

**Cocaine trafficking in West Africa: Is Guinea-Bissau a narco-state?**

MA Thesis International Studies

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## **Abstract**

Drug trafficking in West Africa poses a threat to the stability of developing countries. This thesis will answer the question whether Guinea-Bissau is a narco-state. It will show that parts of the highest military and political elites were engaged in and protected the cocaine trade. However, it will argue that drug trafficking did not alter the structure of the Bissau-Guinean state but rather exacerbated pre-existing conditions. An historical examination will show that the overly influential role of the military and the patrimonial system of externally focused economic accumulation inherent to the political system make it more accurate to consider Guinea-Bissau a weak state rather than a narco-state. This is of paramount importance when considering possible measures to combat drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau effectively, as only a truly developmental approach can long lasting change.

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## 1. Introduction

Drug trafficking has been an important topic on the international agenda since the war on drugs was proclaimed by the United States in the 1980's. Extensive research has been made into the political and economic consequences of this illicit trade in the Americas, Europe and Asia. However, the nature and threat posed by drug trafficking has received considerably less attention. When looking at this specific region, the effect organized crime has on the state and the rule of law is especially interesting. West African states are amongst the most underdeveloped in the world, with 8 of the 20 states ranking lowest on the UNDP Human Development index hailing from this region.<sup>1</sup> One of these countries is Guinea Bissau, which ranks 178<sup>th</sup> out of 198 on the index.

Guinea Bissau lies on the coast of West Africa between Senegal and Guinea. The country has an estimated population of 1.874.300 and covers 36.125 square kilometres. The territory includes an extensive coastline and the Bijagos Archipelago, which is comprised of 88 mainly uninhabited islands and islets. This geographical feature seems to have been one of the main drivers behind the encroachment of cocaine traffickers into the country, as the state was not able to police all of its coastline and the surrounding uninhabited islands adequately. First instances of cocaine being trafficked through Guinea-Bissau were reported in the early 2000's. As the pattern of global cocaine consumption was shifting its main focus from the United States to Europe, South American drug cartels were looking for new Transit routes to traffic their product. Guinea-Bissau offered perfect conditions. Situated halfway between the producing countries in the Andes and the consumer market in Europe, its porous borders and the geographical vicinity to historical trade routes through the Sahara provided a perfect setting for the drug traffickers. Additionally, the state in Guinea-Bissau did not present a strong adversary. So much so that Antonio Mazzitelli, Head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Regional Office for West and Central Africa at the time called Guinea-Bissau an emerging narco-state as early as 2007.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP, Human Development Index, p. 325-6 (last accessed Aug. 27 at: <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> 'Guinea-Bissau: Fears of an Emerging Narcostate', *The New Humanitarian*, 2 February 2007, (last accessed Aug. 3 at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2007/02/02/fears-emerging-narcostate>)

This thesis will try to answer the question of whether Guinea-Bissau is in fact a narco-state.

The first chapter of this thesis will examine some of the pre-existing literature on the state in Africa and provide a definition of a narco-state. The second chapter will look at the history of Guinea-Bissau and highlight the characteristics the state developed historically, which made it so attractive to drug trafficking operations. These are the tradition of elite competition and strife, the strong role of the military in politics and a history of public officials intent on furthering their influence by engaging in the tradition of neo-patrimonial dispensation of wealth. Further, it will show that it is exactly these pre-existing conditions, which make the classification of Guinea-Bissau as a narco-state too rigid and unhelpful for a successful resolution of the problem. The last chapter will show the ways the state in Guinea-Bissau was affected by the drug trade. However, it will show that the organized crime networks did not in fact capture the state but rather provided the revenue the military and political elite needed to enhance their grip on power and maintain the already pre-existing systems of patronage. It will argue that it is better to see Guinea-Bissau as a weak state rather than a narco-state. The last chapter will provide an outlook on Guinea-Bissau's future and examine the best possibilities for Guinea-Bissau to combat this threat.

The question of whether Guinea-Bissau is a narco-state is relevant in several aspects. The country represents an interesting case study as it shows the effect the drug trade can have on a transit state. A transit state can be understood as a state, through which considerable amounts of drugs are transported. Furthermore, the examination of a developing nation in Africa offers insights on the relationship between organized crime and developing nations. Additionally, a better understanding of the situation in Guinea-Bissau is important for the stability of the entire subregion, as the instability the drug trade brings with it can spill-over, as shown by the situation in Mali and Burkina Faso. Lastly, an investigation of the effects of drug-trafficking on the nation-state offers a different framework to look at the state fragility inherent to many (formal) African democracies.

## **2. Methodology**

Academic research into drug trafficking always presents a challenge as the illegal nature of this activity complicates the acquisition of reliable data. For the purpose of this thesis qualitative approach will be taken. The history of Guinea-Bissau will be examined to highlight the historical fragilities inherent to the Bissau-Guinean state. The analysis will combine existent academic research with information found in research reports published mainly by think tanks and international organizations. Furthermore, relevant newspaper articles will be used to add to the argument.

## **3. Literature Review**

### **3.1. The State in Africa**

In order to answer the question of whether Guinea-Bissau is a narco-state, it is important to look at the concept of the state in an African context. Since the emergence of independent states in Africa there has been an abundance of research trying to explain the prevalence of weak states on the continent. Due to the large amounts of research available, only a few concepts have been selected in order to give a short understanding of the state in Africa for the purpose of this thesis.

A good starting point is provided by William Reno's book "Corruption and State politics in Sierra Leone"<sup>3</sup>. The aim of this book is to help identify when a state actually fails and what happens when the governmental apparatus collapses.<sup>4</sup> Reno shows how some government leaders operate states, which increasingly look like protection rackets or organized crime networks in order to collect revenue and provide protection to favoured constituents.<sup>5</sup> He calls this a 'shadow state'.

The concept of the shadow state can be understood as a state, that still holds up the façade of a formal state with the corresponding laws and institutional structures but is

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<sup>3</sup> William Reno, *Corruption and State politics in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995)

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Herbst, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 27:3 (1997), 563

<sup>5</sup> Reno, *Corruption*, p. 58

actually run by public officials acting in their self-interest<sup>6</sup>. The governance within a shadow state has been defined as a form of personal rule, where the authority is based more on the decisions of individuals and their interests than any written sets of laws and procedures, even though these formal aspects of government exist on the outside.<sup>7</sup> In many cases this authority is then enforced by organised criminal actors and can therefore constitute the use of illegitimate force.<sup>8</sup> This potential undermining of the government's monopoly on the use of force constitutes one of the main dangers of the shadow state.

Another important aspect of the concept of a shadow state is that in parallel to state affairs public officials run clandestine activities for personal benefits. This creates an informal political economy that can attract external actors interested in the profits generated, such as international drug syndicates. However, these external actors still rely on the political elites on the ground to keep up the appearance of functioning state institutions in order to access these markets.<sup>9</sup> As many of these weakened states have reduced revenue from conventional income flows, such as taxes, the influx of the surplus revenue provided by external actors is often used to run state affairs. This further erodes formal state institutions and hinders countermeasures.<sup>10</sup>

A similar argument regarding informal political economies is brought forward by Nikki Funke and Hussein Solomon. In their seminal paper 'The Shadow State: A Discussion' they argue that shadow state officials manipulate access of external actors to both formal and informal markets by relying on the recognition of their sovereignty over both markets<sup>11</sup>. This sometimes entails further weakening state institutions as these might hinder the functioning of the informal markets or pose a threat to the elite's efforts to stay in power.<sup>12</sup> However, they also argue that by weakening state institutions and structures and paying no heed to the population leaders within a shadow state often endanger themselves.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rosaleen Duffy, 'Global Governance, Shadow States and the Environment', *Development and Change*, 36:5, 831

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 837

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 837-8

<sup>9</sup> Reno, *Corruption*, p. 102

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Nikki Funke, Hussein Solomon, 'The Shadow State: A Discussion', *Development Policy Management Forum* (2002), 4

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 13

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 17

The aforementioned concept of informal political economy is of importance, as it is included in most of the literature dealing with organised crime and fragile states. Reno points out that the tradition of political leaders acting in their own interest was already common practice in the region before independence, partly due to the British concept of indirect rule.<sup>14</sup> During colonial times most of the native population traded within an informal setting all across West Africa, irrespective of the colonizer. Nevertheless, Reno's work provides a good base for the examination of state structures as it paints a clear picture of the informal political economies prevalent in many countries of the region.

Another article written by Reno titled 'illicit markets, violence, warlords and governance: West African cases' gives further insight into the shadow state and informal political economies. In this article Reno analyses the role played by wartime leaders in post-conflict state building. He argues that some wartime leaders use their commercial activities in post-conflict situations to foster political support and launch successful political campaigns.<sup>15</sup> This represents the development of new forms of governance outside the framework of imported notions of reform and state building. He argues that although many armed groups in West African conflicts are capable of creating considerable destruction, they may also play a key role in promoting progressive political and economic change<sup>16</sup>. The role of wartime leaders in post-conflict state building presented in this article further underlines the important role that informal political economies play in West Africa.

Chabal and Daloz's book 'Africa Works'<sup>17</sup> also highlights informality as a defining characteristic of the state in most of Africa. The authors argue that there has been no institutionalisation of the state, which they describe as the emancipation of the state from society, and therefore the patrimonial nature of power is maintained<sup>18</sup>. They develop this argument by examining political elites across the African continent. They

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<sup>14</sup> Reno, *Corruption*, pp. 29-30

<sup>15</sup> William Reno, 'Illicit markets, violence, warlords and governance: West African cases', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 52:3 (2009), 313

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 314

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford, James Currey, 1999)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2, 5



show that although there might be changes in ideology the ascension to and retention of power is still largely dependent on ‘links between the leader, or patron, and his/her constituency’<sup>19</sup>. This means that power is personalised, and legitimacy derived from practices of redistribution<sup>20</sup>. They therefore argue that ‘what all African states share is a generalized system of patrimonialism and an acute degree of apparent disorder’<sup>21</sup>. Building on this, Chabal and Daloz introduce the concept of the ‘instrumentalization of disorder’, which they describe as the efforts of the elite to perpetuate the aforementioned system as it benefits them and their constituency<sup>22</sup>. Although their book can be criticised for making a universal claim to ostensibly be applied to all sub-Saharan African states, it represents a useful resource as it points to the systems of patrimonialism, which are paramount to understand the state in Guinea-Bissau.

### **3.2. Organized Crime and the State**

After having looked at some of the concepts, which are important to understand the state in Africa, it is helpful to look at interrelationship of governments and international organised crime networks. Moises Naim’s essay “Mafia states” examines this interrelationship. As he describes: “In mafia states, government officials enrich themselves and their families and friends while exploiting the money, muscle, political influence and global connections of criminal syndicates to cement and expand their own power.”<sup>23</sup> He argues that, although there has always been some sort of collaboration between organised crime networks and governments, the national interest and the interests of organised crime are now undistinguishable in some countries, such as Guinea-Bissau.<sup>24</sup> The author credits this development to the ability of criminal networks to take advantage of economic, political and technological transformations in the last two decades.<sup>25</sup> In conclusion, Naim argues for the importance of an internationalised response to the problem, as the trust in national law enforcement and institutions cannot be guaranteed when state officials are complicit in criminal activities.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 2

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 3

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. xix

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 1

<sup>23</sup> Moises Naim, ‘Mafia states: Organized Crime takes Office’, *Foreign Affairs*, (2012)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 101

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 102

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 109-10

### 3.3. The Narco-State

In order to answer the question if Guinea-Bissau is a narco-state one first has to define the concept. In general, one can define it as a state which has been influenced by drug trafficking in some way. Although there have been several studies examining the effects drug trafficking can have on specific states, most of these studies have been conducted without a defined theoretical framework. An exception can be found in David Jones' book *Drug Politics: Dirty Money and Democracies*<sup>27</sup>.

Although the book was published in 1999 and therefore is slightly dated it provides a valid theoretical foundation for an examination of the situation in Guinea-Bissau. By looking at examples of the effect drug trafficking organisations in particular, have had on states in Latin America and Russia he defines a narco-state as: "A state where the criminalization of the political system has reached the point that the highest officials of the government protect and depend on narcotics trafficking organizations"<sup>28</sup>. He points out that organised crime, government policy and transnational capitalism form an interdependent relationship for a narco-state to develop<sup>29</sup>.

By looking at the different paths of states towards becoming a narco-state, he develops the framework of narcostatization and points out that democracies and autocracies are equally susceptible to the negative effects of the three aforementioned phenomena. The concept of narcostatization is defined as: "The corruption of the political regime as a result of narcotics trafficking; the criminalization of the state. Narcostatization undermines the democratic check on the abuses of power by insulating elected officials from accountability and transforms the authoritarian state into a criminal one."<sup>30</sup>

In order to further conceptualise the effect of narcostatization, Jordan argues that narco-states become anocracies. Although scholars have used the concept in a variety of different ways to describe political regimes, he describes it as "a system wherein a political or ruling class maintains itself in power despite the apparent existence of

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<sup>27</sup> David Jones, *Drug Politics: Dirty money and Democracies*, (Norman, 1999)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 234

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 9

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 234

contested elections and full public participation.”<sup>31</sup> An anocracy can be described as a regime that lies between a democracy and an autocracy. One of the defining features of an anocracy is that although nominally democratic institutions, such as an independent judiciary or contested elections, exist these are not able to hold the ruling elite accountable and provide the necessary restraints for the proper functioning of a democracy. This enables ruling elites to perpetuate their control over the state. The concept of anocracy is important for the study of a narco-state as according to Jordan narcostatization is the most common course towards anocratization<sup>32</sup>.

What makes Jordan’s book especially interesting is his analysis of how narcostatization undermines the proper functioning of a democracy. His first argument refers to the impact drug trafficking has on civil society. In a quite moralistic argument, where he strongly advocates against the legalization of drugs, Jordan argues that the support for drug consumption and the accompanying deterioration of public participation undermines the ability of the populace to hold its leaders accountable.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, he argues that the influx of drug money to finance political campaigns further decreases the accountability of politicians as their backers’ interests gain higher importance than the public good<sup>34</sup>. Furthermore, once in power the governing party may consider it essential to protect drug trafficking operations for the government’s economic viability, as the revenues gained through them allow for inefficiencies.<sup>35</sup>

Thirdly, Jordan points to the effects of narcostatization on the system of institutional checks and balances. He shows that once one branch of a state’s institutions, such as the judiciary, executive or law enforcement, becomes infiltrated by drug trafficking it automatically decreases the other branches’ willingness to curb or combat such activities.<sup>36</sup> One of his most interesting conclusions is that narcostatization transforms public servants into a new ruling class, which aims to evade accountability and to protect the drug traffickers’, and therefore their own, interests.<sup>37</sup> Jordan has created an Index, which is useful to examine the situation in Guinea-Bissau.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 9, 231

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 10, 120

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 96, 174-5

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 72-7, 142-4

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 140

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 124, 165

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 151-3, 220

| Level          | Characteristics  |
|----------------|--|
| 1 - Incipient  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bribery of low-level officials</li> <li>• Widespread drug consumption and inability either through lack of capability or will to reduce demand</li> <li>• Increasing cultural support for drug consumption</li> </ul>   |
| 2 – Developing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing governmental support for drug consumption</li> <li>• Antidrug activists removed from educational and cultural institutions</li> <li>• Government institutions (e.g. security, judicial, health, education) infiltrated or run by pro-drug officials</li> </ul>   |
| 3 – Serious    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massive bribery and corruption of public officials</li> <li>• Substantial intimidation, including murder, of resisting officials</li> <li>• Corruption of local and regional police and judicial officials</li> </ul>   |
| 4 – Critical   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corruption at highest levels of national police and judicial systems, endemic extortion rather than bribery</li> <li>• Top-level police enter drug trade, protect it, and authorize political assassinations</li> <li>• Financing of journalists and magazines by drug lords; narco-journalists become known and remain in place</li> </ul> |
| 5 – Advanced   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance of ministries, in addition to judiciary and police, with organized crime</li> <li>• A president surrounded by compromised officials</li> <li>• Possible complicity of the presidency itself; e.g., the president may be charged as capo di tutti capi and public not be surprised</li> </ul>                                     |

Source David C. Jordan (1999)

As shown above Jordan focuses on the political characteristics that define a narco-state. For the purpose of this thesis a framework in between Jordan's and the one established by Ashley Neese Bybee in her PhD thesis 'Narco-State or Failed State? Narcotics and Politics in Guinea-Bissau'<sup>38</sup> will be used. Bybee also bases her framework partly on the research done by Jordan but argues that the effect of drug trafficking can also be felt on the economic, societal or security level.<sup>39</sup> She therefore defines a narco-state as "a state whose political, economic, security or social institutions have been impacted to some extent by the drug trade."<sup>40</sup>

This thesis will mainly focus on the political aspect of the question of whether Guinea-Bissau is a narco-state and use Jordan's definition as a parameter. This means that it will examine to what extent the political sphere in Guinea-Bissau has been penetrated by drug trafficking operations. However, it will borrow from Bybee and examine the economic and security characteristics, if to a lesser extent. The societal aspect will not be examined, due to the constraints of this research and the nearly negligible application to the Bissau-Guinean context.

The economic characteristics of a narco-state can be recognized by the existence of a narco-economy. Although there is no official definition of a narco-economy Villar and Cottle argue that it exists when "all goods and services both legal (...) and illegal (...) are dependent on drugs for the economic stability of the nation"<sup>41</sup>. Due to this definition being very rigid, for the purpose of this research a narco-economy will be defined as "an economy which is largely driven by and dependent on drug revenues"<sup>42</sup>. As Bybee rightly points out, to determine whether an economy is dependent on one particular revenue source one has to use subjective judgement as well as acknowledge both the formal and informal economies, with the latter being a crucial tenet of the African state as mentioned above. This research will determine to what extent a narco-economy exists in Guinea-Bissau.

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<sup>38</sup> Ashley Neese Bybee, *Narco State or Failed State? Narcotics and Politics in Guinea-Bissau* (George Mason University, 2011)

<sup>39</sup> Bybee, *Narco State*, p. 109

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 97

<sup>41</sup> Oliver Villar and Drew Cottle, 'A Narco-State and Narco-Economy' in *Cocaine, Death Squads and the War on Terror*, (New York, 2011), p. 62

<sup>42</sup> Bybee, *Narco State*, p. 100

When examining the security characteristics of a narco-state one invariably arrives at drug violence. As the example of Mexico shows, the existence of a narco-state can create great amounts of violence between state and criminal actors, among criminal actors themselves, as well as against the civilian population. Furthermore, drug revenues have also been known to fund bloody insurgencies and terrorism, as shown by the latest seizure of amphetamines in Italy destined to finance the operations of ISIS in Syria.<sup>43</sup> This research will try to show that Guinea-Bissau represents an exceptional case, as only minor instances of violence connected to the drug trade have been reported.

## **4. Historical Context**

### **4.1. Colonial History**

In order to answer the question whether Guinea-Bissau is a narco-state comprehensively an examination of the country's history is paramount. The aim of this chapter will be to show how Guinea-Bissau's colonial and post-colonial history influenced strongly in the creation of a state, which offered fertile ground for the encroachment of drug trafficking operations.

The Portuguese exploration of the Guinea coast started during the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the first colonial outpost in the region was founded on Cape Verde from 1456 onwards<sup>44</sup>. In the Upper Guinea region, where Guinea-Bissau is situated, Portuguese traders penetrated the rivers and creeks and established mixed communities, with a Kriol language based on Portuguese as their lingua franca. The trade in slaves quickly became the main source of revenue for the colonizers. This meant that between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century the Upper Guinea region lost importance for the Portuguese as they acquired most of the slaves on the Gulf of Guinea, where some outposts had also

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<sup>43</sup> Davies, Pascale (2020), 'World's largest seizure of amphetamines': Italy finds haul of ISIS-made drugs near Naples, *Euronews*, 1 July, (last accessed Aug. 26 at: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/01/world-s-largest-seizure-of-amphetamines-italy-finds-haul-of-isis-made-drugs-near-naples>)

<sup>44</sup> Charles R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415-1825*, (London, 1973), pp. 26-7

been established. It can be argued that the Portuguese neglect of the region ended with the founding of Bissau in 1687<sup>45</sup>, after the outposts further south had been lost to the Dutch. This came hand in hand with a stronger reliance on slaves from this region, promoted by the Marquess de Pombal.<sup>46</sup> The Portuguese relied heavily on the cooperation of African elites for the acquisition of slaves.<sup>47</sup> The abolition of the slave trade by Britain in 1807 meant that the slave traders of Guinea found themselves in a position of near monopoly on the trade until the mid 1850's, as the last significant shipment of West African slaves reached Brazil in 1852.<sup>48</sup>

Although the Portuguese position was strengthened after the region lost importance for the British with the abolition of the slave trade, the Portuguese presence was still only limited to the coastal regions and the river-banks. The colonisation of the territories further inland effectively started during the Scramble for Africa. This is the name given to the period leading up to and after the Berlin conference in 1884-5, in which the European powers divided up the African continent between themselves. The conference set down the 'principle of effective occupation', which stated that a European nation could only lay claim to a territory if it was flying its flag there, had treaties with local leaders or had established an administration with its own police force to keep order.<sup>49</sup> This principle paired with other European powers' interest in the region led the Portuguese to try to assert their dominance of the territory. In what was called the 'pacification' of the territory, Portugal led several military campaigns between 1885 and 1913 to secure the mainland but was met with stubborn resistance by local leaders.<sup>50</sup> Although by 1915 the inhabitants of the mainland had been conquered it still took three major Portuguese military campaigns between 1917-36 to gain complete control of the territory.<sup>51</sup> It has been argued that the "'pacification' of Guinea-Bissau in the early twentieth century was achieved with extraordinary violence"<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 192

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 194

<sup>47</sup> Peter Karibe Mendy, 'Portugal's civilizing mission in Guinea-Bissau: Rhetoric and Reality', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 36:1 (2003), 38

<sup>48</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Slave trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870*, (New York, 1997), pp. 945-6

<sup>49</sup> Crawford Young, *The Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*, (New Haven, 1994), p. 53

<sup>50</sup> Mendy, 'Portugal', p. 41

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 41-2

<sup>52</sup> Toby Green, 'Dimension of Historical Ethnicity in the Guinea-Bissau region' in Patrick Chabal and Toby Green (Eds.) *Guinea-Bissau: Micro-state to Narco-State*, (London, 2016), p. 27

After military control over Guinea was established the Portuguese established a colonial administration that was designed to allow the complete exploitation of both the human and material resources of the colony. The Portuguese colonial systems across Africa were built upon the policy of assimilation<sup>53</sup>. This can be seen as fundamentally linked to Portugal's self-proclaimed civilizing mission. This is shown the legislation put into place by the Portuguese administration after Guinea had been conquered, the Organic Charter of Guinea of 1917. The Charter divided the population of the territory into *indigenas* (natives) and *nao-indigenas* (non-natives), which corresponds to uncivilised and civilised respectively<sup>54</sup>. The system was designed to enable the 'uncivilised' natives to be elevated to the status of civilized and acquire the Portuguese citizenship and thereby become an *assimilado*. In order to achieve this the Charter specified several requirements in Article 307. The requirements were literacy and fluency in Portuguese, 'proof and dedication to the interest of the Portuguese nation', a salaried occupation and 'good behaviour as attested by the administrative authority of their area'<sup>55</sup>. One of the purposes of the *assimilados* rule was to legitimise the colonial rule by giving the impression that every inhabitant of Portuguese Guinea could achieve Portuguese citizenship and all the rights and privileges associated with this once the specific requirements were met. The primary purpose seems to have been to create a small colonial elite in the territory, centred around the capital, which would think of themselves as Portuguese and help the efficient functioning of the colonial state. It is important to remember the creation of this indigenous elite when examining whether Guinea-Bissau is a Narco-State as it shows that already the colonial state was dependent on an elite for its proper functioning.

When talking about the colonial administration it is important to note that for all intents and purposes colonial Guinea was 'run as a bureaucratic appendage of Cape Verde'<sup>56</sup>, which meant that the officials were less-well trained than in other lusophone colonies and that administrators in Portuguese Guinea were also Cape Verdean. Furthermore, the administrative resources at the officials' disposal were lacking which led them to turn to more arbitrary and informal arrangements, especially in rural areas<sup>57</sup>. This

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<sup>53</sup> Peter Mendy, Richard Lobban Jr., *The Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau*, p. 38

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38

<sup>56</sup> J. B. Forrest, 'Guinea-Bissau's colonial and post-colonial political institutions' in Patrick Chabal and Toby Green (Eds.) *Guinea-Bissau: Micro-state to Narco-State*, (London, 2016), p. 39

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39



rather informal nature of the colonial administration in rural areas meant that the 'control over the local agronomic production was at best incomplete'<sup>58</sup>. Observers at the time stated that this situation enabled many colonial bureaucrats to prioritize their own personal well-being over the completion of infrastructural projects, bureaucratic work or collection of taxes<sup>59</sup>. Therefore, the colonial state in Portuguese Guinea was lacking in regard to basic administrative capabilities and its capacity to formulate public policy<sup>60</sup>. As a result of the state bureaucracy's weakness most public projects, that were indeed completed, were to be found in and around the capital city of Bissau. Furthermore, this weakness rendered it nearly impossible for the state to provide basic social services, such as healthcare and education, to the majority of the population<sup>61</sup>. There are several important aspects to be highlighted here. Firstly, the informal nature of governance which was created in rural areas prioritised personal gain over the good of the people and therefore normalised this form of administration. As will be shown this continues to be an important aspect of Bissau-Guinean politics to this day. Secondly, the concentration of efforts on Bissau and its surrounding territory started a trend wherein the policies of the state were mostly tailored for the capital and its surrounding areas, neglecting the rural parts of the country. This trend can also be followed into the present of Guinea-Bissau. Lastly the prominence of Cape Verdeans in the colonial administration created resentment among the local population toward them, which proved to be highly problematic in the establishment of a functioning state in the post-independence period.

#### **4.2. War for Independence**

As in most of Africa, the 1950's saw the first stirrings for independence emerge. The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (Partido Africano para a Independencia da Guine e Cabo Verde, PAIGC) was founded in 1956. Although several other smaller parties for independence were founded the liberation struggle will be analysed by looking at the PAIGC as it has been argued that 'by the mid 1960's the PAIGC had succeeded in establishing itself as the only legitimate and effective

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 39

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 39

<sup>60</sup> J. B. Forrest, *Lineages in State Fragility: Rural Civil society in Guinea-Bissau*, (Oxford, 2003), pp. 176-7

<sup>61</sup> P. Chabal, 'The Construction of the Nation state' in P. Chabal (ed.) *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa*, (London, 2002), p. 43

national liberation movement<sup>62</sup>. At first the party tried to achieve their goal by 'semi-legal/constitutional agitation which was proving to successful in British and French colonies'<sup>63</sup>. Although these efforts were largely unsuccessful, they did lead to a number of strikes by Bissau dock workers, including one in August 1959. The Portuguese colonial authorities decided to break this strike by force and as a result at least 50 people were killed and several hundred more were injured<sup>64</sup>. This incident, which is known as the Pidjiguiti massacre led the PAIGC leadership to believe that peaceful agitation was not going to bear fruits and led to a change in the party's strategy.<sup>65</sup>

Following the massacre, the PAIGC leadership installed itself in Conakry, the capital of the newly founded neighbouring Republic of Guinea, and called for a national liberation war. In 1960 Amilcar Cabral, one of the founders of the PAIGC, who was to become the unequivocal leader of the struggle for independence, also left Portugal and joined his comrades in Guinea. The preparations for the war lasted for the next three years and consisted mainly of training cadres in Conakry, who were then sent to the Bissau-Guinean countryside in order to mobilise the rural population and gain their support. This can be seen as a strong accomplishment of the liberation struggle as it managed to counteract the historically pervasive negligence of the rural population the central state. Furthermore, this social mobilisation in the rural areas seemed to lay the groundwork for the creation of an independent state from the ground up as it established strong local government.

The armed conflict began in January 1963 despite the severe lack of proper arms supplies<sup>66</sup>. Guerrilla groups operating out of the regions where local support had been attained paralysed Portuguese troop movements in order to then consolidate their control of the area.<sup>67</sup> As the Portuguese had been expecting incursions from neighbouring countries this tactic caught them unprepared and proved to be highly successful. So much so that by 1966 the Portuguese were on the defensive and by 1969 the PAIGC and its Armed Forces (FARP) was in control of 60 percent of the

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<sup>62</sup> Patrick Chabal, 'National Liberation in Portuguese Guinea, 1956-1974', *African Affairs*, 80:318, 89-90

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 80

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 82

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

colony's territory, where around 50 percent of the population lived.<sup>68</sup> Due to these setbacks the Portuguese realized that the conflict was not going to be won militarily and in 1970 embarked on colonial governor General Spínola's 'Better Guinea' initiative. The initiative consisted of large investments in order to enhance the socio-economic development of the colony with a view to 'winning the hearts and minds of the Bissau-Guinean people'<sup>69</sup>. Although the program did bring improvements in the infrastructure, especially regarding the number of health centres and schools, "it was a case of 'too little, too late', because it failed in its fundamental objective of rolling back the tide of independence"<sup>70</sup>.

In addition to the Portuguese inability to counteract the liberation struggle politically the period between 1969 and 1973 also saw the consolidation of the military successes of the PAIGC, until Portuguese control was confined to the main cities and a few strategic outposts. Although the all-important leader of the struggle, Amílcar Cabral, was assassinated by discontented factions of his party with the help of the Portuguese secret police in 1973. The same year saw further military successes, such as the destruction of the strategically paramount Portuguese Air Force. The position of the PAIGC, both politically and militarily, allowed it to unilaterally proclaim independence on 24 September 1973 and immediately gain recognition by more than 60 countries<sup>71</sup>. Near universal recognition followed after the fascist Estado Novo dictatorship had been toppled in Lisbon in April 1974. Finally, Guinea-Bissau was recognised by its former overlord in September 1974 and was admitted to the United Nations.

Although 'the PAIGC would scarcely have survived, let alone have developed, if it had not been successful militarily'<sup>72</sup> the main reasons for its success were political. Its achievements in socially reconstructing the liberated areas lent it additional legitimacy and thereby strengthened the liberation efforts. The main strongpoint of the PAIGC during the liberation struggle, in my opinion, lay in the emphasis put on military compliance with the political objectives. Decisions taken at the PAIGC's Cassaca Congress in 1964 and after, put in place a system wherein every military unit had a

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 83

<sup>69</sup> Peter Karibe Mendy, Richard Lobban Jr., *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau*, (Plymouth, 2013), p. 358

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 358

<sup>71</sup> Chabal, 'National Liberation', p. 84

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 92

military commander and a political commissar.<sup>73</sup> This system was able to counteract the tendencies of militarism and acquisition of personal power by commanders, which is inherent to a guerrilla struggle. However, it has to be said that the political dominance over military affairs saw a strong setback with the death of Amilcar Cabral. This can be explained by the fact that ‘most original and significant aspects of the PAIGC political strategy were directly the product of Cabral’s views and ideas’<sup>74</sup>.

Additionally, it had always been Cabral, who was intent on instilling ‘political consciousness and discipline to (...) accept the dominance of the political over the military wing of the party’<sup>75</sup>. Although he had always been intent on distributing power evenly, Cabral also left behind a strong-leader legacy, which was used by his successors for their own personal advantage.

### **4.3. Post-independence period**

The next part of this chapter will look at the post-independence period and highlight how a political environment was created which was conducive to the encroachment of drug trafficking operations.

#### **4.3.1. One-party state and patrimonial patterns of power**

The period right after the independence saw the PAIGC’s efforts to create a one-party government. Under the leadership of the first president Luis Cabral, half-brother of Amilcar Cabral and co-founder of the PAIGC, commissioners were appointed to the 16 new ministries and sector committees were put in place to ensure political control over the process. However, the need to create ‘a viable, functioning public sector meant that the PAIGC would have to allow its members a generally free hand to build appropriate bureaucratic structures’<sup>76</sup>. This brought with it the first draw backs, as in order to gain administrative power the ministers focused on gaining resources, for example from international development agencies. This enabled them ‘to dispense

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 93

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 98

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 93

<sup>76</sup> Joshua B. Forrest, ‘Guinea-Bissau since Independence: A Decade of Domestic Power Struggles’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 25:1 (1987), 97

jobs and salaries in a patrimonial way that reinforced intra-department loyalty'<sup>77</sup>. As Forrest further argues, 'an increasing functional and organisational separation ensued, with the Ministers expanding their bureaucratic hegemony and control over the nation's wealth'<sup>78</sup>. Here we can see that already early on in the independence period, government officials were more intent on securing their personal power and wealth than to govern for the people.

In addition to these problems this period also saw the accumulation of power in Bissau and its surrounding area. Although the war for independence had been mainly dependent on the social mobilisation in the rural areas, these nearly immediately lost all importance for the government and its policies. Furthermore, the structures of local government, which had proven so successful, were quickly dismantled<sup>79</sup>. This can partly be explained by the fact, that many who entered the government felt that their sacrifices during the liberation struggle allowed them to now bear the fruits of their labour and those were to be found in the capital<sup>80</sup>. This led to a disenchantment of the peasantry which rightly felt that it had born the main burden during the independence war<sup>81</sup>.

#### 4.3.2. Military influences the political process

This allusion to sacrifices made during the colonial period and the disenchantment of the peasantry can be seen as two of the main factors for another problem the independent state was presented with, namely the growing discontent amongst the military.

Many soldiers originally came from rural areas and opposed the concentration of wealth and power in the Greater Bissau region. Additionally, many felt that after independence the politicians were reaping all the benefits of being in control of the natural resources, for which they had fought so valiantly.<sup>82</sup> Here it is important to note

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 98

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 98

<sup>79</sup> David Fistein, *Guinea-Bissau: How a successful social revolution can become an obstacle to subsequent State-Building*, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 44:3 (2011), 447

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 449

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> Forrest, 'Decade of domestic', 101-2

that there also was an ethnic factor to the growing division between the government and the military<sup>83</sup>. Many who gained positions of power within the government were Cape Verdeans, who had already had disproportionately large representation in the colonial administration. On the other hand, the Balanta, Guinea-Bissau's single biggest ethnic group embodying around one quarter of the population, were strongly represented within the military and disliked the fact that the same people, who had helped the Portuguese, were in their eyes also running the new independent state. These divisions became illustrated in the rivalry between Luis Cabral and the Army Commander, Joao Bernardo "Nino" Vieira. An amalgamation of the abovementioned factors led to a military coup d'état in 1980, which put Nino Vieira in power.

The first consequence of the coup was the expulsion of all Cape Verdeans from the government and a definite split between the two countries. Furthermore, Vieira reformed the government but such as before the new 'parliament was created to rubberstamp the great leader's decisions and policies'<sup>84</sup>. The following years again showed the strong influence of the military in the countries politics as the years 1982, 83 and 84 saw attempted coups, due to the soldiers deteriorating economic situation and the president's refusal to grant privileges to the army<sup>85</sup>. These attempted coups failed and gave Vieira an excuse to purge the military from all forces that threatened his hold on power, which in this case were mainly Balanta officers.<sup>86</sup> By the end of the 1980's Vieira's governing style had increasingly become authoritarian and he was heavily reliant on his secret police to stay in power.<sup>87</sup> It has been argued that Vieira managed to transform 'the office of the presidency from a relatively weak institution to an overly powerful, insular, unpopular and violence-prone leadership structure that appeared to lack political legitimacy in the eyes of most Bissau-Guineans'<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>83</sup> Marina Temudo, 'From the Margins of the State to the Presidential Palace: The Balanta Case in Guinea-Bissau', *African Studies Review*, 52:2 (2009), 53

<sup>84</sup> Finstein, 'successful social revolution', 450

<sup>85</sup> Birgit Embalo, 'Civil-military relations and political order in Guinea-Bissau', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 50:2 (2012), 261

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

<sup>87</sup> Joshua B. Forrest, 'Guinea-Bissau's Colonial and Post-Colonial political institutions' in Patrick Chabal and Toby Green (Eds.) *Guinea-Bissau: Micro-state to Narco-State*, (London, 2016), p. 51

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 49

#### 4.3.3. Economic downturn and move towards democracy

Vieira's rule also had severe negative implications for the economy. Guinea-Bissau accepted the structural adjustment programs mandated by the Breton Woods institutions. The move towards a liberal economy was unsuccessful due to corruption, graft and hesitant privatization.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, these programs pushed Vieira and parts of the politico-military elite further 'towards a reliance on non-domestic resource flows'<sup>90</sup>. It has been argued that arms trafficking became a key source of funding for Vieira in order to supplement official corruption and patronage to maintain his grip on power.<sup>91</sup> As will be shown in the next chapter this was an important factor for the incursion of drug trafficking operations into the country.

Due in part to the weak economic situation the 1990's saw formal democratization as the first multi-party elections were called in 1994. The PAIGC easily won and Vieira continued as president. However, the PAIGC was the only real contender, as it was the only party with an apparatus large enough to campaign. This also had effects on the relationship with the military. By 1998 the military felt that their own institutional interests were at stake and that the political system would benefit from a temporary military intervention.<sup>92</sup> The military intervention materialized in yet another coup d'état when General Ansumane Mané, who had been dismissed by Vieira earlier in the year, announced the removal of Vieira's regime on June 7 1998. The military conflict that ensued saw the involvement of Senegalese and Guinean troops. Most of the population was on Mané's side as they saw the foreign troops as invaders and blamed Vieira for bad governance and corruption.<sup>93</sup> Eleven months of brutal military conflict, interrupted by ceasefires, ensued until peace was officially declared on 11 May 1999.<sup>94</sup> Vieira first sought refuge in the Portuguese embassy and later went into exile in Lisbon.

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<sup>89</sup> Hassoum Ceesay, 'Guinea-Bissau: The Narco-State and the Impact on Institutions in Guinea-Bissau and Countries in the Sub-region' in Patrick Chabal and Toby Green (Eds.) *Guinea-Bissau: Micro-state to Narco-State*, (London, 2016), p. 210

<sup>90</sup> Mark Shaw, 'Drug Trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, 1998-2014', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 53:3 (2015), 344

<sup>91</sup> David O'Reagan, Peter Thompson, 'Advancing Stability and Reconciliation in Guinea-Bissau: Lessons from Africa's first Narco-State', ACSS Special Report, p. 17

<sup>92</sup> Jose Lingna Nafafe, 'The Guinean Diaspora After 1998' in Patrick Chabal and Toby Green (Eds.) *Guinea-Bissau: Micro-state to Narco-State*, (London, 2016), p. 154

<sup>93</sup> Christoph Kohl, 'Ethnicity and the political system post-1998' in Patrick Chabal and Toby Green (Eds.) *Guinea-Bissau: Micro-state to Narco-State*, (London, 2016), p. 168

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p. 168-9

#### 4.3.4. Post Civil-War

The elections that followed in November 1999 and January 2000 saw the PAIGC being ousted from power for the first time since independence. The PRS (Partido da Renovacao Social, Party for Social Renewal) leader Kumba Yalá became president as the leader of coalition government. However, the coalition collapsed in January 2001 due to Kumba Yalá's authoritarian rule and his persistence on eroding the separation of powers.<sup>95</sup> Yalá managed to stay in power, as he had family and friendship connections to part of the military and had bought widespread support by, for example, granting import licences which were freed from customs.<sup>96</sup> Despite this backing, Yalá was ousted in a military coup in November 2003. Following Yalá's dismissal a caretaker government was installed with the task to organize parliamentary and presidential elections. The situation continued to be volatile as shown by the death of General Seabra, who was killed during a mutiny over unpaid salaries.<sup>97</sup>

At this point the situation in the country was one of a lasting political crisis. As Kohl argues 'Systemic failures and symptoms of state collapse were to be found in these repeated coups, (...) lasting problems in the security sector and the judiciary, and the upcoming involvement of army figures in narco-trafficking'<sup>98</sup>. Following the coup Henrique Rosa was sworn in as interim president. In 2005 Nino Vieira returned from exile and was once again elected as president.

It was around this time that the first indications for the encroachment of drug trafficking operations in Guinea-Bissau can be found. It is for that reason that the following time period will be looked at as part of the analysis of whether Guinea-Bissau is a narco-state in the next chapter.

This chapter has shown that the political climate in Guinea-Bissau was always dominated by struggles for power between the government and the military and by struggles within the political elite of the country. Furthermore, it has been shown that the elites in the country were quickly reliant on external sources of revenue for the

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 170

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 170

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 171

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 171



conservation of their power through neo-patrimonial patronage systems. It has been shown that some of these structures can be traced back to the weak colonial administration. Furthermore, the long war for independence left the legacy of an overly powerful military, which saw itself as an integral part of the political process in the country. The next chapter will show how an amalgamation of these factors led Guinea-Bissau to become such a fertile ground for drug trafficking operations.

## **5. Analysis**

This chapter will answer the research question of this thesis: Is Guinea-Bissau a Narco-State? To remind us for the purpose of this thesis, a narco-state is defined as “a state where the criminalization of the political system has reached the point that highest officials of the government protect and depend on narcotics trafficking organizations”<sup>99</sup>. The first part of this chapter will provide evidence supporting the claim that Guinea-Bissau is indeed a narco-state. The second part of the chapter will show that the answer to the research question can only be given when looking at the historical context of the country.

### **5.1. First contacts**

The first concrete evidence that the cocaine trade had entered Guinea-Bissau presented itself in 2005. First several foreigners, including two Latin Americans, were arrested on a small island of the Bijagos archipelago in April 2005, where a small illegal landing strip had been constructed and a small quantity of cocaine seized<sup>100</sup>. In Quinhamel, a small village thirty kilometres from Bissau, a fisherman found a large number of packages filled with white powder floating in the sea, which appeared to have come from a ship that had wrecked in the area in October. This was followed by the arrival of a plane in Bissau wherefrom three individuals, with the help of a military escort, tried to buy the powder back. These individuals were subsequently arrested by

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<sup>99</sup> Jordan, *Drug Politics*, p. 234

<sup>100</sup> Antonio Mazzitelli, 'Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: The Additional Challenge', *International Affairs*, 83:6 (2007), 1087

the Judicial Police. However, they were released only a few days later without any explanation after apparently the presidency had intervened in their favour.<sup>101</sup>

## 5.2. Establishment of an elite protection network

The following year saw further proof that drug trafficking networks had established themselves and were working in conjunction with parts of the government. In September 2006, following a shoot-out on the streets of Bissau the police arrested two Venezuelan men and seized 674 kg of cocaine. These were then placed in the national treasury for safe-keeping but disappeared after 'some soldiers came, demanding that they be able to count the drugs'<sup>102</sup>, as a treasury official described it to the UN news agency. Probably the most important indication for the involvement of the elite in drug trafficking happened in August 2007. During the raid of a warehouse in Bissau the Judicial Police found a white board drawn up by the Latin American traffickers which depicted the key controlling figures of the drug trade in Guinea-Bissau. According to Mark Shaw, these were: 'President Vieira himself, the Minister of Defence, Helder Proenca, the military Chief of Staff, General Tagwe Na Waie, and the Minister of Interior, Baciro Dabo'<sup>103</sup> and Admiral Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchuto.

These men had created a functioning protection system, which dispersed its profits to a select number of military and civilian individuals within the state. The everyday management and protection of drug convoys was provided by the military.<sup>104</sup> The involvement of key political figures in the drug trade seems to have been known widely in Bissau. This shows that at this stage the highest political elites in the country were protecting and profiting from the drug trade.

The protection network's power is illustrated by the incidents following another drug seizure in 2007. The police seized 635 kg of cocaine after stopping a vehicle which had just been loaded at a military airstrip.<sup>105</sup> However, the two Colombian and two Bissau-Guinean suspects who had been arrested were released and the head of the

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<sup>101</sup> Mark Shaw, 'Drug Trafficking', 348-9

<sup>102</sup> 'Guinea-Bissau', *The New Humanitarian*

<sup>103</sup> Shaw, 'Drug Trafficking', 351

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 351

<sup>105</sup> Walter Kemp, *The elephant in the room: how can peace operations deal with organized crime?*, New York: International Peace Institute (IPI), p. 23

Judicial Police was removed from his post after an intervention by the aforementioned Baciro Dabo.<sup>106</sup> By 2009 the state was fully immersed in the drug trade.<sup>107</sup>

### 5.3. Military takes control

In March of that year both Chief of Staff Tagme Na Waie and President Joao Bernardo Vieira were assassinated. Although it is near to impossible to know the real reasons for these assassinations there are several indications that it was connected to their involvement in the drug trade<sup>108</sup>. This theory is reinforced when considering the fact that the remaining two individuals represented on the white board, Helder Proenca and Baciro Dabo, were also killed the same year. In fact, sources within the Judicial Police believe that these assassinations were part of a bid by elements within the military to take control over the protection racket.<sup>109</sup>

The period that followed the assassinations saw growing instability and the military assuming an even more dominant role in the political sphere. Although the new president Malam Bacai Sanha claimed he would actively fight drug trafficking, his presidency was dominated by his bad health and several coup attempts. The attempted coup in April 2010 was not successful due to the public taking to the streets of Bissau to oppose it. It nonetheless did succeed in reinstating Bubo Na Tchuto, who had left the country after trying to oust Vieira in an unsuccessful coup in 2008, as commander of Guinea-Bissau's, ship-less, navy. Furthermore, Major General Antonio Indjai was installed as Chief of Staff. Na Tchuto then allegedly led another unsuccessful coup in December 2011<sup>110</sup>. These coup attempts albeit unsuccessful weakened the civilian control over the drug trade and enabled the military to take full control.

After Sanha died in early 2012 new presidential elections were called and the first round was won by then prime minister Carlos Gomes Junior. However, in April 2012 on the eve of the run-off election the military seized power in a successful coup and

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 23

<sup>107</sup> Stephen Ellis, 'West Africa's International Drug Trade', *African Affairs*, 108:431, (2009), 176

<sup>108</sup> Dirk Kohnert, (2010) Democratisation via elections in an African 'narco-state'? The case of Guinea-Bissau, ZBW, Deutsche Zentralbibliothek für Wirtschaftswissenschaften, Kiel, p. 56

<sup>109</sup> Shaw, 'Drug trafficking', *Modern African Studies*, 353, 361

<sup>110</sup> Kemp, The elephant in the room, IPI, p. 20

installed Serifo Nhamajo, who was seen as close to the military. There are several explanations for this coup. Firstly, Gomes Jr, in his capacity as prime minister had shown a willingness to curb the drug trade by signing a declaration to counter drug trafficking and organized crime in June 2011.<sup>111</sup> Secondly, the government had created a list of 200 military officers to be retired as part of a security sector reform agreed upon with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP). This was perceived as a threat to their power and their ability to control the rents created by the drug trade by the military.

It has been argued that the period after the coup saw a considerable increase in the drug trade.<sup>112</sup> This can be explained by the fact that the coup had further strengthened the military and thereby the network controlling the drug trade. It is also shown by the fact that in the six months following the coup more than twenty transatlantic flights involving small airplanes loaded with drugs landed in Bissau.<sup>113</sup> At this point the two main individuals controlling the network were Rear-Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto and Antonio Indjai. They had succeeded in changing the network from one merely providing protection to one being able to market drugs itself.<sup>114</sup> By 2013 Indjai was the most powerful figure in Guinea-Bissau. At this point it was clear that the drug trade and the vast income it generated for the elites dominated politics in Guinea-Bissau.

#### **5.4. The drug trade, defeated?**

This situation changed in 2013 after a successful operation by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). The aim of the operation was to entrap Na Tchuto and Indjai by making them believe they were going to buy cocaine from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in exchange for the provision of weapons.<sup>115</sup> The operation was only partially successful as when a meeting was set in international waters off the coast of Cape Verde in April 2013, only Na Tchuto was arrested as Indjai

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<sup>111</sup> Republic of Guinea-Bissau, 2011 Political Declaration to Counter Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Guinea-Bissau, Bissau: Government Publishers RGB

<sup>112</sup> Shaw, 'Drug trafficking', *Modern African Studies*, 356

<sup>113</sup> UNODC, *Not just in Transit: Drugs the State and Society in West Africa*, p. 20

<sup>114</sup> Shaw, 'Drug trafficking', *Modern African Studies*, 358

<sup>115</sup> United States District Court (USDC): Southern District of New York, 2012, file S6 12 Cr. 839, *The United States vs. Antonio Indjai*, p. 4-5

was not present. On audio recordings made during the investigation Na Tchuto had suggested that it was the perfect time to make a deal as the civilian government had been weakened due to the 2012 coup.<sup>116</sup> Na Tchuto was subsequently extradited to the United States and sentenced to four years in prison in October 2016<sup>117</sup>. The effect of the DEA operation on the drug protection network was severe. All drug trafficking operations were halted and there appear to have been no movement of drugs for a while.<sup>118</sup>

The indictment of Indjai and Na Tchuto also facilitated the organisation of elections in 2014. Following strong external pressures to reform the security sector, the new government under president Jose Maria Vaz ousted Indjai from his post. Vaz became the first president in the independent history of Guinea-Bissau to complete his full term when it ended in 2019. This would suggest that his tenure was one of political stability but that was not the case. Starting in 2015 political infighting within the elite saw the appointment of 7 different prime ministers during Vaz's tenure. The infighting is also reflected by the fact that in 2018 the Movimento de Alternancia Democratica (MADEM G-15) was formed as a new party by a break-away group of PAIGC politicians.

Vaz's presidency started out with a strong commitment to fight against the drug trade in the country. The period after 2014 saw no major drug seizures not only in Guinea-Bissau but in the whole of West Africa. This gave hope that drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau had been dealt a fatal blow by the DEA's operation in 2013 and was no longer a major issue in the country. However, two major drug seizures in 2019 proved this wrong. In March 2019 789 kg of cocaine were found in a false bottom of a truck. This was followed by the largest drug seizure in the history of Guinea-Bissau, when on 2 September 2019, 1,947 kg of cocaine were seized<sup>119</sup>. The drugs were incinerated under the supervision of the UN and ECOWAS only a few days later. This in conjunction with the conviction of one of the main perpetrators in early November 2019 to 15 years in prison seemed to reflect the stronger stance on drugs the government

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<sup>116</sup> United States District Court (USDC): Southern District of New York, 2012, file S1 12 Cr. 972, *The United States vs. Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchuto, Papis Djeme and Tchamy Yala*, p. 3

<sup>117</sup> Nate Raymond, 'Guinea-Bissau's ex-navy chief sentenced in prison in U.S. Drug Case', *Reuters* (2016), (last accessed Aug. 16 at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-bissau-natchuto/guinea-bissaus-ex-navy-chief-sentenced-in-prison-in-u-s-drug-case-idUSKCN124298>)

<sup>118</sup> Mark Shaw, Tuesday Reitano, 'The end of impunity: After the kingpins, what next for Guinea-Bissau', *Institute for Security Studies* (July 2013), p. 1

<sup>119</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/2019-09-02-seizure-guinea-bissau.html>

had try to show under Vaz. However, the situation once again worsened after presidential elections in November 2019.

### 5.5. Re-emergence of the traffickers

The election pitted the Maidem G-15 candidate Umaro Sissoco Embaló against the PAIGC backed and reformist Domingos Simoes Pereira. The first results showed Embaló as the winner, but Pereira contested the vote and demanded a recount. Although the Supreme Court had ruled in favour of a recount the country's elections body, the CNE, refused the ruling<sup>120</sup>. Despite the ruling Embaló had asserted himself in the presidential palace by February 2020 and proclaimed himself as president. On February 29 he appointed Nuno Gomes Nabiam as prime minister. At the appointment several high-ranking military officials appeared with him on the steps of the presidential offices. These included Chief of Air Force Ibrahima Papiss Camara who had been put on the U.S. DEA's drug kingpin list as early as 2010<sup>121</sup>. This is one of several indicators that the drug trafficking network within the military was still strong and has managed to manoeuvre itself back into a position of political power. Another indicator is given by the fact that the newly appointed prime minister has close connection to Antonio Indjai, who despite the evidence against him remains free.

Another indicator is the apparent return of impunity for drug trafficking offences, as shown by the case of Seidi Bá. Although Mr. Bá was one of the ringleaders behind the biggest drug seizure in 2019, he returned to Bissau after the appointment of Nabiam as prime minister and was not apprehended. Even after he was sentenced to 16 years in prison, he still walked around openly on the streets of Bissau with a small military escort supposedly provided by Indjai.<sup>122</sup> In addition to this former Minister of Justice Ruth Monteiro, who is living in exile in Portugal and during her tenure as minister was known to work against the drug trade, has accused the new government of being

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<sup>120</sup> Mark Shaw, A. Gomes, *Breaking the vicious cycle: Cocaine politics in Guinea-Bissau*, Geneva (2020), Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, p. 7

<sup>121</sup> UNODC, 'Not Just in Transit: Drugs, the State and Society in West Africa', *West Africa Commission on Drugs*, (2014), p. 24

<sup>122</sup> Antonio Rodrigues (2020), 'Guiné-Bissau: os traficantes voltaram, mesmo con mandato internacional' [Guinea-Bissau: the drug traffickers came back, despite an international search warrant], *Publico*, April 9, (last accessed Aug. 24 at: <https://www.publico.pt/2020/04/09/mundo/noticia/guinebissau-trafficantes-voltaram-mandado-internacional-1911778?>)

directly linked to drug trafficking. In an interview with media network Deutsche Welle, she recounts an instance earlier in the year where the Judicial Police was forced to hand over seized drugs and a suspect to forces of the Ministry of Interior at the airport of Bissau.<sup>123</sup>

## 5.6. Narco-State or not?

When looking at recent developments in the first half of 2020 it seems to be clear that the drug trafficking network within the elite of Guinea-Bissau survived the events of 2013 and has managed to regain a position of high political influence. Considering this it is important to note that the two major drug seizures in 2019 were made shortly before the legislative and presidential election, respectively. This can be seen as an indicator that the traffickers were trying to gather funds to influence the election campaigns in their favour.

The evidence presented above suggests that the research question of this thesis has a clear answer. Guinea-Bissau is indeed a narco-state. Since, the advent of the drug trade in the 2000, highest officials of the government have protected the drug trade and have depended on it for their political survival. Although there have been differing degrees of infiltration of the highest echelons of political power by the trafficking networks in Guinea-Bissau, the events since the presidential election in 2019 indicate that Guinea-Bissau can be once again found ranking high Jordan's narcostatization index. This author would argue that Guinea-Bissau classifies as being in the advanced stage of narcostatization. This classification as being at the highest possible level of narcostatization can be explained by the fact that ministries are in compliance with drug trafficking networks and the president himself is surrounded by compromised officials.

However, the premise of this thesis is that the answer is not as straightforward as it might seem. Firstly, Jordan argues that narcostatization is the most common course for a democracy to become an anocracy. One of the defining features of an anocracy

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<sup>123</sup> Antonio Cascais, 'Ruth Monteiro: "Qhem assumio o poder na Guiné-Bissau está estreitamente ligado ao trafico de droga"' [Ruth Monteiro: The ones who have taken power in Guinea-Bissau are directly linked to the drug trade], *Deutsche Welle*, July 21, (last accessed Aug, 26 at: <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/ruth-monteiro-quem-assumiu-o-poder-na-guin%C3%A9-bissau-est%C3%A1-estritamente-ligado-ao-tr%C3%A1fico-de-droga/a-54257840>)

is the nominal existence of democratic institutions, which are unable to hold the ruling elite accountable and provide the necessary restraints for the proper functioning of democracy. This clearly applies to Guinea-Bissau. However, it is important to note that the political system in Guinea-Bissau was already clearly anocratic when the drug trade entered the stage. This leads perfectly to the most important caveat against the argument that Guinea-Bissau is a narco-state. The drug trade did not create the political instabilities, which as it has been shown have plagued Guinea-Bissau for most of its independent history, but rather took advantage of pre-existing conditions. A good example for this can be seen by the fact that Nino Vieira had already been involved in trafficking, albeit with arms in and from the Casamance region of Senegal, in the lead-up to the 1998/9 civil war.<sup>124</sup>

One of the most important pre-existing conditions is the strong role of the military in Guinea-Bissau. As has been shown in the chapter on historical context the war for independence had created a strong military, which saw itself as an integral part of the political process of the country. As Birgit Embaló argues: ‘the military form a principal actor with pronounced self-interests that may either converge or diverge from those of civil power players’<sup>125</sup>. Furthermore, the long history of successful coup d’états showed the military that direct intervention in the political sphere was always an option when their interests seemed to be in danger. Another reason the military was always invested in the political process, is maintain control over the state’s revenue. The drug trade also exacerbated the tradition of political infighting within the elite. This infighting is linked with the strong role of the military in the country’s affairs, as more often than not the elites, if they did not stem from military, used the military to enhance their power and crush their opponents.

The fight for the control over the country’s wealth is the second pre-existing condition the drug traffickers took advantage of. As shown in the chapter on historical context the patrimonial/neo-patrimonial dispensation of wealth for personal gain and the cementation of political power can be traced back to colonial times. This practice was then continued after independence and the structural adjustments programs of the

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<sup>124</sup> Christoph Kohl, ‘National Integration in Guinea-Bissau since independence’, *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, 10 (2010), 101

<sup>125</sup> Embaló, ‘Civil-military’, *Modern African Studies*, 255



1980's pushed the elites in Guinea-Bissau to look for foreign funds in order to maintain their systems of patronage.

It is also in this light that the attractiveness of the drug trade to the political elites must be understood. The aftermath of the 1998/9 civil war saw a decline in foreign investment, which led the elite to look for other sources of funding. They found a most convenient source of wealth in the revenues promised by drug traffickers. The attractiveness of the cocaine trade to the political elites is reflected by the fact that the estimated value of the drugs transiting West Africa in 2019 are nearly equivalent to Guinea-Bissau's entire gross domestic product for the same year.<sup>126</sup> It has been shown that the proceeds from the drug trade are mainly used to maintain and strengthen patronage networks or on personal acquisitions that promote status.<sup>127</sup>

At this point it is helpful to recall the definition of a narco-economy, as provided by Bybee: 'an economy which is largely driven by and dependent on drug revenues'<sup>128</sup>. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, the economy is neither driven nor dependent on drug revenues for its proper functioning. This can be explained by the fact that, most of the funds were used by the elites to stay in power.

Nevertheless, the drug trade has had an impact on the Bissau-Guinean economy. The arrival of large funds in the country led to the construction of large apartment complexes and luxury hotels in the capital, for the purpose of laundering money, which in turn raised the overall cost of living<sup>129</sup>. In this way the drug trade has contributed to a more unequal society in Guinea-Bissau as it enabled the elite and their dependents to live a life of luxury but raised the cost of living for the rest of the population.

Another effect the drug trade has had is the threat it poses to legitimate foreign aid. This shown by the fact that the European Union halted its funding for security sector reform in the wake of the 2012 coup.<sup>130</sup> Although the effects of the drug trade have

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<sup>126</sup> UNODC, *World Drug Report 2020*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Vienna, p. 31-2 (Booklet 3), (last accessed Aug. 14 at: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/guinea-bissau?view=chart>)

<sup>127</sup> Mark Shaw, 'Illicit Financial Flows: Illicit Narcotics transiting West Africa', *OECD Development Cooperation Working Paper 64*, (2019), p. 20

<sup>128</sup> Bybee, *Narco State*, p. 100

<sup>129</sup> Bybee, *Narco State*, p. 211-2

<sup>130</sup> Shaw, 'Drug trafficking', *Moderan African Studies*, 357

been felt in its economy this thesis argues that Guinea-Bissau does not possess a narco-economy.

When looking at the impact the drug trade has had on a security level the exceptionality of the Bissau-Guinean case become apparent. Although several political assassinations have been linked to the drug trade over the years, there have not been instances in which the wider public has experienced drug violence.

Furthermore, political assassinations were already commonplace in Guinea-Bissau long before the advent of the drug trade, as shown by the example of Amilcar Cabral, the celebrated leader of the independence movement. This shows once again how drug trafficking exacerbated pre-existing divisions within the political and military elite of the country, rather than creating them.

This chapter has shown that there is ample evidence to support the claim that Guinea-Bissau is a narco-state. However, it has also been shown that the situation can only be understood in historical context as Guinea-Bissau was already a weak state, if not failed, before drug trafficking arrived on the scene. It can therefore be said that the definition of Guinea Bissau as a narco-state would be inappropriate and unhelpful to combat the problem.

Drug trafficking networks have not captured the state as such a definition would suggest. Rather, the drug trade provided the funds for a political and military elite, which had become accustomed to using the revenue of the state for their own personal gain and to bolster historical patronage networks. This is important to remember when thinking of possibilities to combat the situation as it calls for a more developmental approach. Guinea-Bissau can only truly be rid of the scourge of the drug trade if state capacities are improved and the systems of patronage eradicated by a more inclusive political sphere and diversified economy.

## **6. Outlook**

After having analysed the state in Guinea-Bissau a brief look at the possibilities to improve the situation will be given. As has been shown, the recent developments in the country do not bode well for its immediate future. As the drug trafficking network seems to have manoeuvred itself back into the centre of power it is even more important for the international community to initiate long-lasting changes. There are several obstacles to overcome to achieve this.

In light of the current Covid-19 crisis Guinea-Bissau's importance on the international agenda has dropped further. This development comes at the worst possible time as the mandate of the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB) ran out at the end of March 2019 and the mandate of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau is set to run out at the end of this year. Yet this could represent an opportunity. Most of the initiatives led by the international community to combat trafficking up to this point focused on the security aspect of the problem. Even if the establishment of the West African Coast Initiative (WACI), the Airport Communication Project (AIRCOP) and a Transnational Crime Unit (TCU) in Guinea-Bissau have borne fruits, as an increased number of seizures would indicate, they fail to tackle the problem at its core. The security sector reforms initiated over the years by ECOWAS, CPLP and the EU were more promising, as they tried to address the problem of the military's complicity with drug traffickers and its overgrown size. These initiatives, however, failed to alleviate the problem as they did not diminish the military's influence on the political stage.

In order to successfully tackle the problem, there are several options. In a more immediate future, the international community must hold the Bissau-Guinean government accountable for the fact that a convicted drug dealer, Seidi Ba, is not serving his sentence and running around untouched on the streets of Bissau. The political and military elite of the country must be reminded, by a concerted effort of regional actors and the international community as a whole, that their actions have consequences and will not be met with impunity. While this sentiment has been

expressed by the UN Security Council, but must be followed up with actions to have any real effect on the ground<sup>131</sup>.

In the long-term, the inclusion of civil society in the political process will be of the highest importance. The role an independent media and civil-society organisations play in providing the checks and balances crucial to the proper functioning of democracy, through their monitoring and reporting on political practices, will be paramount if politics in Guinea-Bissau are to see a real change. They have to be protected and their inclusion in the workings of the state should be a top priority of the international community. It can be hoped that the inclusion of civil society would in turn lead to higher participation in politics by the general public and thereby provide an additional check to the power of the elite.

Lastly, there should be an increased focus on a developmental approach. If the traditions of neopatrimonialism and the existence of systems of patronage are to be successfully eliminated the capacities of the country to generate its own wealth have to be improved. One possible step would be to diversify the economy and turn away from an externally focused cash crop economy, which has enabled the systems of patronage. The author is aware that this last claim may sound utopian, but the history of Guinea-Bissau has shown that radical measures are needed for lasting change.

## **7. Conclusion**

The research question of this thesis has been to determine whether Guinea-Bissau is a narco-state. The aim of the research has been to show that the definition of the country as a narco-state is inaccurate and counterproductive as it does not take into account underlying systemic issues, which made the country a target for drug traffickers in the first place.

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<sup>131</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2512 (2020), (last accessed 24 Aug. at: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2512>)

The drug trade has had undeniable effects on Guinea-Bissau. This thesis has shown that it did not create the issues plaguing good governance in the country but rather that drug-trafficking exacerbated pre-existing conditions. This research has specified these conditions. Firstly, the overly strong role of the military in the political sphere has been an integral part of the political system in Guinea-Bissau since independence. The involvement of the military has always been connected to the control over the revenue of the state and the drug trade with its enormous amounts of funds aggravated this situation.

The issue over the control over the country's resources can be seen as the second pre-existing condition. Already in colonial times positions of power were used for personal gain. This practice was continued after independence and a system of externally focused economic accumulation was created. The accumulated funds were used to bolster the elites grasp on political power by dispensing the wealth in a neo-patrimonial manner to their power base. As the revenue to be gained from the state continued to diminish after the adoption of structural adjustment programs in the 1980's, the elites had to look for new sources of income. The appearance of drug traffickers at the beginning of the 2000's provided the elites with a new source of external funding, which they used as they had done throughout the independent history of Guinea Bissau.

The appearance of these enormous funds exacerbated the political divisions 'as the patrimonial state strengthened, the modern state vanished, and authority became the best way for personal enrichment'<sup>132</sup>. It is these neo-patrimonial systems of patronage that have to be the focus of any initiative aimed at combating the problem of drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau. To focus merely on the security aspect of the issue has proven to be ineffective. A more developmental approach, aimed at improving governance capacities, is more suited to address the historical fragilities lying at the core of the Bissau-Guinean state. Only if these fragilities are nullified can Guinea-Bissau leave behind the political instability that has dominated its history since independence.

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<sup>132</sup> J. M. Pureza, M. Roque, M. Rafael & T. Cravo, 'Do States Fail or Are They Pushed? Lessons learned from three former Portuguese colonies', *Oficina do CES No. 273*, p. 17, (last accessed Aug. 25 at: <https://ces.uc.pt/publicacoes/oficina/ficheiros/273.pdf>)

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