that foreign countries continued to pose a threat to Bissau-Guinean independence and nationhood.

Conclusion

In this article I have shown that national integration in Guinea-Bissau appears to be quite strong – despite high degrees of ethnic diversity and a state frequently described as *weak* and *failed*.

Interestingly, it was the leading role of the early postcolonial state in promoting the nationwide spread of creole representations. By employing Kriol as a means of interethnic communication and *manjuandadis* and carnival as a means of political mass-mobilization, the postcolonial state made these features popular throughout the country and across ethnic and religious boundaries. Their expansion was facilitated by the fact that these creole representations were shared by various ethnic subcategories under a creole umbrella.

As respects the country's ethnic fragmentation, politicians have not yet managed to create a system that can be termed *political tribalism*. One reason for this is that national integration and interethnic co-operation are very pronounced in Bissau-Guinean society.

Bissau-Guineans distinguish clearly between state and nationhood. While they are critical of their state's performance, they nevertheless identify as one nation. The state is most severely criticized by the masses of disadvantaged people who regard themselves as victims of their state. By contrast, their identification with the nation is very pronounced. This feeling unites Bissau-Guineans across ethnic and religious boundaries.

When the military conflict broke out and foreign powers entered Guinea-Bissau, the nation stood united against a shared enemy, embodied by Senegalese, Guinean, and French army troops, thus forgetting any social, ethnic, and religious cleavages.

The Bissau-Guineans' strong commitment to nationhood has been largely fostered by the independence movement PAIGC. On the basis of a *unity-in-diversity*

or *tree-as-nation* model that portrayed the Bissau-Guinean nation as an umbrella encompassing various ethnic groups, the PAIGC had actively encouraged national cohesion ever since the beginning of the struggle for liberation. These developments were initiated by the postcolonial state in its attempt to construct a nation *after* the formation of an independent state. Thus, the construction of an independent nation- and statehood in Guinea-Bissau – as in many other African countries – differed from European models such as Germany, Italy, and Poland, where nation-building had preceded state-building.

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