

Democracy : Legitimate Warfare in Guinea-Bissau

I am working in Guinea-Bissau at the National Institute of Studies and Research (INEP), and I had the doubtful privilege to witness the outbreak of the war and to be evacuated twice from the country (in June last year and in January this year). Moreover, I followed the news on the basis of communication with colleagues in Bissau, and by reading (between the lines of) various daily and weekly newspapers¹.

From June 7th 1998 to February 5 1999, an armed conflict took place in Guinea-Bissau, a conflict which until now has not yet been definitely solved. Guinea-Bissau is a country which finds itself among the poorest countries of the world, and was therefore vulnerable to the conflict : its fragile economy has been further deteriorating ; its poor public services have been diminished to zero. Moreover, the population has been living in total insecurity and lack of perspectives - apart from the human disasters in terms of casualties, malnutrition, epidemics - of which no official figures exist yet.

In the scarce attention the media in the Netherlands and some other European countries paid to Guinea-Bissau, the conflict has been labelled as a purely internal one, a « civil war », with or without reference to ethnic aspects. *Another civil war in Africa, another ethnic conflict...* say no more, it's as synonymous with « Africa » as starvation and AIDS.

I am going to disappoint you in this respect. There was no civil war, and the major ethnic groups get along pretty well. With the example of Guinea-Bissau, I would like to break down a stereotype image which exists and still is reconfirmed by the Western press, and invite experts of other African war-torn countries to see if they can do a similar thing.

The alternative image I would like to present here today is the image of a population which is more or less « off-side », which does not fundamentally influence national politics, which does not actually participate in « democracy ». The weight of international relations between the national « top » and foreign partners is so heavy in comparison to what the « basis » can offer, that even « democracy » is an international game, hardly touching

1. I would like to express my gratitude for critical remarks on this paper from Mamadú Jao (INEP, Bissau), Jos van der Klei (Free University Amsterdam), Jessie Bokhoven (SNV, Bissau), Ulla Andrén (Swedish Embassy Bissau) and Lars Rudebeck (political scientist, specialized on Guinea-Bissau).

the level where it (in ancient Greek : *the people governing*) originally was all about.

In circles of international diplomacy and development cooperation, the insight in democracy in a country like Guinea-Bissau hardly bypasses the level of procedures, such as elections. This makes democracy a highly manipulative system. For foreign *business*, this is an ideal situation : the top is *a priori* legitimate, the top is therefore powerful enough to do business with (not hindered by parliament, justice, intellectuals or villagers), and the actual deals are profitable to both the national top as well as the foreign companies – obviously, the State Treasury hardly is formally involved.

It was in this context, that the war in Guinea-Bissau started on the basis of a diplomatically legitimate, externally supported mission. Foreign troops were sent to Guinea-Bissau leading the civil population into harsh living conditions ; it has been impressive that during the conflict, the emergency relief of the majority of the 250,000 refugees from Bissau has been performed by the rural population all over the country, who shared their already scarce stocks of food stuffs and seeds.

The Military Uprising

Gunfire broke out, Sunday June 7th 1998, early in the morning. At that moment, I was jogging on the outskirts of Bissau with my friend and colleague of INEP. « What's going on out there ? », I asked somewhat worried. My friend said : « Oh, that can't be nothing. Maybe some criminals are hunted by the police. It can't be anything serious. We're in Bissau you know ».

The uprising of the *Junta Militar*, a group of rebellious soldiers from the National Armed Forces led by their former Superior Chief Ansumane Mané, that Sunday morning came as a big surprise to almost everyone². We hardly could believe the first radio communiqués, especially from President Vieira's side, which indicated a serious conflict which was to be solved through the use of military force.

In January 1998, Ansumane Mané had been suspended, being accused of negligence in regard to controlling the illegal sale of Guinean arms to the Casamance Democratic Movement (MFDC) in neighbouring Senegal – which since 1982 is holding a rebellion against the national government. Mané pointed at involvement of the highest levels of Guinea-Bissau's government in this matter, which was followed by a parliamentary investigation on the arms trade. On June 5th, President Vieira appointed a new Chief of the Armed Forces and it was believed that he was determined to boycott the final report of the parliamentary investigation, which was to be presented on June 8th. Furthermore, Ansumane Mané was home-arrested ; according to his own statements later on, Mané was sure that he had to fear for his life.

2. At this moment, it is difficult to have insight into the way possible events were foreseen in political and military circles in Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. It is, for instance, « surprising » how fast the first Senegalese soldiers were on the spot after the action undertaken by Ansumane Mané and his men. It is therefore very likely, that the dismissal of Ansumane Mané has – at least partly – been a foreign (French, Senegalese) decision.

As a reaction, Mané and a group of allies from the Armed Forces – he was very popular among the soldiers – took over the main military bases and arms depots, as well as a private radio station in the capital on Sunday June 7th. During this quick action, two casualties were reported on the side of the government.

In their first radio communiqués, the *Junta Militar* stated that « *hora tchiga* », the time had come for change :

– on a particular level, the *Junta* demanded an improvement of the living conditions of soldiers and war heroes from the anti-colonial war

– on a more general level, the government and notably the president of the Republic were criticised on their malfunctioning, and extreme corruption.

Although very soon a dominant military force was obtained, Ansumane Mané and his men did not – and would never try to – take over power³, in other words commit a coup d'État. Although criticising his corrupt regime, they initially referred to « Camarada Presidente Vieira » with whom they had struggled for Independence, and called for a dialogue in order to look for ways of improvement.

Already during the first week of the conflict it became clear that the *Junta Militar* could count on a rapidly increasing support from civil society and opposition parties. Moreover, the *Junta's* appeal for justice was shared by the majority of the population, which already became manifest some weeks after « June 7th ».

Nevertheless, President Vieira refused to talk – « how can the democratically elected president share the same table with criminals ? », he stated on the radio. During the first week of the conflict, he refused to listen to repeated requests for negotiations – among whom from the Bishop of Bissau and a delegation of Parliament. Meanwhile, troupes from Senegal and Guinea-Conakry entered the country to support President Vieira and defeat the « rebels ». On Saturday June 13th it became clear for everyone in town that the war was about to begin.

Like many inhabitants of Bissau, our front neighbours had fled out of town, leaving a young man behind to look after the house. He borrowed my bicycle to bring water and food to his relatives outside town. On the way back, he used to buy some beer for me on the street. Saturday June 13th, president Jammeh of the Gambia had launched an appeal for negotiations – which made us very hopeful. That evening, our front neighbour came to our house and said : « I just heard that Nino (Vieira's nickname in Guinea-Bissau) doesn't want to talk ; everyone says it's going to be war tomorrow, guerra di bardadi (real war). So I think its good for you to economise on your beer, because I don't think I will be able to buy new beer tomorrow ». The next morning, a bomb fell just ten metres in front of our house, entirely destroying our neighbours » place. When I looked outside the window, I saw that our neighbour would never be able to buy beer for us again.

The sad thing is, that the war in Guinea-Bissau has been a war of a President and his foreign allies against the majority of the political parties, against parliament, against the Bishop and all prominent actors of civil society, as a matter of fact against the people of Guinea-Bissau. In this

3. During an early broadcast of Rádio Renascença (Portuguese private radio station), a telephone interview was heard with one of Mané's men. The Portuguese journalist repeatedly asked this man, whether this action could be considered as a coup d'État ; in the end, the answer was a hesitating « yes », but everyone I talked to agreed that this « statement » was not to be taken seriously.

struggle, the Vieira coalition did not even hesitate to close the Senegalese border for commercial and humanitarian transports, using hunger and disease as its arms. Even sadder is the fact, that this war – including the strategies used – has been internationally, diplomatically *approved* and therefore could continue for more than nine months.

Democratisation in Guinea-Bissau

As I already mentioned, the military action of Ansumane Mané *became* a vehicle for popular protest. This can be explained by the fact that there already existed a general, increasing « climate » for expressions of frustration and protest against the Vieira administration.

Guinea-Bissau finally adopted western-style democracy in 1994, when for the first time multiparty elections were held for parliament and presidency. Since then, on a formal, institutional level, Guinea-Bissau indeed went through a remarkable democratic development, for instance looking at constitutional separation of powers, Parliament, free press, a legitimate, and a reasonably well organised civil society.

At the same time, discontent about the (mal-)functioning of the government and especially the President of the Republic gradually started to increase. In a few words, João Bernardo « Nino » Vieira did everything but respect the law, in particular the Constitution. At the same time, he increased his power and wealth on the basis of personal external allies and deals, and internal clientelist networks (subsidised with foreign funds). Apparently, this intensifying and very visible abuse of power by the President and his close circle caused a slowly increasing critical popular conscience. As a result, strikes became more and more common, frequent and longer lasting.

A manifestation of students end-1997 even led to acts of violence, when government properties, notably buildings and cars were damaged ; this violence was kind of « shocking » for Guinea-Bissau standards, but nevertheless there seemed to exist a (silent) general approval for what the school kids had been doing.

The government however, reacted in the same oppressive manner. No measures were taken to improve the conditions of protesting categories of society, things just went on as usual. Why bother, when you're democratically elected ?

It is therefore understandable that the *Junta Militar* rapidly developed a widespread support in the country, especially in Bissau. Their radio station, « Voice of the *Junta Militar* », became the voice of the people – which in the history of Guinea-Bissau never had been particularly loud.

« Apathy » As An Expression of Realism

Guinea-Bissau has a long-standing reputation when it comes to its friendly, flexible, almost fatalist minded population. *Djitu ka tem*, is the national proverb (saying) in Crioulo : « bad luck, nothing you can do about it, maybe we'll be luckier tomorrow, don't worry, *carpe diem* ».

The same expression reflects a certain degree of disinterest of people with certain matters which do not clearly affect them. In this sense, the population of Guinea-Bissau – including the animist groups, who are regarded upon as more or less savages – is seen as « easy to govern »⁴.

This does not mean, that we are dealing here with an ignorant population, which – as development organisations generally state – need to be sensibilised.

Moreover, I would like to argue that a certain degree of disinterest in the State stems from a realistic, pragmatic attitude : why should people bother about their government when they are more or less able to provide in your own basic needs ; why bother about the government when they know that it is fundamentally *not* interested in their situation, even though it is constantly and explicitly pretending to represent the people of Guinea-Bissau.

State Ideology : The Party of Amílcar Cabral

Two important elements of State ideology in Guinea-Bissau are :

- the PAIGC 's ideology is based on a mystification of the past, notably the Liberation War ; with this ideology, it tries to legitimise its own position and to justify the government 's actions ;

- ever since the Liberation War, the PAIGC has been very keen on using populist ideologies, to please foreign partners (donors).

According to the legacy of the Liberation Struggle, which came to an end in 1974, it was a struggle of the people. The charismatic leader of the PAIGC⁵, Amílcar Cabral, who did not live to witness Independence⁶, has been – and still is – worshipped like a popular hero, comparable to a personality-symbol like Che Guevara. Until now, and even explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, the PAIGC claims to be « the Party of Amílcar Cabral », hereby using the Pop Star as a manipulative instrument to remain in power and legitimise its actions.

In recent years, the effectiveness of this ideology has diminished considerably. The Party has to deal with a loss of respect in the eyes of the majority of the population, which is confronted with a retreating State – due to the Structural Adjustment Programme – and exorbitant corruption – partly due to economic liberalisation and privatisation of the State.

During the Liberation War, Amílcar Cabral himself realised that he could never win the war without foreign support. In this sense, the PAIGC during the Liberation War was the first national NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) *avant la lettre* looking for ways to please foreign donors, in order to attract their funds.

Ever since, democracy and participation have been the two magic words in PAIGC ideology which have served as conditions for foreign diplomacy, donor support and business. At the same time, in practice, democracy and participation were reduced to procedures, which hardly made sense to the people.

4. Even the glorious popular rebellion against the Portuguese colonial power was not a particularly *spontaneous* « happening » (in spite of what many observers in Western Europe thought).

5. African party for Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde.

6. Mutually recognised by Portugal and the PAIGC in 1975.

Consequently, the accent of democracy – democratic legitimacy – lies in the relationship between the country's rulers and their foreign partners, in many cases resulting in personal deals, including economic profit and diplomatic legitimisation. The relationship between rulers and ruled is fundamentally *not* involved in this game. This notion has gradually entered the consciousness of the people in Guinea-Bissau⁷.

Recent foreign partnership : Guinea-Bissau goes « francophone »

Since the determination of the frontiers between the colonies, Guinea-Bissau has been a Portuguese island within the great French West-African Empire. In recent years, French influence in Guinea-Bissau started to increase remarkably. In May 1997, the country entered the West-African Monetary Union, in other words the Franc CFA-Zone. French and francophone entrepreneurs and companies started to invade the country. Although Guinea-Bissau is one of the poorest countries in the world, and its natural resources are limited, there is an interesting potential for foreign investors, notably tourism and... oil. It is no secret in Guinea-Bissau, that Vieira and Elf Aquitaine have entered into a profitable marriage of understanding.

Significant off-shore oil reserves have been an important source of conflict between Senegal and Guinea-Conakry over the years. Several disputes rose about the borders of territorial waters, which even reached the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The bad relation with Senegal was furthermore reflected in the passive and sometimes even active Guinean support for the MFDC, the Independence Movement of Senegal's southern region Casamance, which had started to manifest itself in 1982.

With the newly established membership of the Francophone Family, President Vieira was particularly keen on improving the relation with Senegal. In November 1997, during a TV speech, Vieira made it clear that President Abdou Diouf was his « brother », and that measures had to be taken to close the borders for any positive contribution to the MFDC. In January 1998, Ansumane Mané, probably also for certain personal reasons (Vieira and Mané are very close friends since the early Liberation War), appeared to be the scapegoat with regard to the Guinean arms trade to the MFDC.

After the outbreak of the conflict, Vieira repeatedly accused the *Junta Militar* of being related to the « Casamance rebels », thereby legitimising the presence of foreign troops in Guinea-Bissau in terms of « regional stability ». Obviously, the alleged coalition between the *Junta Militar* and the MFDC has also been used as an argument to justify the Senegalese military intervention to the Senegalese public⁸.

In fact, there has never been a formal coalition between the both of them.

7. One of the most interesting definitions of « democracy » I recorded on a village level is : democracy = confusion (*confusão*).

8. It is very likely, that at a high military level in Senegal, measures had already been taken before the weekend of June 6-7th, anticipating on a possible reaction from Ansumane Mané ; how else can it be explained that – according to what Senegalese newspapers (*Sudonline*, 15th of March, 1999 ; *Le Soleil*, 16th of March, 1999) confirm – the first Senegalese militaries were already on their way to Bissau on Sunday June 7th ?

The « Rebels » Versus the « Democratic President » : Democratic International Allies Against the Population

President Vieira, from his first radio communiqués onwards, very consciously chose – and manipulated – his words : he, the « democratically elected » president, found himself opposed by « rebels », « criminals » and « arms traders ». Within a few days it became clear what he was referring to : *not* to internal support from his voters, but to external military support and diplomatic recognition. During the first week of the conflict, numerous initiatives from civil society and parliament to open negotiations were categorically refused by Vieira. At the same time, troupes from Guinea-Conakry and Senegal entered the country to fight the *Junta Militar*. It would be only a matter of days, the President stated on the radio, before the problem would be settled. The same opinion was shared in influential military circles in Dakar, who got a remarkably fast permission from president Diouf to start « Opération Gabou », i.e. the Senegalese military intervention in Guinea-Bissau.

Both in a military as well as a political sense, this appeared to be a severe underestimation. The *Junta* could count on a wide popular support and on a military level appeared to be more intelligent and powerful than the so-called government forces.

In the first phase of this War, Vieira could count on international diplomatic and francophone military support, whereas the *Junta* was isolated, but nevertheless dominant in the battles. In this situation, there were no perspectives for a solution. Apart from serious consequences of the fighting itself, the situation of the population worsened because of a logistical and economic isolation : the Senegalese borders – vital to Guinea-Bissau's trade and humanitarian aid – were closed, starvation was used as an additional weapon to fight the *Junta*.

This has never been questioned by the international community. According to international diplomatic rules, a democratically elected president has the right to do whatever he needs to do to defend his position. This attitude is related to the rather instrumentalistic manner in which the outside world is approaching democracy in Guinea-Bissau, merely looking at procedures (elections) instead of content and functioning.

In this sense, Vieira found himself in an extremely comfortable position. Unfortunately for Vieira, the *Junta Militar* appeared to be much stronger than the « loyal » troupes supporting the government, but at the same time did not aim at a *coup d'État*. Instead, they repeatedly called for foreign attention for this stagnating situation. It was Portugal, that finally provoked a solution through quite an unorthodox and symbolic gesture : it supplied Ansumane Mané with a satellite telephone. Soon, Portugal, accompanied by lusophone allies, succeeded in opening up the *Junta's* isolation and establishing (critical) contact with Vieira on the level of the CPLP, the Community of Portuguese speaking Countries : this became the basis for the first cease-fire in the conflict on July 26th. From that moment on, a diplomatic tug-of-war started between the CPLP and ECOWAS, which has been the main cause of the continuation of the War until recent date.

The role of ECOWAS regarding Guinea-Bissau has been determined for a long time by France and its partners. When ECOWAS entered the scene, it was clear that it was choosing sides for Vieira, opting for a large military

force – a so-called peace-force – in the country, which in practice would occupy the country and defend the interests of Vieira and his partners.

Even the peace-treaty, signed on November 1st in Abuja during the annual meeting of ECOWAS, did not immediately solve the problem, although the provisions made on paper seemed to be water-proof⁹ :

A number of detailed treaties following « Abuja » were formulated, violated and reformulated. Military force, notably on the side of President Vieira, was reinforced, and the main provocations were started by his troupes, which lead to several new outbursts of the war. During the first days of February 1999, the heaviest outburst of violence occurred – partly due to new French 155 mm artillery used by the « government troupes » of Vieira. Not surprisingly, Vieira repeated his slogans of being « democratically elected », and accusing the « rebels » of each and every violent incident. Since « *Abuja* » – meanwhile nicknamed « Abusa » – the population has dealt with four more months of insecurity and human suffering¹⁰ : the transition government the Abuja treaty had provided in, was not installed before February 20th.

Democracy and Good Governance : Shared Responsibility

Arriving in Bissau on January 18th, I was not so much struck by the material damage done by the war. The most important impressions were the military occupation of the town by soldiers on the one hand, and the general desire to return to normal life among the population, which found itself in a situation of total stagnation for a long period of time.

Although everybody was glued to transistor radios following the daily news with great interest, people were wondering themselves all the time : « what are *they* doing to us ? », « why don't they let us deal with our own life, with our own country ? ». Even the presence and the diplomatically desired expansion of the Ecomog-peace force was questioned : « we really don't know why we should need them here ».

On the countryside, where I interviewed people in three different regions, places where the local population had voluntarily taken care of tens of thousands of refugees from the capital. The general attitude vis-à-vis the conflict was even more distant, reflected in the following quote. « We have already given up our expectations vis-à-vis Bissau, our greatest wish is that *they* do not further complicate our lives ».

This attitude was recognised by the Prime Minister of the transition government, Mr. Francisco Fadul, when I discussed this matter with him in January. He was pleading for an « irreversible political reform » in which « true democracy » needs to be respected. Apart from expressing the need

9. Installation of a transition government : the Prime Minister was to be chosen by the *Junta*, the (ten) ministers were to be appointed by Vieira and *Junta* on a 50-50 basis ; preparation of democratic elections for parliament and presidency ; removal of foreign troupes ; installation of an Ecomog-force in order to supervise the execution of the peace-treaty.

10. A sad detail of this period was the (natural) death of Bishop Settissimo Ferrazetta of Bissau on January 27. In spite of his high age and weak physical condition, he had made impressive efforts to promote the peace process. Both parties called him a « martyr of peace » and called for national mourn (the *Junta* : 3 days, Vieira : 5 days). At that moment, a new treaty was about to be signed. However, while the deceased bishop was disposed in the Cathedral – his funeral was planned for February 2nd – and mourning crowds daily begged for peace, the war restarted on Sunday January 31st.

for internal reform, he clearly included the international responsibility in this matter : he called for coordination and transparency of the input of all foreign partners of the country. « How can a government care for its population, as long as it is diverted by different donors and business partners ? ».

At that time however, the international community was not capable for a transparent and coordinated performance in Guinea-Bissau. The role of France, clear to everyone in Bissau¹¹, could not be officially tackled, nor by the UN, neither by the EU. Ecomog-GB at that moment, was monopolised by France.

At a EU level, France has been playing a particular role. During the first six months of the conflict, France succeeded in keeping Guinea-Bissau away from the agenda. Later on, when the EU first made mention of the « importance of the withdrawal of foreign troops » from Guinea-Bissau, the French text talked about « the importance to assure a *progressive* withdrawal »¹². Mrs Ulla Andrén recently told me through e-mail, « that some few weeks ago the Africa Working Group within EU was meeting in Brussels. Sweden tried to put forward a proposal that there should be made what in diplomatic language is called a "démarche" by the member states to Guinea-Conakry and Senegal, to request the withdrawal of their foreign troops from Guinea-Bissau, in compliance with the Abuja agreement. This proposal was vividly supported by Portugal, whereas vehemently opposed by France. Consequently, there was no "démarche" made ».

Recent Diplomatic Peace Strategies

Mrs Ulla Andrén, the Swedish *chargée d'affaires* in Bissau, has been the sole actively operating neutral foreign diplomat in the peace process – a neutral position which eventually and to her own great surprise made her « Mr. Mané's bodyguard ». She mentioned to me the complete lack of transparency of the « Vieira camp » during the entire conflict. « Nobody knows what is going on behind the wall of the presidential palace, except for the fact that they have constantly been hindering the peace process ». Mrs Andrén pointed at the involvement of France, both in the presidential palace as well as in Ecomog, which at that time had become one of the negotiating actors. She had therefore decided to involve Sweden in co-financing Ecomog in order to « neutralize » and rationalize its input and mandate.

After the last outbreak of violence, the European Parliament came with a resolution, which was followed by a diplomatic visit to Bissau of Mrs Bonino of the European Commission. The strategy which was followed by the EU was to approach the conflict in Guinea-Bissau strictly as an internal one. The European Parliament had the courage (this is ironical) to condemn the

11. Eye-witnesses told me that French military advisors were visiting the presidential palace daily, a French-Senegalese military base had been opened on the island of Bubaque, and at least one French military vessel was operational inside the territorial waters. Recently imported French 155 mm artillery caused many casualties during the short but extremely violent « February War ». An old Italian priest had the courage to mention the immediate involvement of at least one hundred French (white) soldiers during this last outburst of violence ; consequently Vieira threatened to expell him. The French Ambassador denied that France had any possible kind of involvement in the conflict when I talked with him, even though I hadn't mentioned the subject.

12. *Diário de Notícias*, 27th of February, 1999.

political and military leaders of the country, because of their [quote] « political irresponsibility, historical ignorance and total human insensibility »¹³.

Mrs Emma Bonino, European Commissioner for humanitarian aid had comparable remarks : « the situation is a typical example of human madness (...) thousands of people are suffering from a crisis which can be solved within a couple of hours (...) it is now time to tell the two contentors (...) that this is their exclusive responsibility »¹⁴.

Mrs Bonino made it perfectly clear, that future EU-funding would depend on the immediate willingness of both parties to restore peace. After having expressed this condition, she invited the international press to make pictures of herself, standing between Vieira and Ansumane Mané who embraced each other. Recently, I heard Mrs Bonino will run for the Italian presidency in the near future (but that was before the European Commission resigned).

The involvement of Sweden and other countries in Ecomog has had a positive impact on the Ecomog mandate. There are no more than 600 soldiers, which act more or less as policemen. ECOWAS and Senegal have recently refused Vieira's request for maintaining armed forces for his personal protection : it seems that - after being internally isolated - he is now losing his foreign allies who apparently no longer see him as a useful partner.

Perspectives

At this moment, the major part of the population in Guinea-Bissau feels relieved, and is even optimistic - without having high expectations - for the near future. As I mentioned before, Prime Minister Francisco Fadul told me in January, that the same population should become the base of coordinated policy on a national and international level. But at the same time, Mr. Fadul is confronted with a dramatic lack of means to restore the country and revitalize public service.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that the Portuguese chairmanship of the European Union has recently started to be prepared in Guinea-Bissau and Togo. On March 9th, a heavy Portuguese delegation led by the Portuguese Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs Mr. Luís Amado, paid a visit to Bissau¹⁵, and Togo with the goal « to stress the new african policy of Portugal which is no longer based on a dialogue with former colonies, but also with other countries, such as Mali and Benin »¹⁶. The Portuguese

13. *Ibid.*, 12nd of February, 1999.

14. *Ibid.*, 15th of February, 1999.

15. It is interesting to pay attention to certain descriptions of this visit in the Portuguese press ; « at the end of this visit, Mr. Amado was thanked by President Vieira, Mr. Malan Bacai Sanha (chairman of Parliament and key person in the PAIGC) and Prime Minister Fadul for the efforts that Lisbon had made in minimising the suffering of the guinean people ». The visitor answered them that Portugal is going to the European Union and the United Nations to look for help for this country that is just leaving a war of nine months which killed about two thousand persons and destroyed numerous infrastructures. All the Guinean authorities proved to be sensibilised by [this] member of the Portuguese government ». (*Público*, 10th of March, 1999).

16. In Easter 1999, the Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs Jaime Gama will visit West-Africa, « in order to underline that that zone has space for initiatives from Paris, Lisbon, London, Washington or Berlin » (*Público*, 11th of March, 1999). In the near future, the well-

government has also expressed its desire to have closer ties with ECOWAS. In Togo, the first reactions were most generous, and reference was made to the good old days, when Portugal was the Great Discoverer of West-Africa¹⁷.

It will be an important question for the future, whether Portugal is aiming at – and being able to succeed in – co-ordinating the European partners of Guinea-Bissau and contributing to good governance in Guinea-Bissau, which is – should be – based on the population's needs and priorities.

But looking at the attitude and functioning of the EU with regard to the role of France in Guinea-Bissau, this might be rather utopic, and Portugal could be able to « use » the EU to restore its prestige as the Late Great Discoverer of West-Africa. As far as the rural population of Guinea-Bissau is concerned ; probably they won't bother and it will certainly not fulfill them with great expectations... as long as it doesn't disturb them too much.

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Roy Van der DRIFT

Leiden, Africa Studies Center

Bissau, National Institute for Studies and Research (INEP)

Addendum, 2nd of June, 1999

The final¹⁸

On May 6-7, the *Junta Militar* undertook a final military action against President Vieira, which resulted in his resignation. Once again, on an international level, a game of words started, regardless and even contrary to the actual state of affairs. The final war was a – regrettable – necessity, with regard to the implementation of the Abuja peace accord. For (geo)political reasons, France did its ultimate best to label this action as a coup d'État, which implied an international diplomatic condemnation. Moreover, the destiny of ex-president Vieira, who was remarkably well treated by the *Junta*, became a disproportionate international issue, which put at risk the already promised and urgent funding of the rehabilitation of the country.

reputed Portuguese Ambassador in Bissau, Mr. Henriques da Silva, will be transferred to Ivory Coast.

17. « Who heard the words of certain Togolese officials would say that they are « saudosos » (untranslatable : « nostalgic ») about the time when Portugal was a Great Power, which descended with its ships into the Casamance, at São Jorge da Mina, at São João Baptista de Ajudá, in Cameroon and Gabon, without forgetting the Island of Fernando Pó, in present-day Equatorial Guinea » (*Público*, 12th of March, 1999). « We do not understand how Portugal has let itself bypass in Africa », stated the geologist Moukaila Issifou of the Togolese phosphate enterprise. This company has been doing business with Quimigal and Sapec (Portuguese companies, RvdD), but at present is selling to Canada, Brasil and the Philippines » (*Público*, 11th of March, 1999).

18. I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues Mamadú Jao and Fafali Koudawo for their comments on this section of the article.

Bissau, 5.30 p.m., Brisa do Mar (a pub near the harbour) : I was having a « bazooka », a pint of Pampa, with Lars Rudebeck, a Swedish political scientist and expert on Guinea-Bissau. We were discussing the actual situation and the unpredictable role which president Vieira was playing. At that moment, there was a tension among the guests, who were all nervously listening to Rádio da Voz da Junta Militar. Radio presenter Isodoro Afonso « Nuno » Rodrigues, who has become one of the national heroes during the conflict, explained that the Junta Militar was fed up with the constant treason of Nino Vieira. « We know that Nino has reinforced himself recently, so we'll restore the balance. We have called Ecomog to witness that we are taking back arms that have been delivered to them ».

Suddenly, we heard the sound of a heavy explosion from a long distance. Immediately, dozens of people started to run in total panic. After all, it wasn't the first war, some say the fourth, other call it the fifth. In any case, it was probably the final one.

I came back in Bissau early April 1999, about ten days after the soldiers from Senegal and Guinea-Conakry had left the country. A peace-force of 600 Ecomog-soldiers from Niger, Benin and the Gambia had meanwhile arrived, and were supposed to supervise and facilitate the peace process (disarmament, demining, return of militaries to their barracks). Although the Ecomog soldiers were generally considered as very correct and sympathetic, there grew a certain dissatisfaction about the slow proceeding of the disarmament. « Ecomog is having a nice holiday in Guinea-Bissau », was a frequently heard comment.

In April, the National Assembly had published and ratified the investigation report (dated June 8, 1998) on the arms traffic with the MFDC. A considerable number of officials (politicians, military and police officers) were accused of immediate involvement in various arms traffic activities, among whom the former Minister of Defence, Samba Lamine Mané, the former Chief of Security, João Monteiro, and former Army second-in-command Afonso Té, all of them close collaborators of Vieira. Vieira himself was accused of having been informed about the arms traffic, but having neglected this information and thereby not having taken the necessary measures to put an end to it. Ansumane Mané explicitly was not accused of any direct or indirect involvement. Concluding, the report made it clear, that Vieira sooner or later would have to appear before court¹⁹.

It was especially after the ratification of the report on the arms trade, that, in spite of repeated talks and treaties, president Vieira started to demonstrate again that he was not particularly keen on collaborating within the framework of the accords of « Abuja » and « Lomé », and that he continued to constitute a factor of tension, instability and uncertainty. This has to be seen in the light of the continuation of his foreign support²⁰, his personal one-sided view on the situation and determination to remain in power, as well as his belief that he was wrongly disrespected.

His renewed will of obstruction was illustrated by several concrete examples :

The Government of National Unity had decided to replace one of Vieira's close partners, Paulo Medina (secretary of the PAIGC), as Head of the Municipality by Francisca Vaz Turpin. At a first instance, Medina refused to hand over his keys. On April 23, he appeared on the scene with dozens

19. *Banobero*, 20 of April, 1999.

20. A diplomatic source told me the following anecdote. Shortly after the « War of January 31st », he met the French ambassador, Mr. Chapellet. Chapellet apparently was in an emotional mood and told my source: « if we would have had the 155 mm artillery [introduced during this particular war] dearlier, we would have won ».

of *aguentas*, Vieira's militias. They were heavily armed, and it was visible that they were carrying *new* artillery. Soldiers of the *Junta Militar* immediately came to the Municipality, and took a position in front of the *aguentas*. Ecomog rapidly intervened and succeeded to dissolve the situation. Meanwhile, Medina had removed a large quantity of documents (supposedly private and party documents), together with a number of new air-conditioners from his office.

A relative of president Vieira told me that he had assisted to Vieira's birthday party on April 27. Apparently, Vieira was quite relaxed and self-confident. According to my source, Vieira made it clear that he was still supported by France, and that he would certainly run again for presidency. After my comment, that democracy is open to any candidate who is willing to follow the rules of the game, this source assured me that Vieira would certainly not follow the rules, and that he was already preparing funds and other « gifts » to buy votes on a large scale.

On April 28, a new conflict arose, after Vieira had nominated a new public prosecutor without consulting the government, nor parliament nor the *Junta Militar*, thereby, once again violating the Abuja Peace Agreement and the Constitution.

On Friday April 30, at least four helicopters from Guinea-Conakry landed in the backyard of the presidential palace. According to official statements from the presidency, these helicopters brought in Vieira's wife and mother. Other sources stated, that they had arms on board.

On May 4, president Vieira issued a decree calling the elections to be held on November 28, 1999. The decree made no mention of the Abuja peace agreement, which caused uncertainty about possible hidden intentions of this decree.

On May 5-4, the Emergency Round Table for Guinea-Bissau took place in Geneva. Prime Minister Fadul succeeded in raising funds for a total of 200 million US dollars.

On May 6, the *Junta* took the decision²¹ to put an end to this insecure situation. After having publicly recaptured an amount of arms previously handed over to Ecomog, the *Junta Militar* invaded « Bissauzinho », the center of the capital, and defeated Vieira's forces, which consisted for a major part of *aguentas*, young inexperienced recruits who had received a short military training from Senegalese, Guinea-Conakry and French officers²². The next day, around 11 a.m., the *Junta* had taken over the center, and set fire to the presidential palace.

Vieira himself had already left his palace early in the morning, and found refuge in the Bishop's residence, after having passed by the French Embassy/Cultural Centre, where he was not allowed to stay, since the French would not be able to guarantee his personal security. After he had been discovered by the *Junta*, Vieira was handed over to the Portuguese ambassador. Meanwhile, the *Junta* had approached the French Embassy and forced everyone to come outside. Together with embassy personnel and development volunteers, a dozen of French soldiers came out with their

21. According to a source, Ansumane Mané was encouraged to take this measure by president Abubakar of Nigeria. This source claimed that he had received this information from Mané's interpreter who had accompanied him during his visits to Nigeria and Togo.

22. Military training of more than 300 *aguentas* took place in Guinea-Conakry August-September 1998. Another group was trained at the Bijagós Archipel.

hands in the air, holding white rags. In order to accentuate this public humiliation, the *Junta* damaged the building with a number of grenades.

Although numerous vulgar acts of plundering took place on May 7, following the *Junta's* victory, the treatment of Vieira's companions and militias was remarkably correct. High officials of the Vieira government, including army chief Umberto Gomes, Afonso Té, and João Monteiro, were detained. A number of 634 *aguentas* had surrendered, and firstly sought refuge with Ecomog. A few days later, the *aguentas* were transferred to the *Junta*, under extended national and international supervision. The *Junta* handed over the *aguentas* to the National Liga for Human Rights for a civil training and reinsertion programme.

It was no surprise, that France immediately started a lobby on a diplomatic level, in order to encourage the international community to condemn the *Junta's* actions, labelling them as a *coup d'État*. Ecomog and the OAU were the first international organisations condemning the *Junta's* actions. The UN Secretary General lamented the outbreak of violence and the damages to several diplomatic missions in Bissau, but did not totally condemn an alleged *coup d'État*. On the level of the European Union, Portugal, Sweden and the Netherlands strongly opposed to the French appeal for condemning, which eventually led to a moderate declaration of the EU, in which it stated that it would « follow the developments in Guinea-Bissau with attention, eventually drawing its own conclusions »²³.

On a national level, the military action of the *Junta* is considered as a necessary step to implement the Abuja-Accord, and the proceedings after May 7 can be considered as *legal*. The Government of National Unity has been maintained and so has its mandate. Parliament is functioning normally, and has started to some important issues, such as the approval of the legislation on declaration of goods for public functions, and the revised Constitution.

Organisations of civil society are involved in various aspects of the peace and rehabilitation processes. The decree concerning the November 28 elections is respected, and public order seems to be restored definitely. On May 14th, Malam Bacai Sanha, president of Parliament, was installed as interim-president according to the Constitution.

Although the *Junta Militar* is still present as a « fourth power », there are no signs of abuse – let alone on-going « joy-riding » in stolen cars. *Brigadeiro* Ansumane Mané is a generally respected man, who plays a moderate and strategic role. In spite of his popularity and his actual position, there are still no signs of any political ambition on a longer term.

Meanwhile, the relations between Guinea-Bissau and the international community have become tense, because of the destiny of Nino Vieira. After his arrival in the residence of ambassador António Dias of Portugal, Vieira requested for political asylum, which was immediately granted by Portugal, with a broad international approval. On a national level, however, it soon became clear that this was unacceptable : the ministers of the Government of National Unity, Parliament²⁴, the Catholic Church and all main members of civil society, as well as the *Junta Militar* were unanimously against the

23. *Expresso*, 24 of May, 19999.

24. Including Vieira's own party, the PAIGC, which meanwhile has suspended him as party president – Paulo Medina was likewise suspended as party secretary; another 40 prominent figures of the party were suspended as party members.

implementation of Vieira's political asylum. This would be considered as a violation of the *Justiça* that everyone on a national and international level was so keen on.

Prime Minister Fadul was the only person in favour of Vieira's immediate release; being principally concerned with the 200 million US dollar donor money he successfully obtained during the Round Table Conference of May 4-5. This has put him in a weak position, and until the moment of the conception of this article it is believed, that his resignation is quite likely. On the other hand, during a radio speech called « the first 100 days of the Government » broadcast live on May 31st, Fadul used a relatively moderate tone. Should he resign, Guinea-Bissau will look at the international reactions with nervous curiosity.

Meanwhile, local initiatives directed towards reconstruction and normalisation of life are starting to flourish. The majority of the population is eager to pick up the pieces, although the wounds and scarves of the war are still fresh (people tend to get terrified at hearing sounds which resemble explosions). Ecomog will leave the country from June 6 onwards; mission completed... or *redundant*?

At this moment, it is of utmost importance that the international airport as well as the banks will be reopened on a short term, in order to accelerate the normalisation of different spheres of life, as well as the re-establishment of international relations. Without idealising the political scene, as well as civil society, it is clear that people are doing their utmost best in order to match the magic concepts of democracy and justice with practice. It is of crucial importance, that the international community makes an effort to get real insight in today's practice in order to do the same.

2nd of June, 1999
Roy Van der DRIFT

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- CECRON (NGO forum), Bissau
- Supreme Court, Bissau
- Chamber of Commerce, Bissau
- Regional presidents of Bafatá and Biombo
- Villages of Pocon (Cacheu), Buntusu Canadu (Bafatá) and Quinhámel (Biombo)
- Various national consultants, public servants, business men and the people on the street, Bissau.