



# OFICINA DO CES

**ces**

Centro de Estudos Sociais  
Laboratório Associado  
Faculdade de Economia  
Universidade de Coimbra

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**OVERCOMING MARGINALIZATION AND  
SECURITIZATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE POTENTIAL  
CAUSES OF COLLECTIVE YOUTH VIOLENCE IN  
BISSAU AND PRAIA**

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**OFICINA DO CES**  
Publicação seriada do  
**Centro de Estudos Sociais**  
Praça D. Dinis  
Colégio de S. Jerónimo, Coimbra

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**Overcoming Marginalization and Securitization: An analysis of the potential causes of collective youth violence in Bissau (Guinea-Bissau) and Praia (Cape Verde)**

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to discuss the possible conditions for the emergence or containment of collective youth violence in two African capitals (Bissau and Praia) focusing on young people's (re)actions to economic and social marginality. The visibility of violent groups in Praia – capital of a 'model African country' – contrasts with the apparent scarcity of these phenomena in Bissau – capital of an economically stagnant and politically unstable country. In this paper, we argue that more than looking at traditional theories that relate violence to poverty or social anomie, it is necessary to analyze, on the one hand, the role of social inequality in sustaining violence and, on the other hand, the degree of acceptance of the marginalization and social destiny by the young.

**Keywords:** youth; collective violence; inequalities; social becoming; securitization.

**Youth and Violence: Introduction**

'Youth' is a socially, politically and historically constructed concept and thus not homogeneous, 'trans-historical' or 'trans-cultural' (Durham, 2000: 15). Within the scope of this article we chose to consider youth not only as an age group<sup>1</sup> but also as a cultural and economic category, influenced by local perceptions of youth and adulthood. Interviews were conducted with groups and individuals who live mostly in situations of material dependence or that do not have a socially valued status because they often cannot be responsible for a family or household. This means that, in some cases, we can use the word youth for someone up until the age of 35 or 40 years old.<sup>2</sup> Despite these conceptual difficulties, the need to analyze collective youth violence in these contexts has two main aims: to highlight the marginalization of young people in many African contexts as a form of violence in itself; and to contribute to de-securitize young Africans by focusing our analysis on the phenomena of direct collective violence as a starting point for understanding other forms of violence.

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Development Programme defines youth as the individuals belonging to the age group from 15 to 24 years old (UNDP, 2006: 12).

<sup>2</sup> 'Youth' is a complex concept in any part of the world. Here we highlight two of the most frequent problems. On the one hand, the biological approach, defined by age, is limited and does not apply to every culture and society in the same way. On the other hand, the idea of the young as a homogenous, consolidated category, ignoring diversities and dimensions such as gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and others, must be contradicted.

If the notion of youth may be ambiguous, the definition of violence is even more complex. Sharing the reflections put forward by the field of Peace Studies, we adopt the idea that violence, and not conflict or war, is the opposite of peace and that the latter can only be reached through the abolition of all violences that mutually harbor on each other – direct, structural and cultural (Galtung, 1990; Pureza and Moura, 2004). Along with Feminist Studies in International Relations, we believe it is fundamental to challenge the hierarchy of social groups and the naturalization of power relations that produce and legitimate violence in several degrees and make the separation between war and peace artificial (Reardon, 1985; Santos *et al.*, 2010).

The locations – both geographical and conceptual – to which the actors and the causes of youth violence are remitted by some theoretical frameworks – which consider youth violence an internal matter of the States, of social and economic or criminal countenance, but not an international or political issue – express a vision which discards processes of global marginalization as a form of violence in itself, and that produces more violence either in spiral or in *continuum* (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004). Conversely, our starting point consists in considering that war can be seen as a social project amongst others, equally violent (Richards, 2005). We consider that the reasons why youths are mobilized towards traditional conflicts (wars) do not differ from those who make them players in urban and collective violence, often analyzed as apolitical.

### **1. Trajectories of Collective Youth Violence in Bissau and Praia**

Until recently both in Bissau and Praia, urban violence and associated criminality were not relevant issues. This has however become an increasingly reported issue in Cape Verde, causing social panic in Praia. On the other hand, there is a deep concern regarding the consequences of the increasing insertion of both Bissau and Praia in the international cocaine trafficking routes. Within the scope of urban violence, this paper is particularly interested in understanding the emergence or non-emergence of forms of youth collective organization, which take on violent dimensions.

In the past decade, Praia has witnessed an increase of criminality but also some innovations in the criminal *modus operandi*, the type of weapons used and the protagonists of these phenomena. Being a recent fact, a major part of the analyzes of this new form of urban conflict in Cape Verde has been carried out by the media – with all the risks of a superficial

and biased analysis that this entails. According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Justice, drug trafficking was identified as the most feared criminal offence in Cape Verde. Robbery is also one of the most frequent offences (Ministério da Justiça and UNODC, 2007: 10-17). This study also concluded that the rates of crime reporting are very low - one of the lowest in the world - below those of the other African countries where the survey was also applied. Another study focused specifically on youth in conflict with the law and concluded that about 80 percent of the offences committed by young people between the ages of 16 and 19 are crimes against property (Fernandes and Pina Delgado, 2008: 88).

In Bissau, the placing of bars on house windows and doors, stepped-up security at embassies or foreigners' residences and the recent on-growing frequency of violent assaults on foreigners, something that was sporadic until now, demonstrate that the city is not the same as it was a decade ago. Additionally, external signs of affluence (expensive houses and cars) reveal that there are lucrative business transactions in the country. To ascertain whether these aspects indeed signal a situation of growing insecurity, one will have to trust our respondents' statements and analyses. The perceptions of the people interviewed point to an increase of criminality, albeit not necessarily violent nor organized. However, these have contributed to the increase of security firms, for those who can afford such services, such as small businesses, NGOs, and international organizations. Although youth gangs<sup>3</sup> seem almost inexistent there is great insecurity in the family and in spheres usually deemed as 'protective', namely the neighborhood, the community and public institutions. Also, in recent years the population was shocked by some particularly violent crimes related to score-settling within drug trafficking. This does not mean that gangs or groups associated to crime, with characteristics very different to youth gangs, do not exist. This type of criminal activity – trafficking, armed robbery – is dominated by people of greater influence, in some cases with the involvement of police officers and militaries, who are extremely effective in eliminating competition.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> If we define youth gang as a group with the following characteristics: a) strong bonds of solidarity and companionship amongst members; b) use of violence as a way of relating and resolving conflicts either in or outside the group; c) group rivalries, d) use of certain private communication codes; e) the acceptance amidst peers of certain forms of communication and interaction; and mostly f) to constitute itself as one of the largest risk group to suffer and/or commit acts of violence, see Santacruz Giralt *et al.*, 2001: 353-354).

<sup>4</sup> One of the reasons mentioned in some interviews for the short duration of the groups known as gangs or bands is precisely the fact of being rapidly discovered and eliminated. This is due not necessarily to police effectiveness in fighting crime but to police effectiveness in eliminating competition.

The first study carried out in Bissau on juvenile delinquency (Jao *et al.*, 1996), prior to the armed conflict that took place in 1998-99, already pointed to an increase in criminality. The structural causes identified for this increase – unemployment and the economic crisis – remained after or were even further aggravated by the war. The same study points to a majority of crimes related to armed robbery, drug consumption and drug trafficking, currency counterfeiting, simple robbery, and child abuse. The idea that drug trafficking is a recent phenomenon is, therefore, false. But it is true that there has been a significant change in the types of drugs available and the scale of drug trade. Prior to the war, this kind of activity was mostly conducted by foreign citizens from the West African sub-region, whereas armed robbery was almost completely perpetrated by Guinea-Bissau nationals. It is important to distinguish non-organized petty criminality (robbery, physical assault, some of it armed) and also the practice of more or less organized extortion within neighborhoods, from criminality linked to drug trafficking. Accordingly, it can be categorically stated that Bissau is, for the time being, far from the reality of Praia, in terms of collective youth violence – even if other types of violence may be pervasive.

Youth violence in Bissau is considerably more diffuse and it does not encompass territorial control. Although many deny the existence of a rigid or visible organization, several reports point to some degree of organization coexisting with isolated and individual acts.<sup>5</sup> Some sources state that there are neighborhoods where organized control is exercised upon entry, based on some sort of ‘toll’ (watches, mobile phones, money or other belongings). Additionally, there appears to be a practice of ‘agreements’ between groups regarding burglaries in neighborhoods other than their own.<sup>6</sup> One of the interviewees mentioned the existence of an organized group in one of the mid-town neighborhoods, which allegedly used 12 and 13 year-olds to carry out robberies, namely to break into houses. However, this organization can also be viewed in terms of neighborhood protection, essentially carried out by young men. Since popular justice is pervasive, there has been a proliferation of vigilante groups in Bissau’s neighborhoods. The type of punishment carried

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<sup>5</sup> The news story entitled ‘Armed gang disbanded in Nhom’, in *Kansare* n° 82, 7 August 2006, seems to be an example of this. According to the newspaper, several AK-47s and machine guns, among other weapons, were found, which were used in after-dark robberies and burglaries. However, the age of the owners of this arms cache is not known.

<sup>6</sup> According to the interviews/focus groups conducted, but also mentioned in the study on juvenile delinquency by Jao *et al.*, 1996.

out by the police and by the population consists almost exclusively of corporal punishment, very often of severe nature.

Contrastingly, in Praia the groups known as ‘thugs’ use techniques which are typical of gangs, such as territorial control, strong group solidarity, clashes between rival gangs, among others. The thugs act both in the more deprived neighborhoods of Praia and in the middle and upper-class neighborhoods. In 2005, for instance, some of the murders which shocked Praia, allegedly linked to score-settling associated to drug trafficking, occurred in Palmarejo, one of the most affluent neighborhoods of Cape Verde’s capital. As a rule, gangs avoid committing crimes in their own neighborhoods. Night-life spaces as well as musical festivals have been some of the places chosen for clashes between gangs.

The mobility of gang members in rival neighborhoods is limited, even when family visits are concerned. Regarding internal gang organization, there is no stable, predetermined structure. For instance, choosing leaders or determining task assignments is very often performed on an *ad hoc* basis.<sup>7</sup> However the possession of a firearm and the demonstration of unusual courage act as a differentiating element in terms of leadership and command of the structure of a gang.

Age is also an important factor in determining task assignment within the gang. Very often, the older members beat up the younger ones and force them to undertake risky tasks (for instance keeping stolen objects), since they cannot be prosecuted. In these situations, having a firearm may contribute to reverse the situation of abuse of younger members by older ones.

Having a gun means a lot. Because when you have a gun you feel no one’s going to take advantage of you. When I was little, a lot of people took advantage of me, but after I was twelve and had my first gun, nobody ever took advantage of me anymore. (Interview with an inmate of São Martinho prison, Santiago, 2008)

Another difference which is noteworthy between the two case studies is the degree of violence associated to criminality in each city. The astonishment of the population in Bissau, for instance, when faced with certain types of crime involving firearms today, is a good

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<sup>7</sup> “Any member can head the gang. The idea to rob can come from any one of them, and every one accepts it” (young participant in a focus group, Praia, 2008).



illustration of the near absence of these instruments in the past. Nonetheless knives and bottles remain the most common weapons used in violent acts.

Meanwhile, the new phenomenon of violence in Praia, namely mugging, known as *kasubódi*, is characterized by the use of seemingly unnecessary, gratuitous violence. In fact, even when no resistance is put up by the victim, there are reports of beatings. Often the mugger is not content to merely take the object he/she wants, as it is the case in robberies to fund drug use.

The only common feature among the practices of urban youth violence in both scenarios is the fact that they are mostly carried out by young men, with the help of young women conducting apparently supporting roles. There are diverse techniques, such as using girls to lure and rob people. Both young men and women are frequently characterized by society as wanting more than they are allowed to have.

The social origin of young offenders in Praia can be pinpointed to the most peripheral neighborhoods of the city, characterized by social exclusion. Many of these offenders dropped out of school or are unemployed. However, these gangs also include young middle class students, known as the 'elite thugs', who move into organized gangs, committing murders with firearms as well as minor muggings. In Bissau there is not enough data to determine the social origin of the young people involved in violent acts. However, firearm offences are usually referred to as being carried out by middle or upper class youth, as a way of demonstrating power.

Regarding the prevention of the emergence of new types of violence in Bissau and Praia, it is of utter importance to analyze anew the causes of mobilization or non-mobilization of the young in the light of each context. Thus, we will discuss why structural violent conditions do not always favor the involvement of youths in collective violence by examining the specificities of each case: Bissau and Praia.

## **2. State, Development and Inequalities**

One of the most mentioned causes for youth's participation in collective violence, specially regarding participation in wars, is the collapse of post-Cold War neo-patrimonial states – a period characterized by the marginalization of the African continent and by a decrease of external aid, which formed the basis for survival of extraverted States (Richards, 1996) – as well as the exclusivist nature of these states and the failure of their education systems

(Abbink, 2005: 24). In addition, a profound awareness of the shortcomings of development and the inability of a large number of post-colonial states to formulate successful development models have caused great dissatisfaction, especially for those excluded from neo-patrimonial networks that enable access to resources, as is the case of a vast majority of African youngsters. However, the impact of State collapse on youth is not only related to economic distribution and employment. It has also repercussions in the access to education or health as well as to justice and to security within the community. In fact, youngsters are often those who take charge of neighborhood security, namely through the organization of vigilante groups.

State collapse is disguisedly conveyed through the induction of certain models of State and of development, and through the application of international prescriptions repeated *ad nauseum* in what regards ‘peacebuilding’ or ‘statebuilding’. The ingredients for this recipe are the economic opening of peripheral countries, the creed of private initiative, privatization and austerity; the transfer of the functions of social protection to the formal and informal networks outside the State, the replication of the formal and apparently functional institutions of the State; a low intensity democracy; and, most importantly, the creation of few and bad jobs at global level (Sogge, 2010; Pureza *et al.*, 2007). The emptying of the social functions of the State is somehow an international application of what Loïc Wacquant describes in national terms as the paradox of the neoliberal’s penal project. It advocates “more State” in the law enforcement areas, criminal courts and prisons in order to solve the generalized increase of objective and subjective insecurity which is, itself, caused by “less State” in the economic and social spheres in the advanced First World countries (Wacquant, 2001).

In this sense, contexts presenting a deterioration of living standards as well as greater social inequality and exclusion, even amidst settings of apparent economic progress (Praia), are possibly more favorable to the proliferation of violent forms of behavior than contexts of persistent widespread poverty (Bissau). It is then important to underline that it is not (under)development or poverty that promotes youth collective violence. What can trigger violent reactions or not is the distribution of gains and losses of development and of economic crises as well as the notion of disempowerment.

In addition to the above, youth is not only excluded by the formal sector of the economy and by international and domestic State policies, but also by the leaders and ‘the elders’ in the so-called traditional societies, which escaped the hegemonic presence of the

State (Sigrist, 2001). On the one hand, the degree of social control exerted over the youth in some societies has led to a 'youth crisis' and to inter-generational conflicts, which are related to the lack of access to land and women and to economic dependence from 'big men' (Richards *et al.*, 2004). On the other hand, the lack of control and the dissolution of old social bonds of obedience are often pointed out as justifying youth involvement in crime or in violent groups in urban areas. Contrastingly bonds of solidarity and socialization (not necessarily violent) are also strengthened between peers in urban areas (Sévédé-Bardem, 1997) in opposition to organizational models based on the hierarchical family and on the power of the elderly.

Even if Bissau displays the conditions for adopting a perspective of development failure, responsible for part of the mobilization for the 1998-99 conflict, this structural condition does not seem to mobilize youth towards large-scale criminality or towards peacetime organized violence. Parallel to the immediate factors which triggered this military conflict (arms trafficking involving the military and politicians), the 1998 mobilization can be analyzed as a sign of protest against an exclusivist State which failed to achieve development as well as a strategy or a form of social becoming in a context with few opportunities (Vigh, 2006). The economic situation of the country was in fact deteriorating by the end of the 80's, when structural adjustment programs were imposed, which led to the near collapse of the State's material and human structures and to its withdrawal from the 'social sphere'.

Thus, if the chronic and persistent lack of 'development' does not necessarily lead to widespread urban violence, a step back in the progress achieved and the creation of new inequalities can do so. In 1996, Augel and Cardoso wrote that despite all the attacks to which the political and economic systems were subjected, 'the social and economic situation remains surprisingly solid' (Augel and Cardoso, 1996: 51). It is however necessary to question the extent to which this situation remains as solid as it is claimed to be, considering the aftermath of an armed conflict with economic consequences which were more severe than those of the Rwanda genocide. Indeed, the post-war period was characterized by the dismantlement of the productive sectors, the failure of development projects and programs dating back to the country's independence and the progressive criminalization of the State.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> There are estimates that Guinea-Bissau's GDP would be 42% higher were it not for the conflict, whereas in Rwanda it would only be 25-30% higher, had it not been for the 1994 genocide (World Bank, 2006: 49-50). Notwithstanding, it is not possible to state what the specific contribution of the conflict was, separating it from the country's previously existing conditions (liberalization and privatization in the 1980s and 90s), and, on the

The consequences of modernization and centralizing processes, of the food crisis and of the inability of external aid to respond to this scenario, can quickly lead to a widespread inability to prevent frustration or to come up with alternative means of survival.

When young people in Bissau were asked about the reasons that underlie the non-adherence to armed group violence, they cited precisely the ‘lack of development’, which allegedly made them less capable, less ‘knowledgeable’, less trained and less able to imitate other countries’ models. In fact, although they are possibly faced with even deeper forms of unemployment, dependence and lack of education and opportunities, Bissau’s youngsters do not have the capability or the will to organize towards violence. Additionally, they generally do not regard violence as a legitimate means of acquiring resources or status, precisely because, notwithstanding the growing urbanization, Bissau residents still know almost everybody and thus it would be difficult to evade family and community control, as the above quotation may exemplify:

Rivalries exist, but there is no grudge... because here we are mostly families [...] I’m your friend, but for now I’m treating you as a brother. Your family is my family; my family is your family, so let’s leave it like that. This way is difficult to hold that grudge. (Interview with a young man, Bissau, 2008)

Furthermore, as stated before, youth with average secondary schooling levels may be more prone to violence when they find no outlet for their aspirations. Also, a superior inequality index<sup>9</sup> is likely to be more favorable to violent strategies since the imbalance between youth’s aspirations and their fulfillment is higher.

In a certain way, the absence of violence related to juvenile groups is related to the extreme degree of normalization and acceptance of structural and daily violence, which often presents itself as a fatal acceptance of destiny, as we can see by the words of R. “I’m resigned with my poverty... there are people who feel marginalized, but I don’t”.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast with Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde has ‘scored’ on development. In the set of Portuguese Speaking African countries, it is internationally perceived as a ‘good performer’, a model country, both in the way it has conducted the transition to a multi-party system from

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other hand, it would be necessary to examine the role of international institutions in creating an economic context favourable to war mobilization.

<sup>9</sup> According to the Human Development Report 2009, the Gini Index in Cape Verde is 50.5 while in Guinea Bissau is 35.5: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/161.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with a young man, Bissau, 2008.

the early 1990s onwards and in the way it has efficiently managed international aid since its independence in 1975. Some recent dynamics attest the international recognition of Cape Verde's development,<sup>11</sup> a small archipelago, whose main development sources are exogenous, namely international aid and emigrant remittances.

Despite this trajectory, exceptional in sub-Saharan African terms (with above average life-expectancy, educational, economic growth rates), unemployment and poverty continue to pose real problems and important challenges for the Cape Verdean State and population. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the relation between economic growth, resulting from the growing inclusion of Cape Verde in the global economy, and the increase of social inequality, which can be seen, for instance, in Praia's urban landscape itself, where shanty towns proliferate side by side with gated condominiums. On the one hand, if the supply of material and symbolic products is far bigger and up-to-date than before, on the other hand, the access to these products is increasingly shrinking for a meaningful fraction of the population, where young people represent a significant percentage.

What decisively influences the increase and diversification of urban violence carried out by the young are the processes of urbanization and social change which have taken place over the past decades in Bissau and Praia.

Over the past ten years, Praia has experienced a context of tension and conflict marked by an accelerated urban growth, resulting from internal migration and from immigration from a number of countries on the West African coast.<sup>12</sup> This alone has magnified pressure on housing conditions (insufficient electricity supply and basic sanitation coverage, as well as other household amenities) and on access to the job market, or at least the perception that this is the case. In this context, the number of very poor outlying neighborhoods has grown, which are characterized by economic and social vulnerability, such as alcohol abuse and unemployment or precarious working conditions.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, there is a set of rapid changes, including growing social inequality and exclusion, which specifically affects an extremely young population (53 percent of which is under 20 years of age).

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<sup>11</sup> The absence of armed conflicts in Cape Verde's history also contributed to this positive classification. Furthermore, the country recently signed a special partnership accord with the European Union, was removed from the group of Least Developed Countries and entered into the World Trade Organisation.

<sup>12</sup> The population of Praia consists of approximately 120,000 inhabitants and the total population of Cape Verde is approximately 400,000 inhabitants.

<sup>13</sup> Cape Verdean families consist mostly of single parent (mothers) families, as a result of male emigration, among other factors.

In Bissau, the lack of urban planning policies as well as of functional and accessible public services, including water and electricity, turns everyday life into a constant struggle for minimum living conditions.<sup>14</sup> The deterioration of the living conditions after the conflict is confirmed by 77 percent of the population, being higher in urban areas (80 percent) than in rural areas (74 percent) (World Bank, 2006: 27). The post-conflict period was characterized by the absence of consistent, large-scale rehabilitation policies. Also, trust in institutions, leaders and neighbors seems to have crumbled (World Bank, 2006: 13). In such a context of low levels of trust in official authorities, youngsters in particular also do not seem to trust much of the so-called traditional authorities either.<sup>15</sup> They are thus doubly marginalized in their access to justice. The situation of the judiciary and of the police easily leads to corruption and to the discredit of formal justice mechanisms, in a context in which even traditional justice appears to have weakened. Thus, a sort of “penal society” is reinforced, where groups of youngsters assume and reproduce the functions of police and judiciary authorities and even of the so called “traditional” authorities, under the form of unorganized “popular justice” (persecutions and lynching), very often targeting scapegoats. The groups of “vigilantes” in Bissau’s neighborhoods, which occupy several dozens of youths namely associated in *bancadas*,<sup>16</sup> find support in globalized versions of crime prevention in other parts of the world and in national and international organizations<sup>17</sup> and do not always use non violent methods:

Sometimes, some youngsters are there [a place called Caracol] waiting for someone to come and mug them and steal everything they have. We believe that this is not good. We feel we must address those eligible [the police], but if we go there they will not provide us support for they don’t perceive us a large organization. But lately an association was created who caught, tied and bit them and it [criminality] diminished... Only after it stopped working because they caught some and left others who they knew and with which they had family relations, and stopped doing it, some thought it was not worthwhile doing, because they were doing it for the neighborhood and others were carried away by acquaintance [of those caught] and ended up abandoning it [...] If you assault someone or stab, we are the ones who will catch you, we’ll respond accordingly.

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<sup>14</sup> The inhabitants are calculated at about 300,000 to 400,000, in a country of about 1.2 million. Only 13% of Bissau’s population has access to electricity and in a very discontinuous way.

<sup>15</sup> Data from another Peace Studies Group survey on human security carried out in Guinea-Bissau point to widespread low levels of trust in traditional institutions as well as in their public counterparts. This is higher in rural areas, but our survey is mainly directed at the urban youth (Roque, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Groups of youngsters, who gather at a specific location in the neighborhoods to spend time, talk and organize activities together.

<sup>17</sup> See as an example the national version of the Youth Crime Watch of America in: <http://www.ycwa.org/world/gbissau/index.html>.

If we can resolve your problem here, we'll resolve it instantly, if not, we'll lead you directly to the police. They'll assault you too and will leave you there (interview the leader of one *bancada*, Bissau, 2009).

Despite the recognition of the formal authority in crime fighting, these youngsters act by mimicking society and police action. However, their discourse still reveals a paradoxical relation with the police who, on one hand, is conniving with their methods, but on the other hand, has a negative image of the youngsters for their gathering in *bancada* and having behaviors which are considered negative, such as smoking. The action of the quoted youngsters is based not only on the fundamental need of undertaking neighborhood security, but also on the need of a form of social recognition which is denied, at first, by the imagery of the unoccupied, lazy, delinquent youngster:

Who shall we ask for help to protect us? The police??? They won't see us as they should. They'll see us as simple people 'who sit' [people who do not have an occupation], and usually call us thugs. They don't know our intelligence, what we think. We only say that people shouldn't see the *bancadas* as places where thieves are. It's normal because they say that people of the *bancadas* smoke. And there are some people who smoke in fact, and so they [the police] think it is normal to smoke here and to commit crimes. But in the *bancadas* people do not smoke drugs; people smoke cigarettes. In our *bancada* we don't allow people to smoke. If you sit there you can't smoke. We ask the person to go smoke somewhere else so that they don't ruin our name. (Interview with the leader of one *bancada*, Bissau, 2009)

By acting in a violent manner, these groups of youngsters are a mirror of a society and of a political power based on impunity, on the inability to prosecute crime suspects and violent acts, and to punish them. Consequentially, the logic of immediate punishment accepted by society and the authorities prevails. The invisibility of this type of involvement of youngsters in violent acts is still due to the fact that this is fundamentally a violence of poor against poor – unlike what happens in Cape Verde, where violence starts to reach the upper and middle classes. Only then does it become a social and political problem to consider.

Besides these cases of socially accepted collective violence, youth of Bissau do not seem to seek violence in ways which have become more and more common in Praia, such as forming violent gangs. This is due perhaps to the fact that they find this 'adrenaline' in socialization mechanisms among peers, which are less violent. Nevertheless, along the same lines, the surveys to Cape Verdean youth in the neighborhoods of Praia highlight as the main

factors leading to violence the lack of activities for the young, long term unemployment and underemployment and the lack of options for job training.

### **3. Social Becoming and the Construction of Violent Identities**

Young people are very often viewed through a dichotomized perspective: either ‘as victims of drugs and brainwashing forced to fight, a collective of irrational killing machines’, or as ‘the vanguards of [...] liberation struggles and as voices against colonial oppression and injustice.’ (McIntyre, 2005: 1). According to this author, both perspectives derive from the lack of in-depth analysis on the choices, motivations and ambitions of young soldiers who end up being the ‘invisible stakeholders’ of conflicts (McIntyre, 2005: 3). This failure is also identified by researchers, such as Argenti (2002), who highlight the lack of analysis of the aspirations, needs and survival strategies of young African soldiers.

The question arises: to what extent is the participation in non-war collective violence driven by a particular political agenda of the young? As argued by Abdullah (2002: 2), participation in conflicts is very often perceived as a job or as a way of ‘becoming somebody’. Belonging to armed groups creates the illusion of equality and erosion of hierarchies, as pointed out by Richards (1996). In this way, gangs emerge as new models of social integration and community cohesion. In these contexts, violence turns into a form of ‘social navigation’ in unstable and adverse environments, as demonstrated in the case of youth mobilization for war in Guinea-Bissau (Vigh, 2006).

As far as social becoming is concerned, an analysis that mentions the gender of youth is of utter importance. Youth, especially when examined in contexts of violence, tends to be initially thought of as an abstract, universal and asexual category, although in practice it means that one thinks of young men. Above all it is when studying young women that the need is felt to include gender analysis. Nevertheless, when men are the object of study it is also necessary to take into account and investigate their perceptions of gender, the way the different types of masculinity influence the different types of violence committed or endured by those same young men (Barker, 2005; Moura, 2007). This analysis should not only encompass domestic violence or gender violence, but all types of violence, examining it in the light of a process of construction of an identity, of self-affirmation or belonging.

In this sense, Kynoch argues that despite the multiplicity of factors – class, political affiliation, rituals, ethnicity, generation (age) and gender – that are essential to an



understanding of the construction of identities, gangs are transversally based on the subjugation of women and on a violent masculinity (Kynoch, 1999: 58). In the words of Michael Kimmel, “the violence perpetrated in name of a certain type of masculinity is not so much the result of an identity, as it is above all an attempt to re-establish power and thus to belong to a ‘group’” (Kimmel, 2005). Also, Gary Barker’s analysis of the reasons which trigger youth in several urban centers around the world to join gangs and armed groups, leading them to ‘kill or die to achieve a legitimate version of masculinity’, shows that demands for a dominant version of masculinity in contexts of economic and social inequality worldwide are related to the possibility of acquiring goods, money, respect and women (Barker, 2005). However, the means each young person is willing to use, or which are available to him or her, mark the frontiers between adopting a violent or a non-violent model of masculinity or femininity. In fact, violent masculinities and femininities can be constructed and legitimized in different ways in face of different types of violence. For instance, even if violence in the public sphere is not socially accepted as a means of attaining a powerful masculinity, it may be accepted in the so-called private domain.

The few records of collective violence and criminality in Bissau are often connected with attempts to gain control over girls through material resources, since women are not very accessible to young men. This happens not only because marriage implies resources and the ability to maintain a family, but also because in this context of generalized poverty they often prefer older men with resources. When questioned about this, young men usually describe this as violence committed against them by girls, while at the same time they understand women’s preferences within this economic setting and in some way legitimize it as a survival strategy. Nonetheless, most of the time young men feel revolted against these processes and some consider violent and illegal means to attain girls:

Some boys become attractive to girls because they have money and the girls are influenced by money. In Guinea [Bissau], there are three factors in order to be admired: luxury [label clothes], money and the factor of having many girls. Money is respect and fame: who creates it is the government and the elders who chase girls, give them things... After, when they leave the government, that ends... (Interview with a group of youngsters, Buba, Guinea Bissau, 2010)

This “discrimination” is seen at some point as normal due to the widespread perception among youth that it is impossible to change social norms and economic statuses. In the

meantime, even though it does not cause a violent revolt from the youths towards the elder, it may lead them to become part of groups which use violence as a form of acquisition of income. It may also increase gender based violence as a form of giving back to the youths what is denied to them:

Violence increases during festivity seasons because girls ask for things and they may ask other boys and so the boyfriends beat them up because they have neither the means nor jobs (interview with a group of youngsters, Bafata, Guinea Bissau).

The issue of gender identity and power relations is also present in forms of non-violent sociability. Young men see “women-free” spaces as a way to prevent conflict between them. They try to escape from female presence and their so-called power (of dividing men) by creating male exclusive spaces. Even when present in groups such as *bancadas*, women usually do not have the same status as men and only participate in specific events, such as parties. Few women try to create their own space among peers in the public realm, but those who do usually create groups with extremely sexualized performances, such as dance groups or beauty pageant contests. Others prefer to cope with this inequality by using the available strategies to access status and material gains, that is, through men. In a context where the possibilities of wealth are even more connected with illegal and violent strategies, this means that many girls may perceive their mates’ violence as a legitimate way of taking care of them.

The construction of gender identities in Cape Verde also reflects a prevailing hegemonic version of a violent masculinity and a passive femininity. Whereas such hegemonic vision envisages, on the one hand, the man as the strongest and the provider for the family, on the other hand, it envisages the woman in the domestic sphere, at home taking care of children and, consequently, too frail and dependent on the man. Amongst the motivations which lead youngsters to become thugs one can point out the following: the opportunity to have several girlfriends and thus the possibility of keeping them safe; the access to a greater status among peers; and the access to brand clothing. Young women in gangs, who are for the most part the girlfriends of one or more gang members, tend to perform a specific role - they are used to lure ‘victims’, acting as ‘bait’.

Social organization in Guinea-Bissau is characterized by great diversity, with more or less hierarchical societies and with different means of achieving social status and belonging,

namely through rites of passage. In a society organized along age and class lines<sup>18</sup>, as it is the case of some Guinea-Bissau ethnic groups, the ability to control youth's violent potential has proved to be crucial in avoiding serious inter-generational conflicts<sup>19</sup>. It is essential to highlight the importance of these control mechanisms linked to age, which act as decisive elements in the context of negotiating, preventing and resolving conflicts, and mitigating violence. Violent rituals, including physical punishment, have progressively been left behind and inter-generational conflicts are often resolved without violence. However, there are countless reports of forced marriages. Although symbolic threats are still used in situations where rites of passage are not undertaken, there is some opening up to social changes, which have led young people to question polygamy, for instance.

Apart from this traditional-rural societies approach, in the urban context of Bissau, solidarity among peers and respective forms of integration and association through formal or informal associations, may lead youth to refuse violence and criminality. The *bancadas* that we mentioned previously are mostly non-violent groups. These groups of youths based on solidarity amongst peers, mainly males, constitute forms of juvenile association, such as youth gangs, without the criminal activities and the degree of violence which characterize the latter. Despite being ways of occupation of the youths, of learning with the eldest and of social control – almost always located in front or in the middle of the neighborhood, where the eldest can control – they are yet seen, as mentioned before, by the eldest mostly as a potentially destabilizing source of political and military manipulation. The forms whereby these dynamics can also lead to violence, besides the involvement of some of the youngsters in aforementioned popular justice processes, are yet to be analyzed. Some respondents, for instance, divide the 'good *bancadas*', dedicated to organizing football championships, sweeping streets and setting up parties, from the 'evil *bancadas*', allegedly used to bring youth together to drink and use drugs or to organize robberies and burglaries.

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<sup>18</sup> Former President Nino Vieira gathered significant support from age-based solidarity groups. On the other hand, it was also solidarity around these groupings which contributed to his defeat in the 1989-99 conflict, as an expression of discontentment with the political and economic regime (Koudawo, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> According to Marina Temudo, after the independence older people were able to increasingly concede freedom and economic independence to young people. Thus, in the absence of a strong inter-generational tension, youth did not feel motivated to join war. However, the possibility remains that they may do so when youngsters distance themselves from the majority party (PAIGC) and seek new sources of income, recognition and social status (Temudo, 2006).

In Cape Verde, there are no social controls mechanisms related to ethnicity or traditional agrarian societies for instance. Family and churches as well as a more functional education system play a fundamental role in this context.

#### **4. Transnational Flows: Triggering violence?**

Violent structural and cultural conditions do not automatically generate youth collective violence. Youth violence may thus be fostered by mediation or triggering factors that include the availability of small arms, the existence of illegal drug markets, the takeover of youth dynamics which were originally not violent by organized crime, and the adoption of globalized lifestyles, behavior, expectations and consumer habits. Briceño-León and Zubillaga consider that in the Latin American context the process of globalized violence can be analyzed based on five specific, interrelated processes:

(1) the changes occurring in the drug economy; (2) the massive proliferation of firearms; (3) the similarity of the cultural patterns of violence and the emergence of an actor – the young man from a marginal neighborhood; (4) a generalized fear among the population; and (5) citizen support for extralegal action by the police (Briceño-León and Zubillaga, 2002: 23).

Within this framework, the factors that enable violence take on a significant importance which can be summarized as follows: “globalization is democratic and egalitarian in spreading expectations, but it is inequitable in providing the means to satisfy them (*idem*: 28).

This paper argues that these same consequences and processes of globalization are producing similar results in African contexts, even if with different proportions, mostly in those with lower social resilience to global changes, leading to the standardization of young people’s behaviors. It is true that in some African contexts, due to the ‘triple crisis involving the family, the nation and the state’, the youth is seen as an instrument of change, once it is strongly influenced by the intersection between the local and the global. They are opening “new avenues of political action and expression that may be violent or nonviolent, formal or informal” (Diouf, 2003: 2-3).

#### *Bissau and Praia on the International Cocaine Trafficking Route*

Differently from legal flows, Guinea-Bissau is very much sought by drug and arms trafficking networks. Drug trafficking has in fact grown drastically over the past five or six

years. It appears that the international cocaine route, with originated in Latin America and which passed through Cape Verde to its ultimate destination, Europe, was re-routed through Guinea-Bissau, as a result of increased controls.<sup>20</sup> It is a fact that Guinea-Bissau, like other countries in this region, has drawn close international attention, due to the drugs seized in its territory, the increasing presence of South Americans, to whom the authorship of this type of activity is attributed; and also due to the publicized reports regarding the breakdown of border controls and even the association of local authorities to cocaine trafficking.

In addition to Guinea-Bissau being a staging-post for this trade, general concern about the increase in drug use in Bissau is growing. Several local accounts on crack use, which was not frequent up until recently, should be further investigated. More and more drug trafficking is associated to a potential increase in violence. There is the risk that these routes may become a preferential source of income for the vast majority of unemployed youth in Bissau, in a context of decreasing alternative resources, such as international aid. The widespread feeling of impunity and low life expectancy make it even more acceptable to grasp chances for quick money-making. Along these lines, one of our interviewees stated that ‘Drugs are going to bring development!’

Like Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, due to its strategic location and the vulnerability of its coast, has served as a major revolving door in drug trafficking between Latin America, Europe and North America. Reports of the constant seizing of drugs signal the increase of controls. However, there is still a long way to go in terms of adopting effective policies and enhancing border control. It must be noted that the type of violence associated to drug trafficking has brought in new, ‘more professional’ criminal methods and practices, hitherto unheard of in Cape Verde, such as ‘contract killings’, ‘score settling’, ‘burning archives’, and so forth. A significant increase in this type of crime was recorded in the first years of the 2000s (2003, 2004 and 2005). The murder of a flight attendant, employed by the national carrier, TACV, who had been arrested for drug trafficking, in one of the country’s main prisons, São Martinho Prison, is a paradigmatic example of this new type of activity. This inmate was one of the main witnesses of a case of an alleged international drug trafficking network.<sup>21</sup>

There have also been cases of corruption related to drug trafficking and involvement of officers of the National Police and of the Judiciary Police, along with the alleged

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<sup>20</sup> ‘South American drug traffickers reported in Guinea-Bissau’, Reuters, 24 September 2006.

<sup>21</sup> *A Semana*, 14 December 2007.

participation of immigrants from the west coast (for instance, Nigerians) and an increase in the number of the so-called ‘couriers’ – people, most of whom poor women, who are persuaded into carrying small quantities of drugs.

*Firearms: An issue?*

According to government estimates, there are approximately 25,000 illegal small arms and light weapons in Guinea-Bissau. However, according to NGOs’ data, there are 75,000 weapons circulating in the country. It is rather difficult to access official figures, since sources of information are scattered, difficult to access, or there is an unwillingness to make the information available. According to a government official, legal imports and exports are virtually negligible, and there is allegedly greater control in granting licenses. Nevertheless, the existence of porous borders makes Guinea-Bissau a preferred staging-post for arms trafficking, for instance, to Casamance (Senegal).

Weapons in private hands are a widespread phenomenon. For example, anyone can have access to a weapon for hunting purposes. However, several interviewees regard with great concern the use of weapons by soldiers, former soldiers and their families (above all, their children and youngsters), showing the insufficiency (or virtual non-existence) of efforts to disarm soldiers in the post-conflict era. Thus weapons tread new paths, being used in burglaries, in night-life areas associated to drug trafficking – there are reports of shoot-outs in places known for drugs’ sale- and in the public space as trivialized instruments, which replace other types of weapons, namely cutting objects.

Additionally, there is significant home-made production of firearms in the country, which is, nevertheless, the easiest to identify. However, there is little or no serious analysis of the potential use of these weapons – in contexts of war and peace – or of its impact. In addition, there are several myths and rumors about countless buried or concealed weapons, whose whereabouts are known only to certain ethnic groups or local chiefs. These weapons could pose a threat, should the latter decide to embark on political uprisings. But perhaps of even greater concern is the lack of knowledge regarding the use and circuits of non-buried and non-concealed weapons. In general, symbolic disarmament programs have been carried out, however with no concern for mapping, analyzing or regulating weapons and their potential threat. Without this, these programs appear to be strategies purely designed to obtain international funding.

In Cape Verde, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons also results from the country's vulnerability, considering its coast and territorial waters, as well as its national legislation, which, for instance, limits a more efficient action by the Fiscal Police (a division of the National Police). This police force has reduced powers and is not allowed to inspect cargo, for instance. Since a large part of the weapons enters the country through sea routes (for there is greater control at airports, namely scanners, metal detectors, etc.), it is essential to implement tight vigilance in the country's main ports as well as to update the legislation with the aim of improving the control capability at the Customs level (Cardoso, 2008).

The current general feeling in Praia is that anyone can own a weapon, if they want to, since these can allegedly be easily purchased at Sucupira, the city's main market. The ever more frequent shoot-outs between rival gangs and cases where containers packed with weapons and ammunitions are seized seem to confirm that weapons have become indeed more accessible.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, 'when there are muggings, there are no leaders, but when there are fights between gangs, the leader is there. He's the one with the gun' (Young men participating in a focus group in Praia).

There are cases where parents themselves urge their children to acquire a firearm for self-defense purposes.<sup>23</sup> Access to firearms is facilitated by the production of home-made weapons (known as *boka bedju*), whose sophistication has been growing. These are allegedly manufactured in the interior of the Island of Santiago and in some neighborhoods of Praia.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the issue of disarming the population begins to be seriously taken into consideration by the Cape Verdean authorities.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 'It's worse here than in Brazil [...] the violence never stops. You're at home and it sounds like corn popping. There's shooting all over the place.' – Interview with a woman resident in the Achada Grande neighborhood. Cape Verde National Television (2009), report broadcast 'Urban violence – disquiet in Cape Verdean society'.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> The Creole terms *boka* and *bedju* mean, respectively: 'mouth' and 'old or hard'. The phrase *boka bedju* is used to characterize people who, even without sound arguments, hotly defend their views to the point of sheer stubbornness.

<sup>25</sup> Recently (in the end of May), the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, organized a workshop entitled 'Public Dialogue on the Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons in Cape Verde', with the aim of gathering data and contributions to apply a national survey on arms dissemination. This survey will act as a basis for drawing up a national Plan to control firearms' production, trade and ownership of in Cape Verde, in [www.asemana.cv](http://www.asemana.cv).

#### **4. Youth and Securitization: Re-thinking policies**

The relation between youth and violence has been mostly explored starting from the definition of youths as being male, poor, and located “on the margins”, both geographically and socially (Bordonaro, 2007). This happens because the youth is considered to be mostly a practitioner of violence, an aggressor or potential aggressor, and not the victim. The universalization of the threat to public order, internal or international, and the need to create scapegoats for the flaws of the neoliberal projects, either at domestic or international levels, result in the expansion of the image of what was called “the young man from marginal neighborhoods” (Briceño-León and Zubillaga, 2002: 23). The opportunities for survival or affirmation of this “young man” are limited to emigration and carrying out of fast (and illegal) income generating activities.

The same reasons have also led to the creation of standardized policies of contention of the potential (of) violence of youngsters based on processes of (de)politicization, and on the internalization of the causes of violence and the externalization of the answers.

We divide these policies in two major tendencies, those of overt securitization and geographical confinement or distancing – including deportation policies and the increase in penitentiary incarceration; and those of lesser obvious control of the youths, or disguised securitization. The latter include the absorption by the aid-system, by reproducing hollow associative models, by promoting youth self-control (endless AIDS projects or yet still “peace culture” promotion are an example of this) or by mystifying “spontaneous organization” phenomena and “individual survival strategies” of the informal economy, which amount to an acceptance of the resignation of the State and of the organizations which occupy themselves with “development”, job promotion and stability of resources (Sévédé-Bardem, 1997: 56). These measures, often considered as violence prevention measures, usually however give rise to a securitarian approach. Their results are at best mixed in containing violences that affect youngsters – either as victims, or as aggressors.

As mentioned above, in Cape Verde, in the early 2000s, thug criminality has become a frequent theme in countless media news pieces and reports, having altered some social habits and security perceptions of Cape-Verdeans, particularly among the habitants of the city of Praia. We underline here the role played by the media in amplifying and exacerbating this social phenomenon, especially during the initial stage of its emergence. At that time, when characteristics, consequences and stimulating factors of this type of violence were almost



completely unknown, the media contributed towards “creating moral panic” in the Cape Verdean society (Bordonaro, 2009).

The conception and implementation of measures aimed at combating urban violence (police reinforcement, military presence in the streets, namely in the peripheries, creation of socio-educative centers, a more punitive than re-integrative prison system) have revealed so far little attention to the micro and macro-social conditions which contextualize this violence. The emphasis has been placed on the individual variables and not on the structural alterations occurred in Cape Verde in the last years (for instance, inequality, individualized and consumption society, poverty and social exclusion, changes in the family structure, unemployment, school abandonment, and mistrust in the institutions). In our view, this approach illustrates the logic of alignment towards global crime eradication and prevention policies, which has been directed by repression and by securitization and by the “criminalization of the poor and outcast” (Wacquant, 2001).

In some cases, the police has adopted disproportionate repressive action, namely through the assignment of patrolling duties to the Military Police. Moreover, there are some reports of the ill-treatment of young people which, for instance, have reached the National Human Rights and Citizenship Commission.<sup>26</sup> Due to increasing insecurity, the population itself demands a more direct and incisive intervention by the authorities. However, there seems to be no adequate response to the problem of juvenile delinquency, due to the non-existence of alternative response mechanisms and equipments – a significant number of young gang members are under the age of 16 and thus cannot be prosecuted. Efforts to create and organize structures – such as reception centers – which can deal with this phenomenon have only recently come into being and are still poorly consolidated. Some analyses have reached the conclusion that in many countries juvenile detention centers are inadequate and do not contribute to an effective social re-insertion (Dowdney, 2005: 305).

Regarding the causes for the appearance of thugs and juvenile violence in Cape Verde, we verified that often people identified deported youngsters, mainly from the USA, who in the last years have arrived in growing numbers to the archipelago, as the thrusters of the arising of these groups. This association has to do in large measure, on the one hand, with the

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<sup>26</sup> The government has decided to renew the presence of the Military Police on the streets of Praia as a way of reinforcing public safety, which has been jeopardized in the past few days by several types of crime, namely the murder of a driver of the public transport company, Moura Company. This measure was met with a great deal of criticism, namely from the leader of the main opposition party, see *Expresso das Ilhas*, 16/09/2008 “Militares voltam às ruas da Praia”, <http://www.expressodasilhas.sapo.cv/pt/noticias/go/militares-voltam-as-ruas-da-praia>.

fact that the practice of crimes is often at the origin of the deportation, and on the other hand, with the fact that the deportees face situations of exclusion in the process of (re)integration in the country. So, in concomitance with the success stories of Cape Verdean emigrants, immediately after the independence the first cases of deportees appear. The phenomenon gained some expression after the 80's, and presently there are a significant number of deportees, 844 in 2007.<sup>27</sup> Much more important than centering our attention on the analysis of the relation between deportees and juvenile collective violence in Cape Verde, and on the perception of the role that these deportees may have performed while reproducers of forms of criminal organization “learnt” in foster countries, we would like to underline the importance of understanding deportation as a global regulatory mechanism, of social control, an item of the liberal peace agenda. In a context branded by the incessant search for scapegoats, by the opposition between friend and enemy, by dehumanization, by marginalization and criminalization of youngsters, we believe it is essential to draw attention to this point.

In our perspective, this link is visible at both ends of the process. While in the foster countries there is a simplification of procedures in the juridical-political frame which facilitate deportation and make the “deportable” more vulnerable; in the (so called) countries of origin, the deportees are a target of social stigma and in many cases depend upon (re)integration programs which end up by not contributing to alter this label, due to their strong charitable propensity. Deportation in its current version contains elements which are analogous to historic deportations. Like in the past deportations continue to be motivated by logics of punishment and of depuration of society. The candidates “chosen” to be deported are members of society which by their origin or other more circumstantial factors cannot fit into the ideal citizen pattern defined by States in certain socio-political contexts.

In Guinea-Bissau, despite the omnipresence of structural and symbolic violence that affects the whole of the society, the most visible faces of violence are political-military conflicts and the systematic physical eliminations motivated by the struggle for resources associated with attaining power within the State. It was indirectly through this path that Guinea-Bissau ended up by becoming a ‘dangerous periphery’ and a target of the control of international interventions.

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<sup>27</sup> According to data from the Instituto das Comunidades (2003) “Projecto de Integração dos Repatriados em Cabo Verde”, Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros Cooperação e Comunidades, Praia, Fevereiro de 2003, [www.governo.cv](http://www.governo.cv).

This control attempt is all but uninterested. The intervention logic has ceased for a very long time to be based on development – in decreasing structural violence – to give place to security considerations only. Even though the rhetoric about the need of coherence between security and development is maintained, in practice the only policies which in fact thrived were those which concerned security issues, now increasingly defined as necessary responses to international security threats. Security Sector Reform (SSR) and the eradication of drug trafficking, with the purpose of “protecting” central countries from the penetration of illegal products<sup>28</sup> - parallel to the existing intervention to “protect themselves” from emigration - became the key elements for keeping the aid flows in the views of the international agencies and donors. The absolute primacy of policies such as security reform, border control police training or even the need to build prisons demonstrates that the security at stake is not that of the population of the country that remains in that area of societal responsibility.

In practice, this has translated into the successive postponement of long-term programs that aim at the socio-economic development of the country, once the main objectives of external intervention have been to implement a penal State in a context where the State has been continuously dismantled over the past decades. To the mirage of the State, securitarian mirages are added, which do not necessarily alter the structures and the exercise of political and economic power, nor the social hierarchies. On the one hand, impunity will remain. On the other hand, the prevalence of fear and mistrust regarding the political-military institutions prevents a more demanding posture from the population in general. This leads to the further acceptance of destiny and marginalization in face of the impossibility of change in the political realm.

At the same time, in the context of global securitization, young Guinea Bissau's citizens are being brand marked as potential drug traffickers. An imminent risk of youth criminalization surrounds international peacebuilding policies. In the attempt to maintain a good social image, some youths end up by being transformed into passive pawns of the international aid market logic. Making the youth responsible and guilty for violence reveals how much structural violence is made natural. Normative and moral mechanisms which conduct almost all international approaches regarding youth are reinforced. Increasingly more

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<sup>28</sup> See a news report based on an interview to the Portuguese Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, in which he states that “the international community needs a stable Guinea-Bissau in order to be able to face drug-trafficking”, assuming indirectly that only self-protection regarding cocaine drug trafficking may guarantee the interest of European countries in Guinea-Bissau, <http://www.noticiaslusofonas.com/view.php?load=arcview&article=27455&catogory=Guin%E9%20Bissau>.

juvenile associations direct their interests towards preventing “juvenile delinquency”, almost always defined as drug use and thefts, without having any kind of knowledge about the different types of drugs or about their effects. In these cases we find a clear instrumentalization of the funds originated from the poverty and insecurity markets, with agendas which distance themselves from reality and that often create even more confusion over the causes of the problems – which are randomly identified - and generate the need to maintain a problematic image of the youths in order to capture these funds. Also, thanks to the potential threat of cocaine trafficking, a job-creation program aimed at the youths was designed and managed by the UNDP in Guinea-Bissau. This program is fundamentally aimed at youth occupation through training programs and micro-credit, motivating “entrepreneur and dynamic” youngsters. The description of the target-group of this project maintains that

the beneficiaries will be chosen according to how precarious their situation is, of their level of exclusion from the job market, but also due to their motivation and determination to become more self-dependent and in a position to advance their own development. (UNDP, 2008)

But the goals are even more ambitious. It is intended that youngsters become “multipliers of peace”, escaping from precarious situations in which they find themselves and serve as an “example” to other youngsters (meaning delinquents and unoccupied). These programs do not take into consideration that in a context where informal and family networks of solidarity provide for most youths’ survival, it is not strange that these do not search work that does not guarantee much more material gains, and may even offer them less status. Sub-Saharan African youths are not offered well paid, stable jobs, nor university training, but rather projects of unqualified job creation in practically non-existent markets and mostly destined to failure.

The result of these interventions is the reiteration and conformation of thought and reality about youths and violence, leading to the polarization between dynamic and entrepreneur youngsters and delinquent youths, who are perceived as having (almost) all the responsibility for the situation in which they find themselves.

## **Conclusions**

As demonstrated above, the way young people deal with inequalities and frustrated expectations, and the ways in which violent identities are (or not) promoted constitute decisive conditions in disseminating or containing youth violence. However, these may take on different forms of organization, depending on the contexts and facilitating conditions. Thus the levels of social inequality seem to be the main structural factor. Whereas in Praia the ways of demanding a less unequal social status increasingly take on violent forms, in Bissau the low levels of inequality make such demands less relevant and more scattered. Control over manifestations and expressions of violence by the youth is particularly effective in Bissau, while it is feeble in Praia, which promotes new forms of control – repressive measures – that often gravitate towards the criminalization of youth. These control measures are often violent, which lead us to understand youth more as victims than as perpetrators of violence.

On the other hand, regardless of the existence of structural or cultural conditions which legitimize certain types of violence, a great deal of attention must be devoted to mechanisms that a) contribute to the organization of violence; and b) facilitate the escalation of violence and contribute to its trivialization (availability and cult of firearms, for instance). In this sense, the different impact of drugs and weapons flows in each country helps to reinforce the social control mechanisms in different ways, which reflect a more globalised identity configuration in the case of the Cape Verdean youth and a more localized one in Guinea-Bissau youth.

Furthermore, within an international setting it is important to highlight that there is the risk that both countries may fall into a security-laden, coercive logic, namely related to migration to European countries and anti-drugs policies, at the expense of effective action directed at the structural causes of these phenomena. There are three reasons which in our perspective sustain this framing: firstly, these forms of intervention do not solve the problem of youth expectations, being irrelevant in the prevention of social affirmation through violence; secondly, the potential resistances to youth violence are omitted; and thirdly, those forms of intervention almost always adopt a conservative standpoint regarding the change of power structures.

First, the already mentioned creation of few and bad jobs results in maintaining inequalities, as well as in the resignation of the State from guaranteeing security and

assistance for and to the poor, in order to dedicate itself only to its elites. With this article we intended to call attention to the structural and symbolic violence spread by the contradiction between the promise of modernization, of consumption, and of liberal peace and the fact that it is never reached by a great part of humanity, despite the expectations that it produces, especially amongst youngsters. The influences of globalization in the adoption of life styles, behaviors, desires and consumption habits in countries and circles of youths considered as peripheral are fundamental in order to understand the involvement of youngsters in violent processes. As we have already mentioned, conflicts and violence do not emerge merely from economic reasons but also from the will to politically claim an improved status and possibilities of social becoming (Vigh, 2006; Barker, 2005; Richards, 1996). This contradicts a strategy which aims at creating badly paid jobs and training that offer no possibility of social rising or recognition.

Second, the non participation of youths in groups or violent activities is usually assumed as a “non-fact”. We have to state that the difficulties of “social existence” do not necessarily provoke violent reactions and that the most part of the youth assume non-violent behaviors. The reasons for this non-violence may be placed in the effectiveness of social control and the satisfaction with their social existence or status. This does not mean that these same reasons may not be constituted as violence in itself, producing alienation, passivity and disbelief instead of violent reactions.

Finally, this kind of interventions, which is often self-justified with the argument of respect for local culture, does not question the hierarchies that affect young Africans as a result of the “exclusion against power and the dependence in relation to ‘men’, ‘parents’ and ‘elders’” (Argenti, 2007: 7). Thus, these interventions refuse social transformations – or in other words modernization, that is connoted with a decay of values and morals. The inclusion of youngsters in policies is instrumentalized and, despite opening way to schemes of individual or collective appropriation of financial means, the incentives given to youngsters do not meet the emancipatory objectives. This is the case, for instance, of most interventions aimed at “gender equality”.

To discipline and control the youngsters who find themselves on the brinks of central societies or on the peripheries is one of the imperatives of a global peace project that seeks to hide the fact that the marginalization and inequalities which it propagates are, themselves, forms of violence. The objective of this project is to put aside the fears and the threats of

central societies and the elites in the peripheries, either through closed private-condos or through emigration control policies. This type of securitarian policies is complemented by policies sought as fundamentally good, of an 'empire in denial' (Chandler, 2006), which reproduce the flaws and vices of the development's industry and peace promotion. Despite being crucial mediation mechanisms between structural violence and the existence (or not) of juvenile collective violence, the issues of the sustained inequalities generated by the type of State induced by the liberal peace model or even the increasingly reduced (non) violent possibilities of claiming a valued status by the youths are neglected.

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