

From the Unbearable “Resilience” of Coupism to Ethnicisation: a Short Journey for the Armed Forces of Guinea-Bissau

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the emergence of ethnic ruptures in the Guinea-Bissau Armed Forces. It takes as its starting point the fact that, despite efforts that date back to initiatives implemented by the political wing of the PAIGC (African Party for Independence in Guinea and Cape Verde, *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* in Portuguese) during the war of independence, “ethnic empathy” is rife in the military and, at key moments, over-rides the comradeship that is supposed to form the basis of relations between military personnel. In fact, as I aim to demonstrate, not only do personal loyalties to military leaders frequently supersede the chain of command, many higher-ranked officials also frequently use the “weight” of their ethnicity (and a corresponding network of relations inside different military units) as a bargaining chip, as well as a weapon and a shield. This is especially true in regards to the distribution of profits accrued from drug trafficking. The situation is all the more intriguing given that the cohesion of Guinea-Bissau’s social fabric is generally speaking fairly good, despite its huge ethnic diversity. It is therefore important to ascertain the reason(s) why the situation should be so different within the realm of the Armed Forces.

Keywords: Guinea-Bissau, Armed Forces, diversity management, loyalty/loyalties.

1. INTRODUCTION

This text focuses on the Armed Forces’ unacceptable tendency to constantly intervene in the political affairs of Guinea-Bissau, a practice that dates back to independence, and on incidents of ethnic ruptures that have emerged in the military realm over recent years.

The text takes as its starting point the circumstances created by the military coup of 12 April 2012 and the fact that, despite efforts that date back to initiatives implemented by the political wing of the PAIGC during the war of independence, “ethnic empathy” these days increasingly over-rides the comradeship that is supposed to “format” relationships between military personnel and establish a basic hierarchical order between interconnected units.

2. THE ARMED FORCES OF GUINEA-BISSAU: A BALCANISED “FANDANGO UNIT”

Let us be clear: at present, within the Armed Forces of Guinea-Bissau, groups of Balanta (the country’s largest ethnic group, but one over-represented in the military) are on one side, aligned with their respective leaders, and the other ethnic groups, organised in more disperse fashion, are on the other.

Let us again be clear: cocaine trafficking, and the distribution of drug profits by the military leadership, has played a pivotal role in every coup and counter-coup in Guinea-Bissau of the last decade. Some of these coups were confined to military circles, to the “viper’s nest” the Armed Forces has long since become, while others, including the 12 April 2012 coup, have had direct and immediate repercussions on state policy and governance.

In recent years, apparent peace within the Guinea-Bissau Armed Forces has proved to be little more than a preparation period for the next coup.

In fact, the succession of state coups and attempted coups, along with assassinations of military and political figures, have not only furnished this reading of the situation, they have encouraged the idea, even amongst Guineans, that Guinea-Bissau is condemned to forever suffer political and military strife.

In the last fifteen years alone, the Armed Forces of Guinea-Bissau have, amongst other things, overthrown three elected Presidents of the Republic, provided cast iron protection to numerous supposedly transitional governments and refused to account for any funds they’ve received (from the state budget, from service contracts, from collected fines and bribes, from trade-off agreements with foreign entities, from donations); they were also directly implicated in the 2 March 2009 assassination of President Nino Vieira and, while ousting the Head of State and Major General of the Armed Forces (*Chefe de Estado Maior General das Forças Armadas* in Portuguese: CEMGFA) on 1 April 2010, took the Prime Minister hostage for several hours, and performed a further coup on 12 April 2012¹.

Of the five CEMGFAs selected for office between 1999 and 2011, the first three (Assumane Mané, Veríssimo Serrão and Baptista Tgamé Na Waie) were assassinated by peers, and the penultimate (Zamora Induta) was overthrown and imprisoned on the orders of the then vice CEMGFA, now outright CEMGFA, António Indjai², who was, alongside a former President of the Republic (Kumba Yala), the “strong man” of the April 2012 coup³.

¹ A chronology of the principal outbreaks of military-political violence occurring in Guinea-Bissau since independence can be found here: <http://www.gbissau.com/?p=1048>.

² In April 2010, António Indjai backed a “commando” manoeuvre against Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior and the Head of State and Major General of the Armed Forces, Zamora Induta, arresting the premier for several hours and arresting and deposing the CEMGFA. The manoeuvre came about after soldiers acting under the orders of the Prime Minister were caught receiving and unloading a drugs plane near Quinhamel, with Zamora Induta subsequently forced to write a letter resigning from his post. There have been many such

The Guinea-Bissau state coup of 12 April 2012 (and subsequent score-settling within the military) came as a surprise to nobody. Indeed it was announced several days previously, in fairly clear terms, by Lieutenant Colonel Dahba Na Walna, spokesman and cabinet leader for António Indjai, the leader of the coup. Furthermore, on the eve of the coup, Kumba Yala (deposed as President of the Republic in 2002), speaking on behalf of five candidates who contested the first round results of the presidential elections⁴, declared in a press conference, with typical coldness and arrogance, that “there will be no second round”⁵.

The coup had been plotted by military personnel and civilians ever since President Malam Sanhá’s health began to deteriorate in summer 2011. It had a dummy run with the December 2011 imprisonment, for several hours, of Raimundo Pereira, interim President of the Republic, and Carlos Gomes Júnior, the Prime Minister.

Presented by the “Military Command” as a coup launched to prevent the Armed Forces from being wiped out by foreign forces, it quickly lost, even within the realm of the Armed Forces, any sense of justification and, indeed, credibility⁶. Evidence of Angolan interference, and of collusion between the governments of Guinea-Bissau and Angola aimed at annihilating the Guinean Armed Forces, never emerged in any credible form⁷.

On 3 April 2012, a week before the coup, Joseph Mutaboba, the UN’s representative in Guinea-Bissau, cautioned that “Guinea-Bissau’s military

“wars” within the military in recent years due to violent disputes over hidden drugs or newly arrived shipments.

³ Besides conclusively confirming the weight of his influence amongst Balanta military personnel, and in the “Balanta world” as a whole, the stand-out role played by Kumba Yala before, during and after the state coup of 12 April 2012 suggests, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that he was one of its main leaders. Yet he has evidently begun to fall from favour in recent times: he lost the presidential elections within his own party, a party he himself founded and had always been the natural leader of (The Party for Social Renovation, Partido para a Renovação Social in Portuguese: PRS), and has not been seen coming or going from the Amura (CEMGFA headquarters) or “spouting” threats into radio and television microphones ever since.

⁴ Kumba Yala won 22.3% of the vote in the first round; Serifo Nhamadjo, parliamentary vice-president at the time of the 12 April 2012 coup and President of the Republic of “transition” since 11 May 2012, won 15.7% ; Henrique Rosa, 5.4% ; Afonso Té, 1.3% ; Serifo Baldé, 0.4%. The candidate who won the most votes was Carlos Gomes Júnior, the Prime Minister deposed in the 12 April 2012 coup, with 48.9%.

⁵ See Kumba Yala’s declarations at <http://www.dw.de/oposição-reitera-acusação-de-fraude-e-kumba-ialá-recusa-segunda-volta/a-15829570> (consulted April 2012).

⁶ “The Command has no ambitions for power, but was forced to act in order to defend itself from diplomatic attacks by the Guinean government, attacks that seeks to annihilate the Guinea-Bissau Armed Forces through foreign forces”: <http://noticias.sapo.mz/info/artigo/1235853.html>, consultado em Abril de 2012 (consulted April 2012.)

⁷ See the accusation here: <http://noticias.sapo.mz/info/artigo/1235853.html> (consulted April 2012.)

leaders remain divided and many of them do not respect political power; it is therefore crucial that the next president of Guinea-Bissau shows great capacity for leadership”. Mutaboba even went on to warn that “divisions and a lack of compromise [among military leaders] destroy republican values”, citing confrontations on 26 December 2011 and adding that “the need to reform the security apparatus is consequently a matter of the utmost urgency”⁸.

Joseph Mutaboba’s words of warning had no lasting impact, as the military coup of 12 April 2012 proved.

3. GUINEA-BISSAU – A FRAGILE STATE AT THE MERCY OF THE MOOD SWINGS OF ITS MILITARY LEADERS

Thirty five years after independence, Guinea-Bissau – the only Portuguese colony in Africa where the independence movement triumphed politically and militarily in the war against the colonial state – still suffers from political instability and even, frequently, from outright ungovernability. Indeed for the last decade, governance of the country has almost uninterruptedly been conducted under the “vigilance” of the Armed Forces⁹.

In various aspects, Guinea-Bissau can be described as a “fragile state”¹⁰, a state that is not only incapable of pulling together the country’s multiple ethnic communities and “federalising” the interests of different social groups, but also one unable to provide stable institutions and stop its own territory from being used as a trafficking platform¹¹.

⁸ http://www.portalangop.co.ao/motix/pt_pt/noticias/africa/2012/2/13/Chefias-militares-divididas-alerta-representante-ONU,33ce2dcf-c2e5-4ba0-842a-c26d32fda02b.html (consulted April 2012.)

⁹ There are several significant works dedicated to this issue, including, for example, Nóbrega (2003, 2008), Koudawo e Mendy (1996) and, albeit for a different level of analysis, Rudebeck (2001).

¹⁰ Or, as Joshua Forrest (1992, 2003) prefers to call it, a “Soft State”; or, as some authors have recently preferred to call it, a “Narco State”, or even, in the case of O’Regan and Thompson (2013), “Africa’s first Narco-State”!

¹¹ “During the hangover from the 1998–99 civil war, the 2003 overthrow of Kumba Yala and the 2005 return to power of Nino Vieira, cocaine began to arrive in Guinea-Bissau on a large scale, aggravating a state of general disorder.

A crude state, one incapable of ensuring basic security functions, where the police and military constantly do battle for power and where poverty and corruption are endemic, offers ideal conditions for trafficking. South American mafias, at a time when they were increasing the flow of cocaine to Europe to compensate for fewer supply opportunities in the North American market, found Guinea-Bissau to be the perfect distribution platform (...) Deliveries by air or sea of Colombian, Venezuelan and Bolivian cocaine to Western Africa increased significantly from 2004. Seizures, which from the end of the 1990s had never passed an average of 0.6 metric tonnes, rose to register hundreds of tonnes, proof of the existence of two major distribution axis, one in the north of Guinea-Bissau, the other to the south of the Bight

Despite all this, the Armed Forces do, paradoxically, provide Guinea-Bissau with one stable institution. For, despite all their internal fighting and alliances with political factions, the Armed Forces still constitute the only “social force” in Guinea-Bissau of any real legitimacy.

The military is the only institution with a genuine nationwide territorial presence, and this is a matter of particular relevance given the different levels of legitimacy ascribed to different actors involved in Guinean public affairs, and the fact that higher-ranked military figures with a guerrilla background have always been wary of deferring to political power. Furthermore, although Balanta officials undeniably dominate the Armed Forces, and Balanta soldiers vastly outnumber any other group in the rank and file, the military nevertheless remains the country’s most successful example of integrating the country’s patchwork of ethnic components.

As the country’s only genuinely organised and “national” institution, the Armed Forces of Guinea-Bissau have often nullified “party political power” and have thus, to a large degree, “rewritten” the course of the state’s history.

In truth, if one were to add the aforementioned episodes to numerous other incidents of a similar nature that have happened since 1998, and also include those that occurred during the 25 years before that, it would be easy to conclude that Guinea-Bissau has, directly or indirectly, been governed under the “vigilance” of the Armed Forces almost uninterruptedly since independence.

Informally “inaugurated” by Nino Vieira between 1979 and 1980, at the time of the military coup that overthrew the first President of Guinea-Bissau, Luís Cabral, this “vigilance” did not stop when Vieira himself was removed from office in May 1999. Indeed quite the contrary: it carried on and, if anything, appeared to strengthen over the next 15 years¹².

In fact, on-going involvement by the Armed Forces in the country’s political affairs is not so much the result of anomalous circumstances as it is the consequence of the theories the post-colonial state was founded upon, as well as the way the military has successively and tacitly declared a multitude of roles to be the responsibility of the Armed Forces.

This is an important and revealing issue in terms of the architecture of the power structure that makes up the spine of the state. It goes to the heart of the problem of the ambiguity with which Guinea-Bissau - and to a large degree, the

of Benin” (Barradas, 2012). It is also important to note that, since Bamako’s loss of control of the north of Mali in Spring 2012, and subsequent instability in the Sahel strip, Guinea-Bissau’s role as a platform for receiving and redistributing drugs has gained even greater importance: instability in the Sahel strip facilitated the outflow of drugs, until recent military operations in the region by France. For more on drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau and the surrounding region, see, for example, Champin (2010), O’Regan and Thompson (2013) and the last UNODC report (UNODC 2013 [February]).

¹² For a detailed description of the succession of military interventions between 2001 and 2002, see Nóbrega (2003).

same can be said of all Sub-Saharan Africa - was constructed as a post-colonial state.

Armed Forces intervention in the governing of Guinea-Bissau is what we might call, for want of a better term, a “structural detail”. As such, unless it is dealt with by what has become the only possible solution – radical restructuring – it will be here to stay!¹³

The radical restructuring that is required is so broad in scope we might even call it a “reinvention” of the Armed Forces. Everything needs to be reconsidered: the nature of Armed and Security Forces missions, the Armed Forces’ place in the “overall structure” of the state, organisational structures within the Armed Forces, the quantity and quality of its human resources, equipment and training, and, as we’ll come to see later, the logic that determines promotions and recruitment.

That’s to say, a restructuring that goes way beyond the possibilities put forward in the Organic Law for the Basis of Organisation of the Armed Forces, approved by the National Popular Assembly on 7 May 2010¹⁴, and a restructuring that demands the immediate demobilisation of the majority of officers, sergeants and soldiers, a measure that is more than considerably justified by claims the military has made since 12 April 2012.

Whether acting under “authority” or by their own initiative, the Armed Forces do so with almost total impunity, arresting, torturing and assassinating opponents of the coup and mere citizens, while also, in a further display of arrogance, directly “helping themselves” to revenues raised by different public departments, specifically those departments charged with collecting levies and taxes.

Turning an Armed Forces that is comprised, at the intermediary and upper levels, of proven coupists into an Armed Forces that is anti-coup, is a straightforward impossibility.

In fact, the root of the problems Guinea-Bissau now faces at the highest state level (the authority of its governmental and legislative output; the Armed Forces; justice), problems that have repercussions not only on the daily lives of Guineans but also on the country’s image abroad and its relations within the international community, is old and not entirely explained by a “simple” lack of dialogue between the various Guinean actors, much less by a simple reluctance on the part of older military personnel to be discharged from service.

In fact, not only do personal loyalties to military leaders frequently supersede the chain of command, many higher-ranked officials also frequently use the “weight” of their ethnicity (and corresponding network of relations inside different military units) as a bargaining chip, as well as a weapon and a shield.

¹³ A good description of the current situation inside the Guinea-Bissau Armed Forces can be found in O’Regan and Thompson (2013: 6–10).

¹⁴ For a summary of this document see: <http://pt.scribd.com/doc/32455725/Guinea-Bissau-Africa-Military-Legal-Conference-2010> (consulted April 2010).

The situation is all the more intriguing given that the cohesion of Guinea-Bissau's social fabric is generally speaking fairly good, despite its huge ethnic diversity, and has been so even at the "apex" of violent political-military confrontations.

4. "OLD" PROBLEMS AMPLIFIED, NEW PROBLEMS

As regards what might strictly speaking be termed the behaviour of the Armed Forces, the problems began, it is now generally agreed, in 1964, at the PAIGC conference in Cassacá (13–17 February 1964)¹⁵. During the conference, relationships between the movement's different power strands not only prevented effective measures being taken to tackle serious examples of indiscipline within the guerrilla forces, they also resulted in the guerrilla forces being turned into the embryonic National Armed Forces (or People's Revolutionary Armed Forces, *Forças Armadas Revolucionárias do Povo* in Portuguese: FARP). Furthermore, as we've come to certify in recent decades, these decisions established violence as a banal policy for managing disagreements amongst peers.

Problematic relations between different components of the new state gained extra emphasis in the first years of independence and practically became founding/constitutional principles. This is particularly the case regarding the relationship between the Armed Forces and political powers, a relationship that has always been poisonous, even during the twenty year period when Nino Vieira, as Head of State, was also, to all intents and purposes, the "capo-head" of the Armed Forces. A "capo" rather than, as was stipulated – and still is stipulated – in the constitution, a "simple" Commander in Chief.

In a relationship dictated by political interests and, above all, common economic interests, Nino Vieira and the leaders of the Armed Forces mutually supported one another for almost twenty years, with the odd violent confrontation in between.

Vieira only fell, for the first time¹⁶, in 1998 when the alliance broke down and the vast majority of military personnel sided with the then recently-ousted

¹⁵ For more on the Cassacá congress, see, for example, Amado (2012: 209–213) or Sousa (2012: 365–369). These two authors, of Guinean nationality, deal extensively with internal struggles within the PAIGC during the war of independence. See also Gomes (2010) for more specifically Armed Forces issues.

¹⁶ Nino Vieira, though newly elected President of the Republic in 2005, would be assassinated 2 March 2009, a few hours after the assassination of Tagme na Waie, the then CEMGFA. As with countless other assassinations of politicians and military figures, these two killings have never been resolved, very much despite the fact that many observers, with considerable justification, argue that it was a matter of scores being settled between groups linked to the drugs trade. This is the opinion of, for example, J. Carson, American undersecretary for African affairs: "We believe that the President and the head of the army

CEMGFA, Assumane Mané, in a dispute involving various “sordid business dealings”, specifically arms trafficking by guerrillas on behalf of the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (*Movimento das Forças Democráticas de Casamança* in Portuguese: MFDC).

Up until then, Nino Vieira had managed to “control” his alliance with the military by banishing elements of “discontent”, punishing the disobedient, shuffling those in cushier posts and alternating the members of his inner circle. From extreme situations, such as that of Paulo Correia and the events of 17 October 1985, to more straightforward flashpoints concerning business disagreements and fund embezzlement, such as were seen in the 1990s, with the assassination of Major Robalo de Pina¹⁷, Nino Vieira always managed to keep the alliance at “manageable” levels. That’s to say, he managed to keep a significant number of influential military men on his side.

The Guinea-Bissau Armed Forces function today, for the most part, as if they were still the FARP, or, said another way, as if they were still the FARP of the Party State, but with one small-major difference: as there no longer is a Party State, loyalties lie elsewhere, namely with military leaders!

In Guinea-Bissau, the fact that drug trafficking has the active support of the military means that it is not only a factor in almost all business dealings, but also the cause of (almost) all disputes, be they between military factions or between the military and politicians.

Nevertheless, despite all their troubles and misdeeds, the Armed Forces still have considerable legitimacy in the eyes of most of the population. This is due to the Armed Forces being an authority of substance in the face of governmental disorder, and to their being a favoured “gateway” for many political “enterprises”.

There is another factor besides, one which counts for a lot in the context of Guinea-Bissau, especially at times of crisis and the reconciliatory handshake: for what remains a relatively significant number of active military personnel (as well as those in “active-retirement”), many of whom have been active since the war of independence, some even since the first years of guerrilla resistance, the

were killed in the most part due to their relationship with the finance and trade of drugs”: <http://www.inforpress.publ.cv/cooperacao-mlt/16151-eua-elogiam-actuao-de-cabo-verde-no-combate-ao-narcotrfico>(consulted June 2009). The Guinean press and blogosphere have covered the bloody episode with considerable vigour. The causes and circumstances of the two assassinations continue to be at the root of all political disputes, including the dispute between those currently in power and those deposed from power in the 12 April 2012 coup.

¹⁷ As far as many observers are concerned, the assassination of Major Pina Robalo was a matter of scores being settled relating to fund embezzlement within the Armed Forces, but was “transformed”, by Nino Vieira, into a “premeditated assassination” as part of an attempted coup by the opposition to topple him. For more on this case see, for example, the notes at <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/africa/french/fGuinea-Bissauissau.htm> (consulted May 2013). For Paulo Correia and 17 October 1985, see, among others, Nóbrega (2003, 2008).

military is (practically) the only context in which they socialise and provides their only “point of reference”.

To a large degree, the problem with Guinea-Bissau today is the problem of the military: the problem of those who are active and those (the many) who are retired but still consider themselves active. Said another way, reforming the Armed Forces in Guinea-Bissau is not a simple matter of sending the older generation into retirement: it also requires them being definitively disconnected from the Armed Forces, a colossal task in a country with nothing to offer them in return¹⁸.

5. GUINEA-BISSAU: “VICTIM OF ITSELF”, VICTIM OF THE MINIMAL INVOLVEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND (TO A LESSER DEGREE) VICTIM OF REGIONAL RIVALRIES

It’s true that the international community has begun to show greater willing and greater understanding of the need to “impose” reform – radical reform – on the Armed Forces of Guinea-Bissau, especially from 1 March 2009 onwards, following a succession of incidents and the emergence of irrefutable evidence shedding new light on the extent of the involvement of the Armed Forces¹⁹ and the political elite in drug trafficking, and the wider implications of such a state of affairs. However, it is no less true that within Guinea-Bissau itself, power relations are still geared to maintaining the status quo, or better still, to openly saying that reform of the Armed Forces is a necessity while covertly, either out of interest or fear, doing nothing concrete about it.

Incidentally, on the “external front”, there is no consensus of opinion and meaningful achievements are few and far between. This can be seen in the ambiguous position adopted by the international community as a whole, and

¹⁸ Besides numerous reports by international organisations concerning reform of the Armed Forces in Guinea-Bissau, a systemisation of the problem can be seen, for example, in Embaló (2012), Gomes (2012) and in the dossier “Can the Armed Forces be reformed?” (*Podem as Forças Armadas serem reformadas?*) in Portuguese), by Koudawo and Moreira (2010) published in the bulletin *Ecos da Voz di Paz*.

¹⁹ The recent capture (2 April 2013) in international waters of the former Chief of Staff of the Navy, Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto, and his subsequent transfer to a US prison accused of drug trafficking, alongside charges (18 April 2013) of cocaine trafficking brought by an American court against CEMGFA, General António Indjai, are hardly, given the nature of the accusations, especially surprising. In fact, “the head of the air force, Papa Camara, and the head of the navy, Bubo Na Tchuto, were cited as prominent trafficking figures and publically denounced by the United States back in April 2010, [while] others, such as current CEMGFA, António Indjai, were also referenced as being involved in a cocaine trade that has provided an influx of foreign currency into the local economy, money that cannot be justified by the legal activities of the export or service sectors” (Barradas, 2012).

especially in the irresponsible attitude of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as regards the 12 April 2012 coup.

In fact, although the 12 April 2012 coupists have been targeted with UN sanctions, European Union sanctions and African Union sanctions, and the transfer of payments from international institutions to the Guinean state have, for the most part, been suspended, the international community still principally assigned its “local management” detail to the ECOWAS.

This was highlighted in an analysis drafted by Francisco Henriques da Silva, former Portuguese Ambassador to Guinea-Bissau, in June 2012:

“The international community unanimously condemned the coup, with the firm, unequivocal and without reservations position of the CPLP (Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa* in Portuguese) standing out in contrast to the ambiguous stance adopted by the ECOWAS, presumably due to the influence of Nigeria, the Ivory Coast and Senegal.

The coupists have been targeted with UN sanctions, for what they’re worth, sanctions that will potentially assume greater proportions over time. Nevertheless, counter to all reasoning, common sense and constitutionality, the ECOWAS, all ears to the insurgents, has opted to agree to, in weak and unconventional fashion, a transitional period of one year. The ECOWAS has, furthermore, accepted the nomination of Serifo Nhamadjo as interim (“transitional”) President, and Rui Duarte de Barros as (“transitional”) Prime Minister, both of them governors who have been imposed, no matter the claims of “consensus” (which anyway doesn’t exist), on the country for a period that will supposedly culminate in general elections (already deferred several times) and a return to “normality”. Meanwhile, an ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) force of (initially) 600 men is being sent to maintain the status quo. Thus the rebels’ arguments triumph.”²⁰

In fact, not only was the legality of the interim government not questioned by the ECOWAS intervention, it gave explicit support and “ammunition” to a situation of judicial surrealism, brushing aside the coupists’ “childish interpretation” and risible “loose interpretation” of constitutional laws²¹.

Because the ECOWAS “requires the international community, for political and financial reasons, to periodically lessen or raise the state of isolation Guinea-Bissau has been kept in since the 12 April 2012 state coup”, it favours a “loose interpretation of the constitutional rules” and “encourages developments such as the restitution of the [Popular] National Assembly and the linking of the

²⁰ <http://ditaduradoconsenso.blogspot.pt/2012/06/guine-bissau-um-estado-falhado-ou-o-fim.html> (consulted June 2012).

²¹ Although militantly opposed to the architects of the 12 April 2012 coup, as well as its civilian supporters, the blog Pasmalu (<http://pasmalu.wordpress.com/>), as well as several other Guinean blogs, is nevertheless an important source of information about the volatile and often ridiculous political situation in Guinea-Bissau. Pasmalu is typically written with humour, albeit quite often very black humour!

PAIGC to the transition process”²². The result of all this was the establishment of a new government, at the start of June 2013, after several weeks of troubled negotiations, a government which gave active roles to, among others, the ECOWAS, the EU, António Indjai and the current United Nations’ special Representative in Guinea-Bissau, José Ramos Horta (former President of East Timor). This new government – in fact named a “transitional government” – features members of the PAIGC, the PRS and other, smaller parties, is headed by the Prime Minister himself, Rui Barros, and, on the insistence of the international community, promises general elections before the end of 2013²³.

Nevertheless, despite new accusations of drug trafficking, a subsequent loss of influence within the ECOWAS and signs of “unsettlement” within the Armed Forces²⁴, António Indjai continues to act like the true “master of the situation”, removing and replacing the Prime Minister, President and other members of the “transitional” government as he sees fit. He controls the Armed Forces and is feared by all members of the “transitional” government and President of the Republic²⁵.

6. STATE ABSENCE AND DRUG TRAFFICKING: MAJOR FACTORS IN THE CURRENT GUINEAN SITUATION

In my view, Guinea-Bissau’s ongoing problem of political instability and ungovernability due to military interventions is due (primarily) to two main factors, factors that have encouraged and aggravated the problem over a number

²² África Monitor, 2013: 1–2.

²³ At the United Nations, 2013, see a point made on the situation in May 2013, concerning the process of “returning to normality” in Guinea-Bissau.

²⁴ The charges brought against António Indjai by an American court, as well as the lack of credibility of those currently in power in Guinea-Bissau, should not stop questions being raised about how the military might eventually react, as Vincent Foucher points out: “How will António Indjai’s comrades in arms now react? Will they feel inclined to show solidarity to him, or will they, on the contrary, try to throw him overboard? From what can be seen from the declarations of his political and military allies, solidarity has the advantage so far, for countless initial denials were followed by demands that he be judged by the Guinean-Bissau judiciary” <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20130425-vincent-fouchet-guinee-bissau-junte-andjai-colombie-grogue-bubo-na-tchuto-> (consulted May 2013).

²⁵ “A. Indjal has long made known his utter contempt and/or lack of respect for S. Nhamadjo. The ill feeling is said to stem from his lack of erudition, to some fantastical notion he has of himself, as well as an innate need to show his superiority. New episodes: - A.Indjal sent an emissary to summon S. Nhamadjo to an urgent meeting at his house in Jugudul. S. Nhamadjo was away on a trip to Bafatá at the time and refused the summons – to which A. Indjai reacted with public cruelty. – He dealt with S. Nhamadjo in angry fashion the moment S. Nhamadjo set forth on his journey to Abidjan, for the summit of the ECOWAS” (África Monitor, 2013: 3).

of years: firstly, that different actors in Guinean public affairs have different degrees of legitimacy, and secondly, that former guerrillas in positions of authority in the military have (always) acted with acute distrust for political power.

Over the years, and particularly from the mid-1990s onwards, the Armed Forces have become, for a number of reasons, and especially outside Bissau due to the almost total “disappearance” of any other state structures, the only institution that still has (some of) the material and human resources necessary to maintain a nationwide territorial presence. Furthermore, the Armed Forces have occasionally been able to put themselves forward as the only organisation and representative body able to “take over”, in terms of public order and state representation at local level, when necessary, and have thus assumed control of state functions and structures that lie beyond a military remit.

Regressive structural deficiencies, successive economic crises and endemic bad governance have driven Guinea-Bissau to collapse. Nevertheless, although state funds have become increasingly scarce, Armed Forces budgets have been only minimally affected. Military leaders have gained in autonomy and power due to ambiguities in the state’s constitutional texts, drafted with due casuistry, constantly adapting their interpretations of the legislature to suit new circumstances, such as the implementation of multipartyism, to the point of rendering the legislature meaningless.

To all this must be added what has happened to the country in recent years due to drug trafficking. Much as occurred in Sierra Leone and Casamance with arms trafficking, in Guinea-Bissau, drug trafficking takes place with the active participation of members of the military hierarchy and enriches a clique of civilian and military figures, which makes for a major shift in dynamics between military leaders and their subordinates, as well as between military leaders and different sectors of the state.

Drug trafficking on today’s scale has only a relatively recent history in Guinea-Bissau, but in terms of social impact, and especially in terms of incomparable riches²⁶, it makes for a continuation of the influence arms trafficking had on the country for a large part of the 1980s and 1990s, with particular regard to internal relations in the Armed Forces and relations between military leaders and other figures of state.

Contrary to what military leaders and political leaders would have us believe – that Guinea-Bissau serves only as a trampoline for narco-trafficking²⁷ and that

²⁶ “Trafficking networks operating in Guinea-Bissau benefit from privileged geographical positioning, including islands lacking in vigilance and an unprotected coastline, and easily find local partners within the administrative, military and political bodies. The traffickers’ Guinean partners soon have access to income sources that are immeasurably superior to anything they might make dealing in arms contraband, cyphering off international aid money or working in the regular trade and exploration of bauxite or cashew nuts” (Barradas, 2012).

²⁷ “Guinea does not make or deal drugs, but narco-trafficking makes the Bijagós islands a “trampoline” for others”

the “issue” would resolve itself if only there were more boats to patrol the Bijagós, never mind the fact that narco-trafficking was the root cause of every recent political-military crisis – the fact of the matter is that drug trafficking has not only infiltrated the Armed Forces and other structures of state to a dramatic extent, but also clearly started to infiltrate Guinean society. Given the economic, social and moral repercussions, drug trafficking is starting to become a relatively central component of day-to-day Guinean affairs.

Indeed narco-trafficking is not only the “core business” of the Armed Forces in Guinea-Bissau, it is also, due to the financial weight of cocaine trafficking, the reason the military has assumed previously unimagined levels of importance.

Higher-ranked military leaders have ended up with the capacity to not only “buy” and control people and structures, by distributing drug profits and forming related associations, but form “special groups” within the Armed Forces, units that are well-equipped, ready and at their own private orders. Cocaine trafficking carries such weight in Guinea-Bissau that the Armed Forces have become unreformable and some of their leaders have become, in the old sense of the word, potentates²⁸.

Johnnie Carson, as US Undersecretary for African affairs, said in 2012 that “the GDP of Guinea-Bissau (...) is equivalent in value to six tonnes of cocaine being transported every two months (...) there is no doubt that two or three huge shipments of cocaine passing through a country like Guinea-Bissau has a great capacity to corrupt society, the political elite and the customs authorities”²⁹. But while the involvement of the military in drug trafficking seems to have become an unavoidable fact of life, along with the involvement of highly-placed figures in political, judicial and economic circles, it is no less true that drug trafficking has also come to “restructure” the internal relations of the Armed Forces, “altering” the logic that justifies various chains of command and turning certain military leaders into, amongst other things, the leaders of “personal military groups at the service of private individuals”.

In this last respect, the personal escorts that accompany military leaders on their travels, the way the Mansoa barracks “operates” and the new mansion

http://www.portalangop.co.ao/motix/pt_pt/noticias/africa/2010/8/35/Guine-Bissau-nao-fabrica-nem-comercializa-droga-Consul-Geral,822b6fc3-2aff-4711-a4a3-e7aa7a572ad4.html (consulted August 2010).

²⁸ “The moment the majority of military leaders became involved in drug trafficking, all attempts at reforming the Armed Forces and reducing their number – that hover between 5,500 and 8,000 men – were doomed to failure” (Barradas, 2012).

²⁹ As was proven by the recent imprisonment of Bubo Na Tchuto and the quantity of evidence presented in the case against António Indjal by a New York court, the USA has been following drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau for a number of years. It even, according to *África Monitor* (2012), detailed Russel Hanks, a diplomat with a long experience of handling drug trafficking matters, to keep a close eye on the dossier. See the list of charges brought against António Indjal, as prepared by the Southern District Court of New York: <http://www.justice.gov/usao/nys/pressreleases/April13/IndjaiAntoniIndictmentPR/U.S.%20v.%20Antonio%20Indjai%20S6%20Indictment.pdf> (consulted May 2013).

being built by António Indjal, are all revealing examples of the “informal”, but to all intents and purposes, formal “privatisation” of the Armed Forces.

7. THE ARMED FORCES IN GUINEA-BISSAU: A MOSAIC OF GROUPS AT THE SERVICE OF A FEW ‘POTENTATES’

The Armed Forces of Guinea-Bissau have slowly fragmented and become something of a mosaic of different factions that revolve around leaders with whom they are one day aligned, the next day fighting against, and while the esprit de corps of each faction is primarily based on material dependence, it is nevertheless important to note that it is also shaped along ethnic lines. Just as Nino Vieira, during the civil war of 1998–1999, relied on his battalion of “die hards” made up primarily of young Papels (Vieira’s ethnicity), and financed by Lanssana Conte, then President of the Republic of Guinea, so António Indjal has come to form – and lodge at his new Mansoa stronghold – a praetorian guard made up primarily of Balantas³⁰.

This means that reform of the Armed Forces cannot be achieved simply by retiring older military personnel. Reform requires breaking the grip of the two dominating forces that form the basis of the military’s esprit de corps: material dependency and ethnic affinity.

It’s a matter of dealing with a problem that goes to the heart of the Armed Forces, a problem that is “already a problem without yet (really) being one”. In fact, as far as the “management of human resources” is concerned, sending older military personnel into retirement, although unquestionably important and requiring great delicacy in terms of its implementation, is just one of many measures that need to be taken.

Alongside the need to retire older military personnel and, as a logical consequence, the need to redefine the nature of Armed Forces and Security missions, when it comes to the “management of human resources”, priority must be given to measures that are conducive to “constructing” a ceiling for active personnel numbers across the various branches of the Armed Forces, while simultaneously adjusting the criteria for promotion and recruitment. This would represent genuine reform of the Armed Forces of Guinea-Bissau.

In fact, although ethnicity currently plays, and has done since independence, a benign role in social and political conflicts, and has never really been – with

³⁰ “The house that General António Indjal is having built in the district of Jugudul, near Mansoa, (ironically known as Sintchã Indjai – Indjai’s village!) from narco-trafficking profits, now has so many rooms and annexes it resembles a large village, if not a private barracks. Its latest feature is a landing strip, which although rather crude will enable the easy landing and take-off of light aircraft and small planes of the type typically used in the region for drug trafficking. <http://pasmalu.wordpress.com/2012/10/04/tabanca-ou-quartel/> (consulted October 2012).

the possible exception of 14 November 1980 (“against” Cape Verde) and, more particularly, 17 October 1985 (a Balanta “conspiracy” invented by Nino Vieira) – a significant factor whenever the Armed Forces have fought amongst themselves or overthrown the legitimate political power, the importance “attached” to ethnic belonging in terms of promotion, and the absence of quotas in military recruitment, have led, over a number of years, to military institutions becoming particularly vulnerable to various forms of nepotism based on ethnic identity³¹.

The restructuring of the Armed Forces, which by necessity, due to the number of factors that require attention, has to be radical, must also make a priority of establishing mechanisms that avoid the ethnicisation of the military in any circumstances and in any shape or form.

In this regard, as in others, the need to radically alter current practices is so great that, rather than talk about reforming or restructuring the Armed Forces, it makes more sense to say that Guinea-Bissau needs to reinvent its Armed Forces, and do so with some urgency. In terms of “ethnic alignment”, ethnic voting patterns are already evident in certain polling circles in Guinea-Bissau, most notably at presidential elections. This is a situation that, in the case of Kumba Yala’s victory in 2000, came to create, at different levels of the state apparatus, circumstance that could almost be called, for want of a better term, the “Balantisation” of power³².

The Guinean Armed Forces, who by overthrowing Kumba Yala in September 2003 curiously interrupted a slide towards state “ethnicisation” just when it was threatening to pass the point of no return, are today, from a number of standpoints, little more than a “mosaic” of organised groups: groups organised along the logic of ethnic proximity and of clientelism, and at the service of a handful of potentates. “Sintchã Indjai”, António Indjai’s house-village-barracks-runway in Jugudul, built on the proceeds of drug trafficking, offers the best portrait of how the Armed Forces of Guinea-Bissau “function” today.

³¹ “The politicization of ethnicity first emerged in the 1999 postconflict transition in the disputes and posturing between newly elected President Kumba Yala and General Mané. Trying to consolidate his authority, Yala had dismissed dozens of senior officers within the military and advanced the promotion almost exclusively of Balantas, his ethnic kin, which, comprising a quarter of the population, are marginally the largest ethnic group in the country” (O’Regan and Thompson, 2013: 23).

³² “(...) how can an ethnicity that is said to be acephalous, and cannot therefore, according to the vast cannon of anthropological studies, be known to the mechanisms of state, manage to infiltrate and reproduce within the apparatus of state so quickly? The Balantas not only have as “theirs” the positions of President, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, the highest military brevets, the Bishopdom of Bissau and dozens of director generalships, they also managed to appoint, in the first weeks of the life of the present government, 35 Balanta as sector presidents, out of the 37 sectors that make up the main network of Guinea-Bissau. Now as far as anyone knows, the Balantas are no more vocationally suited to serving the state at national or local level than any other segment of the Guinean population!” (Dias, 2000: 23).

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