P@X online bulletin

YOUTH, MARGINALISATION AND VIOLENCE

Editorial

Taking stock of some of the debates that surfaced in the course of the research project "Trajectories of violence dissemination and containment: a comparative study of Bissau and Praia", this edition of P@x aims to reflect upon the conditions that facilitate or hinder the organisation of youth in violent groups.

Youth urban violence is often perceived as a spontaneous phenomenon, produced by poverty, or a mere expression of criminal and political instrumentalisation.
Contrary to war, it is difficult to identify concretely the aims and actors of youth violence organisation and youth mobilisation conditions. However, in many contexts, peace rests on violent political projects based on the control of societies and more concretely on the control of youth (male) violent potential.

In distinct contexts such as Bissau (Guinea Bissau) and Cidade da Praia (Cape Verde) we find, in different scales, traits of a peace based on inequality, submission, instead of democratisation of power relations and resources, where youth face marginalization and social exclusion provoked by unemployment and lack of access to quality education and to political decision-making processes.

Instead of accentuating securitisation processes targeting poor youth in peripheral countries, to whom L. Bordonaro draws attention to, it is necessary to analyse forms of violence and control faced by them and how these determine or not violent reactions or violent demand of other status. It is thus necessary to overcome the dominant perspective that stigmatises this youth, portraying them as menacing, potential emigration candidates as well as potential agitators, criminals, drug users or traffickers and HIV carriers.

If it is true that some societies are still able to avoid the formation of gangs through specific social processes, external to the State – as illustrated by U. Schiefer- , others are more influenced by consumptions and by the construction of globalised models of masculinity, thus favouring the emergence of embrionary forms of violent youth organisations, as witnessed in Cidade da Praia.

Nevertheless, there are no such things as static societies. As a result of urbanisation, individualisation, changes in proximity/family relations and migrations, often frustrated, the ubiquity of internet, access to distinct lifestyles through music and television, the African youth, similarly to societies in general, have aspirations and behaviours similar to youth elsewhere. In tandem with the adoption of globalised lifestyles, behaviours, expectations and consumption habits, factors such as small arms availability – the topic addressed by A. Leão – and the existence of illegal drug markets can act as facilitators of a violent socialization.

Katia Cardoso and Sílvia Roque, NEP-CES

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How do Agrarian African societies deal with the potential for violence of their youth? A few short notes.

In Africa, like elsewhere, societies' failures to manage the potential for violence of their youth usually attract more attention than their successes.

The potential for violence of young males (violence by females being extremely rare) in many African societies constitutes a condition for, as well as a consequence of, societal collapse. The self-organisation capacity of unrestrained youth, that reaches back to and is derived from hunter-gatherer societies, leads to the quasi-universal organisation form of the predatory youth gang. These can be mobilised and used by factions of the power elite, thus increasing the destructive potential which a growing number of societies can no longer control. Modern African societies, even if highly urbanised, are still strongly influenced by agrarian societies. A closer look at the traditional way of dealing with the potential for violence of their cadets might therefore be useful.

The basic configuration of agrarian societies is ethnic; both centralised and acephalous societies organise their youths and men into age classes. The transition from one class to the next is marked by rites of passage. There are as many different systems as there are ethnic groups, with different age classes, different rites of passage, and a different internal organisation. Some basic features are common, though: they are inclusive, that is, everybody excluding the few who die, passes, so they neither exclude individuals nor produce losers. As everybody passes through all the age groups there is, at least in acephalous groups, no discrimination that is considered unfair, as everybody will eventually gain the respect and privileges associated with

the status of the elder. On their way to an age group with a potential for violence, the cadets have already passed through childhood where, even before they start to walk, they learned to share and to respect their elders. Sharing and respect are basic values in infancy; they constitute the fundamental values of solidarity. As they get older they also assume more and more responsibility, a quality that distinguishes adults from children. Their horizon of expectation is limited to the confines of the village and the lineage. Through language and culture, a clear sense of belonging is instilled in children as they grow up. In many realms they enjoy great liberty, so nobody feels socially excluded. They are free to band together and to roam with their friends, hunting for food or adventure. Social control is applied through presence by peers, family and elders. Spiritual control is, accordingly, not only exercised by intra-psychic configurations, but by external spiritual entities which are often linked to the realm of the deceased.

In each age class they gain certain rights and increase their knowledge and obligations. The passage from one age group to the next is highly ritualised. The status is shown through dress, haircut, bearing and secret signals of bodily expression. In the main rites of passage, constituent dimensions of societies' ethnic existence and essential power lines intersect. The mostly invisible exercise of power (or in the case of acephalous societies: authority) – internal and external – combines with the assertion of ethnic access to and control over natural resources, including land, forests, water, fish, flora and fauna.

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All resources are guarded by spirits and only with their consent can humans exploit them – but there is always a price to pay, usually in the form of ritual sacrifices that vary from small gifts to animals and even humans. Intra and interethnic rivalries and alliances are confirmed, as well as the relationship to other existing power groups and institutions like state structures.

Guineean youth, Bissau, 2008.

The highly secret internal ethnic military organisation is established, the guardians serving as officer cadre. In centralised societies, the power of the rulers is confirmed; in acephalous societies, the mechanisms to avoid the establishment of power structures are reinforced. The relationship between the sexes is (re-) defined, burial rights are ascertained. Everything is based on the understanding of the spiritual world, the world inhabited by spirits with whom the essence of human existence and society's power, fertility and wellbeing ultimately rest. The existence of external, spiritual forces that influence and condition societies, groups and people is a given, a *fait social.* Human existence, health, and collective and individual wellbeing depend on the capacity to establish and maintain relations with them.

For the youth who undergo these rites of passage, which are not reduced to, but often include circumcision, they signify the most profound experience of their lives. In remarkably elaborate settings, hidden away in the bush, they experience a very strong bonding process with their comrades, which produces the most important social relationship that will last for the rest of their lives and dominate all other relationships, in some circumstances even their immediate family ties. They suffer very strong privations, are submitted to strict military discipline by their officers and exposed to cruelty and pain. Even small infractions are punished relentlessly, individual failures often by collective punishments like running the gauntlet. They experience fear of the supernatural in their introduction to the spiritual world, including the loss of some of their colleagues whose death is attributed to the spirits' wrath. They are exposed to hunger, isolation, including from their families and lack of comforts. At the same time, they are taught their group's traditions, dancing, singing, history and secret communications, be the latter by physical expression or even long distance communication with drums. They learn how to engage with spirits, often entering into (sometimes drug enhanced) states of mind which are perceived as a condition to communicate with the spirits. They learn how to conclude contracts with the spirits to protect them against life's many hazards, including how to obtain charms against bullets. These charms do not work against cannons, grenades and bombs, though.

They get a thorough understanding of the difference between sacred and profane, and between pure and impure. In their exercises they are put into spiritual opposition to rival groups, often girls who undergo similar experiences, but are spatially and socially totally separated. They are also taught how to keep secrets, and made aware that violation of the secrecy rules are punished by death. During the rites the guardians spot talent, spiritual and in leadership. Future military leaders are selected from these candidates.

Their ideal is the strong, brave warrior, socially and spiritually well-connected, versed in fighting techniques and able to take part in fighting, be it defensive or offensive.

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After the privations of training they are given a "hero's welcome" by their villages, which requires considerable economic effort for the families to celebrate their new status. Candidates with a respectable lineage (be that matrilineal or patrilineal) and with extra-ordinary abilities in the spiritual realm are selected for further rites which are so secret that even the other fully initiated do not suspect their existence. These rites are the entrance to the so-called secret societies that wield immense influence and power and where wide-reaching decisions are taken. These secret societies often transcend the boundaries of ethnic groups and constitute important links in interethnic alliances which can play an important part in keeping peace or in mobilisation for war.

Even after initiation and training, the cadets will continue to be under strong leadership. A whole gamut of strictly regulated and ritualised games is organised, often against other groups, like dancing or wrestling contests, which often require long marches to the venues. Similarly, many groups organise raids on their neighbours to steal goods or cattle. These can easily turn into violent clashes or skirmishes with the proprietors and their neighbours, frequently leading to injury and even death, especially if firearms are brought into play, which is increasingly frequent.

In all these exercises, the cadets are usually accompanied by their guardians and by their individual and collective guardian spirits. The rich body ornamentation, ranging from elaborate paintings to intricate hair cuts, from special clothing to body adornments, as well as the rhythms of their drums and the tunes of their singing are signals for their invisible spiritual companions as well as for their friends, competitors and foes.

Contests between rival groups, be they in sports, music, dancing or in fighting, are undertaken as spiritual exercises – the military and political power of a group is

understood as to be merely a projection of their spiritual powers. For the young warriors, games and raids alike serve as opportunities to keep in training and to prove their value. Duels between individual warriors are quite frequent and also highly ritualised. If a warrior suffers from a "bout of heroism", it is usually enough to throw stones into the compound of another young warrior – in the ensuing fight the adversaries will promptly come to blows, usually with sticks.

Prowess in fighting, as well as talent in the performing arts, is considered an assured way to fame – which increases their success with the opposite sex.

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We asked three youth associations in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde what were the main problems that affected youth in their countries, the types of violence which they considered more worrying and the contributions of their associations to the resolution of these issues.

Associação Juvenil Black Panthers (AJBP) – Cape Verde
http://www.ajblackpanthers.com/objectivos.php

AJBP (Youth Association Black Panthers) is a community association which leads social initiatives aimed at disenfranchised children, youth and adults in the neighbourhood of Várzea. Besides their social mission, AJBP also pays attention to culture and sports, namely through the participation in the 1st division of the Soccer championship in the Santiago island and the establishment of the dance group *Fidjos de África*.

For this association, the main problem that youth faces in Cape Verde is unemployment, which lies at root of other issues such as alcoholism, drug use, prostitution and delinquency. Violence against women is the most worrying type of violence in the country, especially in the city of Praia. However, despite the fact that women are still perceived as male possessions, this perception, which justifies violence, is changing.

In order to contribute to violence minimisation and prevention, AJBP develops training sessions aimed at qualifying youth and assisting them in entering the labour market. In addition to this, AJBP seeks to offer youth leisure alternatives, namely cultural and sports related. AJBP also runs a support centre for drug addicts and HIV/AIDS patients.

Espaço Aberto Safende (EAS) – Cape Verde
http://espacoabertosafende.blogspot.com/

EAS [Open Space Safende] was set up on the 23rd of February 2008, in a partnership with the Zé Moniz Association, the Sant´Egidio Commmunity, ICCA (Cape Verdian Institute for Children and Adolescents) and the Municipality of Praia, and sponsored by the artist Tcheka. Since then, they have organised activities aimed at the insertion of children, teenagers and youth in the Safende neighbourhood.

Recognising that Cape Verdean youth, like in many other countries with similar characteristics, are affected by several problems at once, the Association advocates for a complex approach to the resolution of these. According to EAS, the main problem that youth faces in Cape Verde is the absence of solid reference in both the family realm and society at large, in tandem with a poor self-accountability culture. In EAS' opinion, school absenteeism, alcoholism, drug use and abuse and unemployment end up to lead to and to justify, to some extent, violent behaviour.

Despite not considering some violences more important than others, currently EAS is particularly worried with violence practiced by youth informal groups made up of teenagers from the Praia's neighbourhoods, which hinder people's free circulation in the city and particularly in some neighbourhoods. EAS is also worried with violence aimed at people with mental conditions. This is a phenomenon, often marginal to the society's concerns, which further contributes to aggravate the marginalisation of these people and their loss of dignity.

EAS sets out to be part of the solution to these problems, by focusing on children, teenagers and youth. EAS is a socialisation space aimed at youth, which offers study orientation, technological capacity building and health monitoring. EAS has also organised leisure activities such as institutional visits for children and celebratory seminars. The construction of their own community centre, currently taking place, aims at improving EAS' work in the community.

Juventude da Associação de Mulheres do Bairro de Belém (JAMBA) – Guinea-Bissau

JAMBA [Youth of the Belém's Neighbourhood Women Association] originates in the foundation, in 2002, of the Belém's Neighbourhood Women Association (AMBA), whose objective was to create a culture of solidarity, cooperation and associative life amongst women and girls in the Belém's Neighbourhood, in Bissau.

For JAMBA, youth's problems in Guinea-Bissau are rooted in the lack of appropriate training and education and unemployment. The vast majority of youth who finishes high school cannot afford to go to university/college. But not even a graduate degree can guarantee employment opportunities. In JAMBA's view, unemployment results from the absence of industries in the country, this limits employment opportunities to public administration and NGO.

According to JAMBA, domestic violence is very worrying in Guinea-Bissau. In JAMBA's opinion this type of violence derives from sexism: Guinean men still believe they are in charge and that women are their property. JAMBA is also concerned with female excision. Despite arguments in favour of female excision in society at large, mostly rooted in tradition, JAMBA highlights its impacts on female youth's heath.

Since its establishment, JAMBA aims to promote women's economy and combat pernicious practices such as domestic violence, forced marriage and female excision. For such, JAMBA has conducted projects of income generation, training sessions as well as initiatives of violence prevention. In addition, JAMBA organises debates with neighbourhood residents not only on the topic of violence but also on the broader challenges faced by the Guinean society in general. Since JAMBA believes that an associative spirit should be rooted in voluntary action, their work does not stop when funding is not secure.

Cape Verde: youth and war on crime

Since the 1990s Cape Verde has undergone dramatic economic and political transformations that have brought about increasing income disparity and social class polarization. Although the middle class has grown considerably in recent years, there is a certain stratum of the population still living in extreme poverty. The last two decades have also witnessed a considerable increase in the urban population (Mindelo and Praia), mostly due to internal migration. Even though 70% of the poor population lives in rural areas, it is in the urban areas that poverty is most severe. The evolution of the urban structures in Praia and Mindelo reflect the social polarisation of the population. Middle and upper class families occupy the older areas of town and the recently built planned areas, while spontaneous neighbourhoods spread without planning on less valuable land. It is in these latter areas that most social issues associated with childhood and youth have become highly visible in the last decade. Ambiguously identified as 'at risk' or as 'a risk', children and young people in these neighbourhoods are increasingly targeted by government policies and social welfare agencies and by the police and the penitentiary system.

Panic on crime in Cape Verde

Since 2000, crime has become a key issue in the political and public debate in Cape Verde. According to police data, in recent years there has been a major increase of petty crime, mostly pick-pocketing, burglary of homes or stores and muggings. A few cases of fatal attacks have rocked peaceful Cape Verdean society. The birth of small gangs on the outskirts of Praia, identifying with specific neighbourhoods and involved in wars with gangs from rival areas, has been particularly shocking. The *thugs*, as the members of these small gangs are called in Cape Verde, have become the folk-devils of Cape Verdean society, contributing to the stigmatization and criminalization of youth in general and of the rise of the hip-hop culture on the outskirts of Praia. The national press and TV have played a central role in boosting moral panic and the feeling of insecurity.

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*Street youth in Mindelo, São Vicente, Summer 2007.*

Since 2000, articles have mushroomed in the national press, sporting headlines proclaiming the increase in crime, the involvement of youth from the outskirts, and the inability of the police to deal with this new threat. Several areas in the towns of Mindelo and Praia are now considered dangerous. Banks, restaurants, public offices, companies and ministries have started to employ private guards, while walls, electric fences, barbed wire, CCTV cameras and secured buildings are springing up in middle and upper class areas of towns.

Zero tolerance and the increase in prison population

The Cape Verde government, responding to the accusations of incompetence from the opposition parties and the press, adopted a repressive approach to youth crime laying siege to public areas and the outskirts of both main towns. 2006 in particular was a turning point, when the Minister of the Interior, Júlio Correia, cried 'Charge!' against crime (*A Semana*, April 14th, 2006). Police forces were increased and reorganized; agreements on cooperation and partnership with European police were signed; and special police squads – the *piquete* - circulating and patrolling urban areas day and night were created to restore order and safety. The military police were called to intervene in Praia on two occasions.

As Graph 1 shows, this has led to a massive increase in the jail population that, according to my research in the prison archives, has almost doubled in the last 10 years (around 200 inmates per 100,000 national population, the highest rate

among Western African countries [*World Prison Population List*, 2008]).
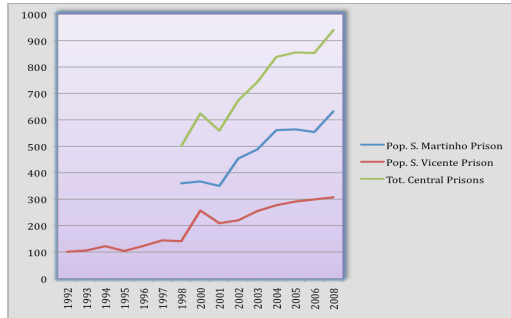
Graph 1 – Increase in jail population (data from central prisons)

São Martinho prison in Praia was originally designed for 250 prisoners. Today it houses around 630 people in inhuman conditions. Violations of human rights are frequent, never leading to any disciplinary action. A new prison is being built, with a capacity for 600 inmates. The prison population is extremely young, also due to the low age of criminal responsibility (16) and to the fact that 50% of the overall Cape Verdean population is under 18. Nevertheless, there are no special wings for younger inmates, and 16-year-olds share cells with older prisoners. There is no social reintegration programme and recidivism is extremely high.

Coherently with the repressive trend, a decree-law (2/2006 of 27 November) was also passed encouraging the creation of special institutions for the internment of children aged between 12 and 16 breaking the law. The decree-law establishes the function, structure and organisation of these institutions (called 'socio-educational centres' - *centros sócio-educativos*). The preamble to the text significantly condenses the remarkably repressive approach to youth crime:

> "We are forced to admit that we are in a time when crimes committed by minors of this age group [12-16] often do not have their origin in economic distress or family dysfunction, but rather in a strong will to break the law and with full knowledge of the harmful effects of such behaviour, though they still do it."

Although the decree-law was passed as emergency legislation to face a widespread, exaggerated public feeling of impunity, it actually never worked. In 2007, after its publication, one socio-educational centre was actually opened. However the *Centro Orlando Pantera*, as it was baptised, never received any children and by November 2008 was almost abandoned.

O*ne of the courtyards of the new prison that is being built in San Martinho, near Praia, Santiago Island. November 2008.*

Local politics, international security

There are several elements that must be considered if we are to understand this repressive turn in Cape Verdean youth justice. Firstly, at a time of rapid transformation and class polarization, has youth crime turned into a symbolic issue in Cape Verde, young offenders becoming the folk-devils and scapegoats for often unexpressed moral concerns about cultural and social transformation and for a growing generation gap. Anxiety about public safety issues is also linked more pragmatically to the interest of the Cape Verdean government in attracting foreign investors in the tourism and real estate sectors.

One more point should be considered, however. Since Cape Verde turned into one of the transit points for cocaine trafficking and illegal emigration from West Africa, issues of internal security have overlapped with issues of international security in a way that challenges our common understanding of state powers and interests. As it has been pointed out, security issues are forming a new style of politics and perhaps a new regime on the international scene.

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According to my data, the 'war on crime' in Cape Verde has been mostly funded by international (and mostly Europeans) donors. In 2004 for example to 'strengthen the fight against terrorism', the Cape Verdean government signed an agreement with United Nations Office on Drug and Crime to implement a program to improve the fight against drug and crime. According to the agreement, the Cape Verdean government received eight million dollars (600 million Cape Verdean escudos). Special partnerships with European border and anti-drug police also allowed for the training of officers, the introduction of advanced technologies for the fight against drug trafficking, and the acquisition of new resources for police forces in general. These elements point to articulation between an international cooperation agenda and funding schemes that prioritize security, trafficking and irregular migration, and the local implementation of repressive approaches to crime in Cape Verde.

Moreover, in a situation of increasing class polarization of Cape Verdean society, these local policies tend to target the poorer strata of the population with few, if any, preventive and social measures being implemented. An analysis of recent politics in Cape Verde points to a shift from a 'welfare-state' to a 'penal-state': economic liberalism, deterioration of the social state, and improvement and glorification of the penal state. It is a scenario that seems to make pertinent Loïc Wacquant's claims about the global criminalization of poverty. Moreover, the fact that these policies are backed up and funded by the European Union and international organizations concerned for the security of their own borders and countries poses serious ethical issues and requires urgent critical assessment of international policies in the area of security.

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Small arms and light weapons: an issue in Guinea-Bissau?

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Despite the scarcity of data available, references to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Guinea-Bissau keep surfacing in a variety of documents from diverse international agencies and academies, and the issue of small arms is recurrent in debates regarding peace and security in Guinea-Bissau. The dimension of the problem and its impact though seems relatively unknown. Rachel Stohl (2004), for instance, referred to about 25,000 firearms in circulation in Guinea-Bissau in 2004, in October 2007 the then Prime Minister put this amount at 125,000, a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2007) estimates that one in every two houses in the country would be armed, and as recently as May 2009 another source (Irin News, 2009) puts the amount of SALW at 650,000.

However, indicators of SALW proliferation such as levels of armed violence are relatively low in Guinea-Bissau. The capital city of Bissau is apparently calm and quiet; the US State Department (2009) refers to Guinea-Bissau as being a relatively peaceful country with low levels of criminality, and political tensions have so far not led to renewed armed violence. Nonetheless, the geography and the history of the country have been conducive to widespread proliferation of SALW rather than to proper firearms management and the issue remains a matter of concern at national, regional and international levels.

Guinea-Bissau is part of a heavily armed sub-region: there are an estimated eight million firearms in circulation in West Africa alone, 77,000 of these in the hands of insurgent groups (Stohl, 2004). No wonder then that all countries in the sub-region have had episodes of armed violence where SALW played a central role.

According to a 2008 report by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) West Africa has been a most unstable sub-region in the continent mainly due to the proliferation of SALW.

UNIDIR estimates that the impact of this proliferation on the socio economic development of the sub-region may outweigh by far that of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Keili, 2008).

In Guinea-Bissau the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) started in 1961 a fierce guerrilla war against colonialism that ended only with formal independence in 1975. The first firearms used by the PAIGC had been captured from Portuguese troops or had come in small supplies from China, but soon the movement was also receiving firearms from the Eastern Block (Chabal, 2002: 78). The procurement and ensuing proliferation of SALW enabled the PAIGC to sustain almost 20 years of war for independence. Popular participation in guerrilla units, the dispersal in small (and often isolated) armed groups, the inability to keep regular contact with the Central Command (often positioned in a neighbouring country), and the need for civilian support – all features of popular wars – are not the most conducive conditions to proper firearms control. Nor has there been any significant disarmament initiative in Guinea-Bissau at the time of or since independence. It is unlikely that within this context Guinea-Bissau would remain immune to the proliferation of SALW even when indicators seem to suggest otherwise. SALW proliferation in Guinea-Bissau seems to be subtle in nature and more of a suspected than a known reality.

Presently Guinea-Bissau seems to be a country permanently close to collapse, with little respect for the rule of law and for democratic institutions. Given above background and context one would expect outbursts of armed violence, be it political in nature or in the form of lootings and riots in times of great instability, and high levels of armed crime. One would expect the uncovering of arms caches as economic activities develop and land is cleared. None of this though seems to be happening in Guinea-Bissau but recent and less-obvious indicators may be surfacing in the country.

According to recent visitors to Guinea-Bissau interviewed for this article in November 2008 the number of private security companies operating in Bissau seems to have increased in the past few years (the demand for them seems to be driven by small shop-owners) and currently it is not unusual to hear firearm shots close to entertainment facilities in Bissau, particularly over the weekends.

Firearms, components and ammunition collected in disarmament programmes in Africa

The firearms generally used in armed incidents in Bissau would usually be homemade, but at times AK47s would be used too. The perception was that these AK47s were leftovers from previous wars both in the country and in the region, and property of people connected to the military elite. According to these visitors there is also a growing perception that there are still several arms caches from the independence war and from the 1998 conflict.

The scale of armed incidents as those weekend scuffles referred above may be minor but they also seem to be so recurrent as being worth mentioning. They also seem to be a relatively new phenomenon in Guinea-Bissau; were they "normal" they would go un-mentioned. And there may be further and more elusive indicators of SALW proliferation. The Centre for Peace Studies in the University of Coimbra is undertaking a comparative study of armed violence in Bissau and in the City of Praia in Cape Verde [1]. The analysis of one question in 16 randomly selected questionnaires of the survey in Bissau was revealing. The question was if there were any firearms in the home of the respondents.

From the 16 respondents, 12 admitted to having firearms in their homes. From these twelve respondents, four were women; one stated having handed in his firearm to the police; and another admitted to having threatened his girlfriend with his firearm. People are generally reluctant to admit to the presence of firearms in their homes or communities, let alone using them. The fact that so many respondents from this small sample did so was quite surprising and if indeed representative of the rest of the sample this may suggest a wide proliferation of SALW and an almost "normality" regarding firearms proliferation and ownership. That is, people are perhaps not carrying firearms around but they seem to own them. Assuming the proliferation of SALW is as widespread and serious as suspected what then can help explaining the low incidence of political and criminal armed violence in Guinea-Bissau? The answer to this requires exhaustive research but allowing some room for informed speculation some (research) hypothesis may be put forth.

In an environment of poverty firearms represent often an asset that can be sold or rented out and so does information on arms caches. Given the regional instability it may be that SALW from Guinea-Bissau are being used in conflicts ongoing in the sub-region, as documented already by some agencies (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2004; USAID, 2006). This may help explaining why arms caches are not being dismantled in Guinea-Bissau and why disarmament campaigns have achieved such dismal results [2].

The low level of armed crime may also be related to the prevailing type of crime in Guinea-Bissau, which seems to be petty theft. Petty theft is seldom violent and seldom resorts to the use of firearms. In environments of generalised poverty, such as Guinea-Bissau, the nature of stolen goods is usually such (pots and pans, blankets and clothing) that people only rarely report the incident to the police, particularly when the closest police post is a couple of hours walk from the place of residence. But even if people report the crime, police may not have the resources or

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the capacity to take the matter further. The inability of the police in addressing the security concerns of the population does not dispel perceptions on insecurity and may hinder voluntary disarmament campaigns. The link between perceptions on police performance and disarmament has been documented in many studies: communities with negative perceptions of police performance seem to be less likely to hand in voluntarily their weapons. There is no data on this correlation in Guinea-Bissau and research on topics such as this one may be needed in order to design and tailor effective disarmament campaigns.

But, at another level, this inability of the police may alienate civilians from security institutions and it does not contribute to the improvement of civilian relations with security institutions, particularly in post-conflict contexts.

Another research topic regarding for the low levels of armed crime in Guinea-Bissau, and which may be paramount to disarmament campaigns, may be police performance. Firearms are traditionally used in major crime operations, such as bank and cash-in-transit heists, cattle rustling and smuggling operations. Guinea-Bissau rumoured to be a centre for drug trafficking between Latin America and Europe where traffickers seem to have close ties to security institutions (Amnesty International, 2008: 146). These links to security institutions, ensuring through co-option or corruption that smuggling operations run smoothly and un-noticed, may preclude the use of firearms in the short term, but such association will most certainly have serious implications in the longer term.

The way things seem to currently be it is unlikely that the average Guinean citizen is aware of the ongoing criminal activities even if they are aware of the impunity under which such activities take place. That is, people may talk about drug shipments but they will have themselves few echoes from such activities, as they seem to be taking place discreetly with the complacency of the authorities. Widespread petty thefts together with the impunity with

which major crimes seem to take place only serve to discredit further the role of security institutions. But worse still, a surge in armed violence could well be the most likely outcome of a potential security sector reform and/or of attempts to improve police performance. It is doubtful drug dealers would let go of their activities, routes, associates, and networks; on the contrary, they seem more likely to resort to any means to protect their operations, including armed confrontation with security forces.[2] Communities so far undisturbed by crime may now be confronted with rising levels of criminal violence, which may reinforce their already negative perceptions on security.

Obsolete weapon in a neighbourhood of Bissau, 2008

Despite the lack of data on security issues, the perception in Guinea-Bissau seems to relate political violence with existing tensions between the political and the military, compounded by ethnic rivalries within the military. In this ethnic configuration none of the groups is clearly dominant. Assuming the different ethnic groups have equal access to resources, including firearms, the likelihood of renewed widespread armed violence seems less likely even in the face of political tensions – it is doubtful there will be a clear winner at the end of the conflict. Perhaps this precarious balance where none of the ethnic groups seems dominant neither in terms of demographics nor in terms of resources may help explaining the volatility of Guinean politics and the absence of renewed conflict. However,

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if one of the ethnic groups were able to access resources excluded to the other groups and thus able to procure weapons and soldiers, renewed conflict may become a viable option for that group.

The proliferation of SALW in Guinea-Bissau seems to carry the potential for seriously jeopardising peace consolidation and there is an urgent need for policy research in this field. This article has shown, through some hypothesis, the way SALW interact with other security issues and with the different realms of social and political life. The presence of SALW may seriously hinder any effort to reform the security sector, including arms management and disarmament programmes, and should not be dissociated from other security concerns. Failing to do so may seriously compromise the credibility of security institutions and ultimately of any government in Guinea-Bissau.

Notes

[1] Entitled "Trajectórias de disseminação e contenção da violência: um estudo comparativo entre Bissau e Praia", funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (2007-2009).
[2] See reports from Oxfam-Ceci 2007 and the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (2000).
[3] For example, the drug wars in Mexico.

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ActivitiesNEP

DECEMBER

In the course of the research project "Trajectories of Violence Dissemination and Containment: a comparative study of Bissau and Praia", **NEP/CES** organised:

- a training session on **"Violence trajectories and youth responses"**, aimed at youth associations working on violence prevention and combat, INEP, Bissau, 2-5 December 2009.

- the seminar **"Youth and violence: conditions and responses"**, INEP, Bissau, 7 December 2009.

- the seminar **"Trajectories of Violence: an analysis through youth experiences"**, CES Lisboa, Picoas Plaza, Lisboa, 17 December 2009.

NEP/CES organised the seminar **"A Post-Liberal Peace: Infrapolitics, Hybridity, and a Pedagogy of Peacebuilding"**, by Oliver Richmond, St. Andrews University, Centre for Social Studies, Coimbra, 14 December 2009.

NOVEMBER

In the course of the Science and Technology Week 2009, **NEP/OGIVA** exhibited the documentary **"Luto como Mãe" ["Right to Mourn"]**, Centre for Social Studies, Coimbra, 27 November 2009.

NEP/OGiVA presented the documentary **"Luto como Mãe"** at the 3rd International Festival of Portuguese-Speaking Cinema, Teatro da Cerca de São Bernardo, Coimbra, 8 November 2009.

NEP/CES organised the meeting **"Mapping current research on European peace operations"**, in the course of the COST Action IS0805 "New Challenges of Peacekeeping and the European Union's Role in Multilateral Crisis Management", Centre for Social Studies, Coimbra, 5-7 November 2009.

In the course of the Doctoral Programme on International Relations "International Politics and Conflict Resolution", **NEP/CES** organised the seminar **"Critical Perspectives on Peacebulding"**, by Michael Pugh, University of Bradford (UK), Department of Peace Studies, School of Economics, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, 6 November 2009.

OCTOBER

In the course of the Conference Cycle "Death penalty: testimonies of the innocent", promoted by Amnesty International Portugal, **NEP/CES** and AI organised the conference **"Pena de Morte: o testemunho de Joaquin José Martinez"**, School of Economics, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, 15 October 2009.

ActivitiesNEP

SEPTEMBER

In the course of the Doctoral Programme on International Relations "International Politics and Conflict Resolution", **NEP/CES** organised the Conference **"The Politics of Peace and Resistance in the Everyday"**, by Oliver P. Richmond, St. Andrews University, School of Economics, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, 18 September 2009.

NEP/OGiVA organised the Summer Course **"O sexo das violências"**, Centre for Social Studies, Coimbra, 9-12 September 2009.