

Understanding “Corruption” in Guinea-Bissau’s Public Sector: Service or Disservice to the Transformation of the Population?

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Abstract

The theme of corruption has dominated the literature surrounding Africa and African governance, primarily narrated by the Global North, leaving no room to present the African standpoint. Taking the public sector of Guinea-Bissau as a case study, this thesis explores what is perceived as corruption in Guinea-Bissau’s capital and how the civil servants justify their conduct as a direct result of institutional dysfunction. Using qualitative data, this article interviewed civil servants to understand: 1) how they attained their jobs and 2) how their careers have aided their personal development as well as those around them. Establishing these factors indicate whether they reached their jobs through corruption and how a role as a civil servant elevates their opportunities and those around them. The findings highlighted three overarching themes: 1) solidarity, 2) obligation and 3) self-interest in which participants used to warrant their corrupt conduct. The author argues that the fraudulent conduct of civil servants is an illustration of the matrix between colonial mentality and Bissau-Guinean morality. Their behaviour may not pose the solution, but it is practical and necessary for the distribution of public resources in the short-term. The thesis will conclude by explaining that the long-term solution is to deal with the root cause of this issue that lays in the institutional dysfunction present in Guinea-Bissau. The state’s inability to reflect the needs of the masses encourages citizens to take on the responsibilities of the country, even when their role does not allow for such discretion.

Keywords: public sector, corruption, Guinea-Bissau, institutional dysfunction, neo-colonialism.

Introduction

The institutions established by the Portuguese in Guinea-Bissau during colonisation functioned in an apartheid-style which segregated the indigenous people of the land. The indigenous population could only integrate into the urban areas if they achieved *assimilado*¹ status. This rule

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¹ *Assimilado* is a term given to Africans who had reached the standards and legal status of a Portuguese citizen. (Mendy, 2014)

meant that after decolonisation, only a small group of elite individuals had the skills required to administer the state, which was dominated by a Cape Verdean minority that abandoned the country shortly after the coup in 1980, initiating the current institutional dysfunction. This article will argue that due to this institutional dysfunction (maladministration of roles), public sector employees have engaged in the redistribution of government resources, which may not always be within their capacity, to support their families and broader communities.

Methodology

Primary research via qualitative interviews was the chosen method of this research paper. Due to the size of Guinea-Bissau, it often gets lost in the region with literature often dominated by countries such as Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. Guinea-Bissau's Lusophone background also causes significant research barriers as the field is largely dominated by English and French literature regarding African Politics. Furthermore, a large amount of work written in the country is obsolete or irrelevant to the subject of corruption. This study took into account that it was imperative to use the advantages of speaking the multiple languages spoken in Guinea-Bissau to explore what is perceived as corrupt conduct. The questions used throughout the research were semi-structured, allowing the participants to explain their perspectives and how their jobs have influenced their private life².

The initial aim of this article was to explore how neo-patrimonial networks³ influence the participant's opportunities in life and how this subsequently trickles down to their family and community. Upon arrival, the study found that civil servants, although engaged in some aspects of the definition of neo-patrimonialism, were not part of patron-client relations, as they did not possess nor need the amount of power typically seen in neo-patrimonial networks. The aim to research neo-patrimonialism was therefore abandoned to explore how civil servants engage in "corrupt" acts in public service capacity. The first few participants were, somewhat, successful in their public service roles. This study also found that to understand how long it took for a public servant to be able to

² See Appendix B for a full interview sample.

³ The term coined by S.N. Eisenstadt (1973) refers to a hierarchical system involving patrons and clients, whereby the former engages in gift-giving of public resources in order to secure loyalty from the latter.

improve the networks, it was essential to interview civil servants with at least ten or more years of work experience. Although there are four participants in this study with less than ten years of experience in civil service, they nevertheless provide an interesting perspective on the matter. The interviews lasted between 20-60 minutes based on how much they had to say regarding the topic. Each interview was transcribed as the participant spoke, held in a private office space where the participants felt confident enough that they could express their truths without the fear of prejudice or third-party interventions.

The interviewees were mostly men as they are more representative of the realities of the civil service realm in Guinea-Bissau compared to women (Interpeace, 2018). In total, 13 civil servants were interviewed with a proportion of 9 men and 4 women. Indeed, in a country that is working to target the underrepresentation of women in civil service and the 2018 parity law (DW, 2018), there is still significant gender inequality. Allowing for the gender of the participants to represent the current ratio in the civil service was, therefore, imperative to the research. Intriguingly, when it comes to development in the civil service, the study revealed that gender did not pose a barrier in terms of being able to provide for their immediate and extended families and the community. Women were able to contribute much more than their male counterparts, as they were able to distribute their salaries and still benefit from the wages of their partners for the upkeep of the household, for example, bills, food or maids.

It is essential to recognise that none of the participants is part of the "elite" class of Guinea-Bissau. All the participants came from considerably low socio-economic households and have worked their way up to the positions they currently hold in their civil service roles. Thus, the objective of this study was to make sure that the information collected was consistent with the central theme, in which corruption is something so deeply embedded in societal structures regardless of the upbringing.

Structure of the article

This article will be divided into three main sections. Section 1 will introduce the history of Guinea-Bissau and a brief literature review to acknowledge the abundance of information surrounding the discussion on corruption in Africa. Section 2 consists of the main body of the primary research, broken down into

three main themes extracted from the interviews: solidarity, obligation and self-interest against corruption. Addressing these themes will allow for understanding in the context of what is considered corrupt conduct through the eyes of the alleged “corruptees” (De Sardan 1999: 34) who primarily see their actions as legitimate and necessary. Section 3 will explore the shortcomings of this research and how corrupt conduct through the allocation of resources to communities may provide a short-term solution to the institutional dysfunction. The latter section also acknowledges the failures to address the root of the issue and the culture that supports corrupt actions that rarely co-exist with development in the region.

Section 1

Guinea-Bissau: A Historical Background

This section starts by briefly discussing pre-colonial and colonial Guinea-Bissau to explain the nature of the institutions and who was administering these institutions. Ultimately, this segment will explore one of the reasons for the breakdown and weaknesses of the current institutions in Guinea-Bissau.

Pre-colonial Guinea-Bissau was known as the Kaabu Kingdom, part of the Mali Empire (Galli and Jones 1987: 11), which encompassed what is now known as Mauritania well into Sierra Leone (Barreto 1938: 9). The territory has been occupied by the Portuguese since the 13th century, with the earliest recorded date being 1446, making it Portugal’s oldest colony (*ibid*: 10) it was also the hardest colony to conquer (*ibid*: 81). During colonialism, the Portuguese executed a direct form of rule, whereby Bissau-Guineans were excluded from significant administrative positions unless they reached the *assimilado*⁴ status. The *assimilado* rank was purposely hard to attain and often unjustifiably denied or removed as the Portuguese executive officers had unlimited discretion (*ibid*: 292). Furthermore, for nations such as Portugal that carried out direct form of rule, they deliberately failed to develop education structures that would aid natives to reach *assimilado* status (Achebe 2015: ch. 8; Mendy 1994: 307). The colonies were for maximum extraction, and developing social infrastructure was

⁴This was a term used to refer to “civilized” natives who had legally demonstrated “significant dedication to the Portuguese nation’s goals, ability to speak “good” Portuguese, literacy, paid job and desired conduct as per the colonial laws at the time” - extract interpreted and translated from Mendy 1994: 286.

deemed as a costly investment with no return for the Portuguese (Chabal and Daloz 1999). The aftermath of this omission by the Portuguese is that Guinea-Bissau is repeatedly named as the least developed country within the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP 2012).⁵

Although separate nations, due to geographical proximity and interconnected colonial histories, Cape Verdeans, who are, mostly, of "Portuguese descent" (Mendy 1994: 306) when in Guinea-Bissau, were given preferential treatment in all spaces. The preferred treatment that Cape Verdeans received also earned them areas in instrumental societal structures such as access to education, subsequently leading to their ability to take on jobs in the colonial administration and civil service institutions (Mendy 1994: 306). At the time, and in the race leading up to the independence struggle (*ibid*: 307), up to 75% of civil servants and government department chiefs were Cape Verdeans. The significance of this is that when the armed struggle for independence took off, and independence was attained, and those in a position to lead the country were the Cape Verdeans, more so than Bissau-Guineans (Galli and Jones 1987: 92-3). Although the states had joined forces for independence and were working towards unification, soon after independence tensions rose due to the predominance of Cape Verdeans in the running of the country (Nobrega 2003: 209). Also, the procedure left them in more advantageous positions, both in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (Galli and Jones 1987: 93). The tensions led to the 1980 *golpe reajustador*⁶ to depose Luiz Cabral from power and subsequently leading to the dissolution of the relations between the two countries, with many abandoning Guinea-Bissau and moving to Portugal or Cape Verde (Nobrega 2003: 226; Galli and Jones 1987: 101).

The twenty-five per cent of Bissau-Guinean's left behind to run the state had little experience in the administration of institutions as they mostly held low-level positions (Galli and Jones 1987: 74) during colonial and post-colonial Guinea-Bissau. The *golpe reajustador* was necessary not only to prevent the colonisation of Bissau-Guineans by Cape Verdeans but also create a closer connection between the institutions of state and the masses. As the regime under Cabral sustained a system, much like the one under colonialism,

⁵Official acronym which spells Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa.

⁶The given name to the 1980 coup to depose Luis Cabral and bring about the readjustment of Guinea-Bissau.

benefiting a Cape Verdean minority (Galli and Jones 1987: 108) whereas the new system was more “equitable [in] distribution of national resources” (*ibid*). Conversely, the regime led by João Bernardo Vieira was not sustainable, as there was less participation from the masses in the running of the state and political institutions. This created a distance between those in power and the masses suffering the consequences of incompetent, undemocratically elected and unrepresentative leadership (Galli & Jones 1987: 108).

Definition of Corruption in the Literature

This part explores the meaning of corruption in the literature and what is considered corrupt conduct in a Western⁷ perspective, then moving on to explore the same in a general African context which primarily applies to the Bissau-Guinean daily encounters of corruption.

Joseph Nye (1967) in *Corruption and Political Development: A Cost-Benefit Analysis* defines corruption as:

“behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of a private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence” (Nye 1967: 419).

Developing an understanding of what it means to be corrupt from a Western perspective, often means that the society of which one is referring to has laws and structures in place which will deem particular conduct as corrupt. Additionally, there must be structures that summon any specific person or groups who are found in violation of those laws, which is not the case in an African context. Countries such as Guinea-Bissau have institutions that are so broken down that it is logistically impossible to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions, creating a culture of impunity.

Similarly to Nye (1967), Bayart (1989) in *The State in Africa: Politics of the Belly*, depicts corruption as a phenomenon which is “inherently” African, with extreme scrutiny of the practice and very little room to acknowledge or accept that the definition of “corruption” may change or be perceived differently

⁷ By West or Western the author means European countries who colonised African countries namely, Portugal, United Kingdom, France as well as the United States. States that continue to assert power dynamics in Africa and engage in acts of neocolonialism.

depending on the society one lives in. The term “corruption” itself often represents the violation of a set of morals, which are present in society and do not apply universally (De Sardan 1999: 40-1). Bayart goes so far as to say that the systems that exist in Africa, no matter how “redistributive” they appear to be, do not contribute to the “reduction of, domination and inequality” (Bayart 1989: 232) as it leads to impunity and the ability for some state actors to act above the law. It is, however, essential to note and distinguish that the sort of corrupt conduct mentioned by Bayart in his piece is of a neo-patrimonial nature, which differs from the level of fraudulent conduct that will be discussed in this article. Neo-patrimonialism is the act of an *elite*⁸ group of persons entering a patron-client relationship. This distinction is important because this piece will explore the relationships between those with “relative” power, working in civil service as opposed to patrons in neo-patrimonial networks who seek support for political power. Even though civil servants may occasionally engage in gift-giving, it is not to secure power, but for reasons which will be discussed later in the piece.

De Sardan (1999), highlights in “The Moral Economy of Corruption in Africa?” the nature of what is known as corruption in the specific context of Niger. De Sardan (1999) engages the reader in a discussion of what is considered “socially acceptable” and what is not in African societies. By doing this, De Sardan (1999) establishes a foundation for the reader to comprehend what it means to be a part of culture whereby the line that divides “bribing someone from thanking them for their services” (p. 35) is very thin. De Sardan (1999) does not give a concrete definition of “corruption”, but through the discussion he explains the reasons why corruption is present in African states is to cope with the mechanisms and structures which were left behind after colonialism, in conjunction with “pre-colonial common law, colonial laws (i.e. customary law, indigenous laws) and post-independence laws” (p. 37).

Laura Routley (2016) in *Negotiating Corruption: NGOs, governance and hybridity in West Africa*, engages the reader in a debate surrounding the definition of corruption and what has been said in the literature regarding this concept. She relies on the description provided by Medard (1995) in which he

⁸ The key difference between neopatrimonialism and general corruption, is that the former engages a particular group or persons who fall into the category of “*elite*”, whereas the latter can include anybody from the general population - from small acts such as bribing a law enforcement agent, to paying a customs agent to release your cargo.

defines the term as “when the distinction between what is private and what is public is recognised but not respected” (Medard 1995: 12). Indeed, the issue with corruption in Africa is not that corruption is not recognised, but rather that it is overlooked or ignored as De Sardan (1999) stated above. The compilation of different laws implemented in Africa, without any being abolished, has led to acts and practices being conflicted, misconstrued or misinterpreted by the general population, be that by accident or deliberately.

For the purposes of this section, the author concurs that the definition of corruption as depicted by Medard (1995) is the Western understanding of corruption in Africa. Accepting the acknowledgement by De Sardan (1999) and Routley (2016) as explanatory foundations for the emergence of this “culture of corruption.”

Debunking Our Understanding of Corruption

Peter Ekeh’s (1975) in *Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement* is instrumental to this piece because it identifies two publics in Africa that have emerged as a result of colonialism. Ekeh (1975) explains the moral foundations of these two publics concerning their Western connotations (Ekeh 1975: 92). Ekeh (1975) explains that what made colonisation attainable was ideology more so than violence, which has led to an African acceptance of absolute Western morals, which are often contrary to their African counterparts. This has led to the creation of a hybrid moral understanding between the two publics interacting in Africa. In essence, Ekeh (1975) argues that the problem encountered in African politics today is a direct result of its colonial history.

The following subsection will discuss how "corruption" will be approached for the remainder of this piece. The most important similarity between Ekeh's (1975) work and the following section is that the civil servants mirror the depictions of Ekeh’s (1975) primordial public. They are often from a "rural, non-literate background” and emerge into high leadership positions, expected to give security to extended family and communities (Ekeh 1975: 107). The empirical evidence depicted in this piece shows that even 44 years after Ekeh's article, there is still evidence to imply that the primordial public exists in Guinea-Bissau. Also, there is still a lack of division between their interactions between their private and public realm.

The preconceived notion of corruption must be erased when reading this article. Corruption relies on context to be defined. The foundation of the term is connected to what is perceived as unethical or immoral as a result of societal norms and the reproduction of these norms. Indeed, the meaning of the word can never be applied universally as ethics and morals change significantly depending on the country or region.

Understanding the diversity of cultures in Guinea-Bissau, as well as its history (pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial) gives us a glimpse into the complexity of this region's social fabric. The people who reside in urban areas have been educated to understand Portuguese societal structures, which were implemented during colonisation. Simultaneously, they are reminded of the values and morals that originate from their tribes. Also, engaging in the hybridity of what it means to be urban or modern while interacting with your tribal morality can be likened to the crossing between the private and public realm of society. In Bissau-Guinean community, there is no harm in the interactions between modernity and your moral groundings. Therefore, civil servants see their acts as legitimate and are widely supported by the community, as they see no problem in mirroring the interactions from their private life into their professional one.

When the discussion is raised to challenge the understanding of corruption, it is not seen as taking from the state for one's gain, but it is entering the public realm and doing for your family what you would do if they were in the private realm (Interview No. 11). It is not only that the lines are blurred or that people do not understand the difference between the individual and the public domains, but rather that the division does not exist, meaning that the two realms merge and exist simultaneously. For this reason, understanding the co-existence of these two realms aids the knowledge of why the participants may see their acts as legitimate as opposed to corrupt.

Indeed, corrupt conduct is predominantly judged in Africa based on a fundamental idea of what is considered corruption according to a criterion set by the International Community, that is primarily made up of, and controlled by, Western countries. The reader must completely erase the understanding of corruption in a Western context to understand that bribery logically exists in societies where immoral acts correlate with what corruption is supposed to be. The civil servants that participated in this research, therefore, possess

characteristics of an altruistic nature, in the sense that they put their families and broader communities ahead of themselves.

Due to the societal morals and realities in Guinea-Bissau, for the remainder of this article, the reader should understand “corruption” as conduct by an individual that has been adopted in the public realm, which is contrary to conduct which is perceived as acceptable and expected in the private sphere. For instance, if person X is an ordinarily generous giver within their family and community in the private realm, then it is expected for them to replicate this conduct in the public sphere towards their family and community. For X to withhold from giving in the general area would be perceived as corrupt by their family and community.

Institutional Dysfunction

A nation consists of several institutions, each delegated with powers and responsibilities within the public realm (Tshiyembe 2014). When functional, these institutions are expected to govern the wants and needs of society. Each institution of the state contains a minister and civil servants who work towards goals and objectives for that ministry, contributing the overall objectives of the state (Tshiyembe 2014). The role of institutions is to serve and protect their citizens based on what is the common or majority accord (Interview 12) in issues that affect society.

Similarly, the current system in Guinea-Bissau was initially based on Portuguese society (Chabal & Daloz 1999). There has been adaptations and additions of ministries to represent the needs of Guinea-Bissau such as the Ministry of Fisheries (Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission, 2016) and the Ministry of Infrastructure, Housing and Human Development (DW, 2019). However, the majority of ministries have remained largely unchanged from those that existed during colonialism. Therefore, this development stall raised the question of whether it will ever be able to “serve and protect” Bissau-Guineans (Interview No. 1). Bissau-Guinean’s embracing of the colonial institutions shows that the country continues to support structures that were never meant to represent the whole nation, but rather a ruling minority elite and their needs. The state’s inability to recognise this critical factor has contributed to a disconnection between the institutions and the public. Institutional dysfunction is, therefore, the state’s inability to serve and protect

its citizens. The current state system was not designed by the general public and is, therefore, repeatedly falling short of representing their needs.

The prevalence of the state's inability to serve the society is a matter which continues to be an outstanding issue and frequent reoccurrence when it comes to a public appeal for justice. There are just under 40,000 civil servants in the country serving a population of just under 2 million people (World Bank 2019). The evident disparity in the ratio of civil servants to population is because, even though the law stipulates that the age of retirement in public service is 60 (Retirement Law Guinea-Bissau 2012: art. 12), "civil servants refuse to retire" (Interview No. 1). They end up consuming public funds that can be used to hire recent graduates but also from allowing for new ideas to be introduced that may contribute to the development of the country (Interviews No. 1, 8). Civil servants often refuse to retire because of societal pressures that surround the idea that unemployment, even at retirement age, deems them disposable and marginal to their community, "it's better to have job, even if it is unpaid, than to sit at home and be seen as useless" (Interview No. 10). Additionally, many civil servants that reach retirement age feel that they will be unable to provide for their families if they are out of a job (Interview No. 12) no matter how average the salary may be.

Moreover, the state is increasingly unable to meet the needs of the population in the realms of which may be the most important for the development of society (Interview No. 1). There is an apparent lack of focus on what needs to be delivered from the state to the people. The disconnection between the country and the public means that the state is unable to address their needs. As those at the top are part of an elite group (Interview No. 8) that is not faced with nor interested in what those at the bottom are dealing with Interviewee No. 11 explained that:

"I had to use my own money to launch a community centre for young boys interested in playing sports. The inability to pay for schooling and unemployment led them to engage in activities which are damaging to the moral bedrock of our community; I had to do something." (Interview No. 11)

Interviewee No. 11 is a senior member of the civil service and had created multiple contacts during the time working in the civil service. Although they did

not have access to public funds to develop the community centre, they used their influence and knowledge to fast track the procedures.

The civil service bodies in Guinea-Bissau are not only detached from the masses, but the institutions also have very little interlinks between them to liaise and approve swift projects that cross the dominion of multiple bodies (UNIOGBIS, 2015). The average Bissau-Guinean, without contacts in the civil service or a well-paid job, would not have the ability to create a community centre. It is therefore imperative to understand that civil servants such as Interviewee No. 11 that have access to more knowledge than the general population have been able to replace the duty of the state and the relevant institutions when it comes to meeting the needs of its people. The issue with civil servants filling in for the institutions of the state is that the country continues to overlook its responsibilities when it comes to serving the public and continues to fund institutions that are unable to fulfil its obligations (FAAPA, 2018).

Section 2

This section will pay special attention to the information gathered from the participants of this research. Three main stories have been picked to narrate each of the themes. These do not represent isolated accounts but are chosen to describe the story where each of the participants has been involved to some extent. The overarching themes highlighted are solidarity, obligation and self-interest of corruption. All of the three topics have been broken down to present a compelling interpretation of what we may see as corruption as a standard, accepted and encouraged conduct in Guinea-Bissau.

Solidarity as Corruption

This chapter explains what is considered corrupt conduct in the face of an instrumental societal component in Guinea-Bissau: solidarity. The mention of solidarity was a recurring theme present in most of the interviews carried out during the primary research raising the question of whether sympathy should be perceived as corrupt in the face of a society that deems it as a critical component of societal interactions.

The roots of the concept of solidarity in Guinea-Bissau are unknown. However, this does not take away from the fact that it is widespread and there

appears to be an unspoken mutual understanding amongst Bissau-Guineans, of what is expected as solidary conduct and what is perceived hostile and unacceptable (Interviews No. 6, 7, 12). De Sardan (1999) explains that unlike the Western nations, where there is an absence of relations between extended family, friends and neighbours, in Africa, "these networks are widely extended far beyond family framework replete with pressures and solicitations which can hardly be ignored" (De Sardan 1999: 40; Interview No. 12). For this article, solidarity, which also applies for shared tribes, is defined as a union or understanding of a common aim or objective between a group of people which may arise as a result of:

"adherence to a common association, church or confraternity, to the same party, to the same faction within a party, also play their role, as does the fact of originating from the same region or district" (De Sardan 1999: 40).

Interviewee No. 2 is a senior member of staff in the ministry of education. The interviewee's seniority allows conducting executive decisions in the department when it comes to dealing with tasks within the realm of education. The interviewee has also explained that whenever there are training or workshops funded by the ministry's partners such as NGOs or hybrid institutions, the participants are usually given a subsidy for their attendance, to cover their travel and attendance costs. Subsequently, Interviewee No. 2 uses this opportunity to gather women of their family (including extended family) and community, who have shown interest in gaining knowledge and personal development. Knowing that they cannot afford to pay for the professional courses of these people, Interviewee No. 2 takes them along to these courses. The beneficiaries may or may not have any direct connections or knowledge to the ministry, but they are nevertheless taken along to gain experience as well the subsidy, which the host organisation provides to attendees. This act falls within the definition of corruption, as the interviewee has used their power in the public realm to allow people they know in the private sphere.

Besides, Interviewee No. 2 is only able to bring their family and community along to the training due to an evident institutional dysfunction that fails to monitor the events that take place regarding the ministry and its employees. If the institutions were able to execute their roles correctly, Interviewee No. 2 would not be able to overlook any civil servants in the ministry when taking

participants for any training that concerned their development. The knowledge gained from these sessions can be fed back directly to the department and subsequently generate added-value civil servants. Additionally, the ministry's inability to control their budget as well as monitor the development of its employees via reports and publications goes to show that there is an evident lack of scrutiny towards the work of civil servants. It is subsequently allowing for senior employees to use their discretion to benefit their family and community in an *ad hoc* manner.

The beneficiaries of these training and workshops have earned these subsidies and knowledge in a way which can be deemed as unfair. The reason is that any partnership or relationship built between the ministry of education and other entities has been due to a mutual understanding of shared goals and objectives for the development of public schooling. Having individuals or groups directly benefiting from these partnerships, without having any direct relation to the ministry, is automatically deemed as unjust or unfair because it takes away from those who genuinely require the knowledge and subsidies given for taking part in these training. These opportunities that do not reoccur often, and its knowledge cannot be used for the development of the ministry.

The way in which this corrupt conduct contributes to the widening of the inequality gap goes beyond just the realms of the ministry of education. It creates inequality within different communities in the capital of Bissau. As they are more likely to attain personal development, provide a better living for their families (as a direct result of subsidies) and increase the chances of landing a job due to cronyism or nepotism. This practice puts the participants at a significant advantage than those who do not live in communities with a senior civil servant who can bring those benefits to them and help in the advancement of the society in general (Interviews No. 9, 10).

It is essential to recognise that the conduct carried out by Interviewee No. 2 does not reflect something that would be seen as corrupt or illegal due to the social pressures for helping their family and networks when holding a position of power. The mentality often surrounds the idea that the one who has come by wealth or secured a place of authority, must not only enrich themselves but it must include those around them to avoid being shunned or perceived as unwise for not making the most of the opportunity (Interview No. 4). Due to the societal pressures and expectations, the perpetrator often sees their conduct as

completely legitimate due to the solidarity networks around them that also encourage this conduct (Interviews No. 7, 8). Moreover, when analysing the corrupt act carried out, it is essential to understand that Interviewee No. 2 sees this as the only way to make use of the opportunities which are available through the ministry of education. Using their discretion, they can act in the capacity of the institution to give the chance of development to selected people, which “genuinely require help and support” (Interviewee No. 2).

By using the principle of solidarity, interviewee No. 2 can help the people in their immediate networks achieve some personal development as they join them and make the most of these subsidies, knowledge and contacts they can attain from the training. Even though this conduct can be misconstrued as “corruption,” it is very easily defined as solidarity or altruistic by a Bissau-Guinean bystander. In a Western nation such behaviour would not be allowed to take place due to the functionality and multiple bodies and entities who work on an independent basis to monitor and carry out due diligence to make sure public funds are not misused (Ake 1993). This notion differs significantly in the Bissau-Guinean context where solidarity is a core value of societal interactions (interviews No. 4, 6, 7, 8, 12) sometimes standing in the way of transparency. It is the expected conduct, based on the social interactions presented to facilitate and even encourage such behaviours. The compilation of practical laws in place, make it impossible to punish or hold those accountable, especially for conducts which are considered culturally acceptable (Interview No. 6). Unless there are systems in place to reprimand and monitor the crossover between the private and public realm, corruption will continue to be perceived as banal and legitimate act in Bissau-Guinean’s public sector.

Obligation as Corruption

Unlike solidarity, this chapter will seek to explore the correlation between what is perceived as corruption versus the obligation in society. The commitment to support those within close networks as well as those who may not be directly connected, form a more extensive network, no matter how weak the connection may be. Interviewee No. 6 explained that “there is always someone expecting to benefit from your earnings/work.” This statement means that having achieved a position of influence in their community equals an obligation to pay school fees for his children, nephews, cousins and uncles even when they may have other priorities at times. Ten out of the thirteen interviewees felt that in

some way they were obliged to help a family, friend or community just because they had a stable job in civil service, putting them at a significant advantage to their peers.

Obligation often arises as a result of a person feeling under pressure to redistribute their earnings, whether gained legitimately or illegitimately, for fear that they may be subject to "evil eye," "jealousy," "mockery" or even "shame" (De Sardan 1999: 46). This chapter looks at the reasons that some may give in abundance to those whom they have fragile connections to, at times even leaving themselves at a disadvantage in the name of preserving the *status quo* or to refrain from "violating morals contrary to collective cultural understanding" (Interviewee No. 6). For the purposes of this study, obligation will be defined as the need to act in a particular manner based on morality or laws in place that the person is bound to or feels they have a duty to submit to, even when they may not be able to comply with those duties. Interviewee No. 12 explained their story, which describes the social pressures to perform an act that would be an obligation as opposed to a solitary or conscious agency.

Interviewee No. 12 lived in a neighbourhood where there was no running water supply, and as a senior member of the civil service with multiple consultancies with international NGOs such as the United Nations and Plan International, they had the means to build a well in their home. Nonetheless, they knew that this conduct would be "selfish" and outright unacceptable in a community where others had to go through dangerous conditions to access clean water. Hence, the interviewee decided to build a community well so that all the members of the community could benefit from a single water supply. Also, Interviewee No. 12 used their position to approve and speedily make the well in the community, which required a long and complicated approval process, usually because the ministry often sees such projects such as "unnecessary" and "not a priority." Their ability to use influence and networks within the government meant that the entire public, as well as their family, were able to benefit from this deed.

The interviewee's ability to avoid the bureaucracy involved in the execution of this project and cut corners is something that the average citizen would not be able to do, not even a "prominent business person with an abundance of cash" (Interview No. 12). This is important because it shows that there is a distinct advantage to having a job in the civil service, even though the

institutions are dysfunctional, but there are still certain services and projects where permits can only be obtained from these state institutions. Interviewee No. 12 is only able to “cheat” the system due to more knowledge than the average citizen regarding which permits are required to execute such actions. Additionally, they had invaluable contacts within the institutions of the state that facilitated the attainment of necessary licenses as well as public builders who can execute the job. This loophole is possible only because of the institutional dysfunction that fails to prioritise projects required for meeting the basic needs of the masses (UNIOBIS, 2017).

The obligations contribute to the wide-spread and deep-seated inequality directly affecting the population’s health. Those benefiting from the potable water are more likely to avoid diseases related to drinking unclean water such as diarrhoea, cholera, dysentery, typhoid, and polio (WHO, 2019). Such differences directly impact other aspects of life such as absenteeism from school, work and overall decrease in household income. This form of inequality is not adequately dealt with by the state. Which means those who do not have direct access to water continue to risk their lives by travelling miles to reach a water supply and drink from contaminated or unregulated sources.

Interviewee No. 12 admitted that this conduct was only possible because of the position in the civil service and the number of years dedicated to the role. However, the interviewee also admitted that it is necessary to sacrifice the family’s health by not building a personal well if it meant it could be used by the entire community. De Sardan (1999) depicts these acts as being “supported by positive social values, namely the necessity to seize all opportunities allowing for manifestation of cardinal virtues, such as generosity” (p. 43) as a way to give back, especially to those who supported them when they were not a “big man” (Interview No. 13). This mentality is very prominent when the discussion surrounds the theme of obligation as it almost suggests the perpetrator is acting under duress of cultural morality. The requirement is that, in the case of Interview No. 12, risks being a victim of “jealousy” from immediate family, neighbours and the wider community which may lead to losing the status attained, family members or even their own life. Those in relative power, therefore, go above and beyond to satisfy specific needs of their networks, even when it may cause them inconvenience for fear of being subject to “sorcery” (Interview No. 6).

Self-interest as Corruption

The ability to navigate through the public sector with ease and omit formal application processes and legal procedures is something obtained with ease once a citizen is within the public sector realm of Guinea-Bissau. This is a clear abuse of power, as the individual uses their leverage attained via their job as a civil servant for personal advancement. However, it is conduct expected from someone who has the networks, as the ones who lack contacts, must beg for support of those who have already attained them (Interview No. 10). In comparison to solidarity and obligation, self-interest is the gravest and least altruistic conduct that participants admitted to have experienced. Also it is the most harmful to population transformation as it means that there may be public service positions filled by untrained or incompetent staff.

Self-interest is a concept heavily promoted in the northern hemisphere, as well as the right to self-governance, personal independence and individualism (Ake 1993). However, in Africa, there is a promotion of communal or collective regard for one's family, friends and neighbours as a standard way of life (Interview No. 7), which inevitably negates this concept of individualism. A person who acts in self-interest in their personal life is seen as "ungrateful" or "unappreciative" of those around him or her. On the other hand, someone who works in self-interest when it comes to their professional life is positively received by their networks as they see their advancement as bringing proceeds to their collective improvement (Interview No. 9). In this article, self-interest is defined as deliberately conducting oneself in a manner that contributes to the achievement of personal aims and objectives with complete disregard for others, also known as egoism.

Interviewee No. 4 began the career in customs and remained in that position for twenty-five years, before deciding that the job did not have any future opportunities. Having spent so many years as a civil servant, in such a crucial and sought-after ministry, the interviewee made irreplaceable contacts and widened the network, which became useful when deciding to undergo a career change. Interviewee No. 4 has also contacted people who were able to guide and assist in the pursuit of a new career. This is corrupt conduct because Interviewee No. 4 did not apply for the job or go through a fair and transparent screening procedure, whereby to compete against others who were also suited for the position that they obtained. This was an act of cronyism meaning that

the privilege of working in the public sector robbed the opportunity of someone who may have had better skills and education for the role but missed out only because they lacked the networks needed.

The form of corruption depicted above is an evident result of institutional dysfunction. If the process had been open and transparent, Interviewee No. 4 would not have secured the spot with as much ease. This is not to say that the interviewee would not have gotten the job if applied, but it still denied a fair application comparing to another person. The evident institutional dysfunction here is that there are no systems in place to monitor or enforce recruitment laws when the institution is dysfunctional to the extent of which the Bissau-Guinean civil service stands (Interview No. 1). If the correct procedures were followed, it would be bureaucratically complex or even impossible to give a job to someone based on networks, as there would be multiple subdivisions to flag the conduct as contrary to those possessed by institutional protocols.

An exception should not be made for those already in civil service, just because they have built a strong network allowing them to find loopholes in the faulted system for personal advancement (Interview No. 12). As the issue that this brings is that those in the civil service have an endless amount of opportunities to exploit the system, whereas those on the margins are left with no chance to achieve personal development (Interview No. 10). This corrupt act contributes to the widening of the inequality gap because it perpetuates a culture supportive of the development of those at the top, failing to create spaces for those on the margins. The less the people in the margins are represented, the more likely it is that the inequality gap will widen as their needs will not be sought after leading to the creation of laws and regulations that do not reflect the wider population. This is an imperative disservice that will be explored in more depth in the later “*Pubis di Ponta*” section.

Interviewee No. 4 explained that they believed their conduct was legitimate and that the redistributive accumulation they engaged in meant that they were able to help more people in their community. The interviewee stated that:

“Within my salary, I am given two bags of rice, which I share out with my neighbours and buy a bag for my family with my own money. I pay the minimum wage to my maids, but the guidance and support I provide them could never be monetised. I pay for their schools, their identification

documents, give them clothes and food. I have often taken away from my family to make sure the most vulnerable in my community have food on the table.” (Interview No. 4)

The above logic may be perceived as irrational from a Western perspective. However it is comprehensible and supported by the average Bissau-Guinean, who would eagerly engage in the conduct if they had the means (Interviews No. 1, 2, 8, 11). This demonstrates the lack of understanding, within the general population between what is considered public and what is private, which causes the two to interact with unlimited discretion from civil servants. The overlooking of the “abuse of power” to attain personal development is a theme which should concern the entire population and should not be trivialised. Conversely, the way society, as a collective, has amalgamated privately accepted conducts and morals into the public realm, makes it extremely complex to decipher the hybridity of their interactions.

Despite how informative the literature surrounding corruption is, this was a theme that was not present under the subject of what De Sardan (1999: 125) refers to as “petty corruption” and Ekeh’s (1967: 55) “primordial public.” The literature discusses the subject of self-interest and egoism nominally when discussing neo-patrimonialism and the exploitation of the public into the private by politicians and “big-men”. However, it fails to recognise that even those with relative power, engage in acts which are within the nature of egoism.

Section 3

“Pubis di Ponta”⁹

This study nuanced the definition of corruption by exploring the moral foundations in Guinea-Bissau and how these erase the lines that divide the private realm from the public in the public sector. By adopting this narrative, it is possible to present a different perspective into the literature regarding corruption in an African context. This perspective is widely tarnished for being supportive of African cultures that oppose Western morality. It is not enough to contribute to the debate without identifying the disadvantages of supporting cultural behaviours that occasionally stand in the way of progressive population transformation. This section will look at the disservices that corruption creates

⁹ Criollo term used to reference the rural people residing in the Regions or peripheries of society.

in Guinea-Bissau, with focus on the two main injustices that need to be addressed to eradicate the need for this short-term fix for population transformation.

The redistribution of wealth by civil servants is widespread due to the number of civil servants in comparison to the population (Interview No. 6). Although one can argue that in spite of the disparity, it is evident that those outside of Bissau, especially those in the further regions, do not benefit from this redistribution in the ways seen in the capital (Interview No. 10). It is evident from the examples discussed in the previous section that the direct beneficiaries from these so-called corrupt acts are only those who share networks with the civil servants and who are in turn taking from the state and elevating their networks. A regional civil servant explains that the "lack of urbanisation means there is no work or progression pushing me towards the civil society sector in Bissau" (Interviewee No. 10). This illustrates the colonial legacy that experienced urbanisation only in the chosen capitals, allowing for significant disparity between it and the regions. The lack of work or ability to apply skills for those in the marginalised areas means they relocate to Bissau in hopes of finding a job and better wages.

This action raises the issue of overpopulation in capitals due to the states inability to urbanise critical social and physical infrastructures outside of Bissau in support of the positive transformation of the population. Interviewee No. 9 explained that the region they resided in offered no educational institutions or scholarships for those most vulnerable and so they had to "move to Bissau to benefit from a scholarship and subsequent job in civil service to support his family." This demonstrates how deep-seated institutional dysfunction is and its trickle-down effects, not only in Bissau but nationwide. This pattern also indicates that the conduct carried out by the civil servants illustrated in section 2 does not pose a universal solution, as it does not deal with the root cause of the issue. Instead, it further contributes to the widening gap of inequality, especially between those on the periphery and those in the capital.

Facing Institutional Dysfunction

The more corruption is allowed, the more prone it is to continue. Ekeh (1975) talks about the forms of corruption that exist that involve the two publics present in Africa: 1) embezzlement from the civic public; and 2) bribes from individuals to the civic public providing services (p.110). Similarly, De Sardan

(1999) talks about big-time corruption in contrast to what is considered “petty corruption” (p.28) and although not seemingly, these types of corruption, when mentioned by both authors, are treated with different levels of severity. The issue with dividing the kinds of corruption that exist is that it creates an environment that tolerates corruption so long as it is not at the extreme “big-time” level. No matter the level of corruption, it must be faced head-on to be overcome.

The current system in Guinea-Bissau is undeniably flawed, with institutional dysfunction being an overarching issue causing a chain of tribulations across the country. Civil servants using their relative power to redistribute resources fall outside of their dominions, and as mentioned above, is only allowed due to the state’s inability to monitor its employees (Interview No. 6). There is an imminent need for the state to do more to highlight and regulate a public servant’s conducts to prohibit the interactions between the private and public realm. If the state can introduce such measures, there is a chance that institutional dysfunction could be dealt with, thereby preventing corrupt conduct from taking place. Chabal (2002) suggests that the solution is the destruction of the “cultural matrix” and the introduction of a new set of cultural norms (p.460). However, Chabal’s solution is simplistic and lacks depth. Suggesting that new cultural norms should be introduced is ignoring the fact that African culture is so vast and profound that making changes would not only take time but also the acknowledgment that one’s cultural norms are wrong. To create visible change, the state needs to educate the civil servants along with the wider population on the importance of separating the private from the public realm. The transitional period will also serve as a chance to: 1) understand what the community believes the role of the state is; and 2) the communities’ duties to the state to bring clarity and establish accountability. Doing this could potentially lead to more successful and sustainable solutions for the population in understanding the reasoning behind the separation of the private and public realm.

Conclusion

Guinea-Bissau, just like most African countries, is rich in culture and customs. Unfortunately, its history was tamed and debased by the Portuguese colonial powers who attempted to erase and destroy pre-colonial structures by creating

an environment that encouraged hostility towards the native. An inferiority complex is present within the Bissau-Guinean population, which was instilled during colonisation, claiming that anything created by "*tugas*"¹⁰ was better. In society, what that translates to is the conflicting nature of what is right, according to Portuguese morals, and what is right according to Bissau-Guinean culture and morals. There is an evident paradox of conflicting ideas in the Bissau-Guinean society standing in the way of the transformation of the population.

This article has explored the way in which the lines of morality have crossed over to the public sector, benefiting individuals or groups in ways which can be perceived as corrupt. While at the same time acknowledging that due to institutional dysfunction, there has been an apparent disconnect between the masses and state causing state actors to take it upon themselves to redistribute public resources at their discretion. The actions of these civil servants may not be the long-term solution as they are mostly unsustainable. However, they are the best way to deal with the lack of distribution of resources with the state currently lacking the capacity to deal with these issues.

All the participants that have taken part in this research have demonstrated conduct of an altruistic nature, which is morally upheld in the Bissau-Guinean society. However, acknowledging that their actions are selfless does not mean that they seize to interfere with the transformation of the population. This article has attempted to debunk the Western definition of corruption, as the one internationally presented is biased and lacks global appreciation and inclusion of different societies, for example those studied in this article. It must be reiterated that the crossover between private and public realm is something that should be avoided in all communities as it blurs the lines of authority and creates a culture of insecurity and even impunity for its citizens. Conversely, the reasoning for the division of the two realms must be organic, meaning that the decision should be made via a dialogue between the state and its citizens. Colonial legacies and external opinions on what and how those divisions should be cannot and will not create sustainable unity. Equally, before this can be done, the state must address the root cause of the issue, which is that of institutional dysfunction.

¹⁰ Criolo expression used by Bissau-Guineans when referring to the Portuguese or white persons (Suriyah & Sia, 2007)

To conclude, corruption in the public sector is necessary for the transformation of the population in Guinea-Bissau at this moment in time, as it provides a level of distribution of public resources to citizens who have a connection to civil servants. Nonetheless, this acknowledges the imminent need for the state to address institutional dysfunction to eradicate the need for this short-term solution. Ultimately, the systems implemented during colonisation must be disintegrated gradually to reflect national values and customs in the government. The discussion on addressing institutional dysfunction, however, will merit further research as it goes beyond the scope of this article.

Appendix A: A Key to Interviews

| Interview No. | Ministry | Years in Service |
|---------------|---|------------------|
| 1 | Ministry of Education | 15 |
| 2 | Teacher reporting to <i>Ministry of Education</i> | 10 |
| 3 | Ministry of Justice | 8 |
| 4 | Ministry of Social Solidarity, Family & Poverty Eradication / Ministry of Customs | 25 |
| 5 | National Institute of Studies and Research (INEP) | 28 |
| 6 | Lecturer reporting to <i>Ministry of Education</i> | 20 |
| 7 | Ministry of Health | 5-8 (approx.) |
| 8 | National Commission of Human Rights | 6 |
| 9 | Teacher reporting to <i>Ministry of Education</i> | 10 |
| 10 | Ministry of Natural Resources | 13 |
| 11 | Public Administrator | 13 |
| 12 | Ministry of Interior Affairs | 25-30 |
| 13 | Ministry of Finance | 6 |

Appendix B: Sample Transcript

| |
|--|
| <p>1. What is your job?</p> |
| <p>Press Secretary of the Ministry of Education</p> |
| <p>2. How did you get your job?</p> |
| <p>I started as an intern journalist at Radio No Pintcha in 2001 and worked there for 5 years. However, due to the lack of organisational structure – after 5 years interning, I was contracted and started getting paid 55,000 XOF per month and received that salary for 12 years.</p> <p>The institutions are dysfunctional and the number of people that are contracted to intern are not manageable and the state is unable to administer all of them [employees including interns]. They hire too many people and there are no means of paying all the employees. I worked for many years without being a permanent employee.</p> <p>The people who have retired do not leave their positions and continue in their posts for much longer than they are supposed to, leaving no room to hire new people and subsequently using the resources required in order to pay the new comers who are younger and require experience.</p> <p>I worked with ECOWAS for a project to do with women, parallel to the job I had at Radio No Pintcha, with the former minister of education, who later abandoned the project to attend for the call to be the minister of education for the government that was formed in 2014. Due to the work that I did with the former minister she appointed me for the role of press advisor.</p> <p>When that government was dissolved, I went back to the radio and was subsequently called back for the new government of Camilo Domingos Simões Pereira for the current role I hold.</p> |
| <p>3. What is your background?</p> |
| <p>You usually get the job via job applications but at the time I did not apply people were just taken on. Year 11 was my top qualification in 1997. In 2004 the university opened and that is when I went to get my degree in organisational communication – it took me 5 years. At the same time I continued to get her internship at Radio No Pintcha. When the new management came in 2004 they did a second round to access the level of the</p> |

people who were working as interns and there were 5 women at the time who were re-assessed. Out of the 5 women who were assessed I was the only one who made it based on my experience and what they were looking for. The other women were not fired, but they did not continue within the journalism section.

4. How have you helped others via your civil service job?

Radio No Pintcha helped me the most because it was basically my university. They helped me in every aspect, and they taught me everything that I know and gave me the experience I needed.

I used to get travel costs covered which was around 15,000 XOF and when I had my first baby it helped my family and other people who did not have jobs or anything, especially during the war in 1998 – the subsidies which we got I managed to help out, which increased with time and I helped my mum who was a teacher at the time and with the jobs that I have now is when I can help a lot of people in my family with scholarships for instance – every member of the commission has the opportunity to get a scholarship for 1 family members.

Due to my job and they worked with her and know her work know that she is competent and knows what she is doing – there is no such thing as having a minister that applies for the job, it has to be someone of the competence which they believe is of their trust they will continue to have someone who can help.

5. How has your job helped improve your lifestyle or the lifestyle of others around you?

I believe that the job has helped me a lot but my husband works in Customs (alfandega) – my job is helpful only to a certain extent but the help that I get from my husband for household bills – I have enough to help my family and community, although at times I still have to get income from different sources such as the civil society projects I am often involved in.

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