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Setting the Model

Reforming Policing in Guinea-Bissau

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Summary

The present report¹ investigates the reform of the police sector in the small West African country of Guinea-Bissau. This particular reform has been a part of comprehensive international efforts over the past decade to restructure the country's security sector. For years, Guinea Bissau's police sector has been characterized by insufficient financing, capacity and equipment shortages, unclear competence areas, conflicts with the military and corruption. After a short civil war in 1998–99, the International Community placed blame on the Bissau-Guinean security sector for fostering political instability, general lawlessness and the lack of social and economic development. Additionally, the country became a problem internationally at the start of the new millennium due to its transformation into a transit hub for the trafficking of drugs and irregular migrants to Europe. As such, there were hopes both domestically and abroad that a reform of the security sector would stabilize Guinea-Bissau nationally and sub-regionally and also promote the rule of law along with peaceful socio-economic development.

Over the past decade, a selection of various approaches and 'entry points' has aimed to reform the police sector along with the military and justice sectors; UNIOGBIS, the 'United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau', has played a central role in this context. Working in cooperation with the Bissau-Guinean authorities, UNIOGBIS established a model police station in an unstable city neighborhood in 2011. A coup in April of the following year forced all cooperation in the police sector to temporarily be placed on hold. Following free elections and the formation of a new, democratically legitimated government in mid-2014, many projects related to security sector reforms were finally able to resume. The outcomes of previous reforms in this sector have proven mixed: they have either failed in eliminating the primary problems areas or their impacts have been marginal, at best. A number of reforms, such as the creation of a national guard, were even counterproductive on account of negative human rights balances and ensuing conflicts with the armed forces. Drawing from a case study of the model police station along with observations in the context of UNIOGBIS training courses for police officers, this study uncovers and analyzes the problem areas that have arisen in cooperation between the International Community and Bissau-Guinean institutions.

I conceive of police sector reforms as an arena in which contrary interests, expectations and understandings overlap. In the following, I argue that 'translation problems' related to transforming international reform concepts into local terms – that, at the same time, are meant to take local rationalities, expectations and perceptions into consideration – have been responsible for the hitherto failures seen by reform attempts in the police sector (along with others). Life and work-worlds are little affected by the international 'export' of often disjointed reform efforts intended to produce quick results. The 'realities'

1 I would like to thank Evgeniya Bakalova, Claudia Baumgart-Ochse, Melanie Coni-Zimmer, Sabine Mannitz and Christian Weidlich for their input and recommendations for improving this report.

perceived by police officers on the ground fundamentally differ from those that the reforms are meant to convey. Concurrently, the national administration largely refrains from assuming responsibility, or, rather, is forced to do so on account of acute capacity deficits, and, moreover, quietly pursues a 'strategy of externalization'.

My investigation demonstrates the need for alternate approaches that foster broad and open discussion and that likewise increase the inclusion of local perspectives. This would allow for the creation of flexible strategies in the reform process that incorporate the views of diverse representatives from the Bissau-Guinean police sector. The root causes of fears and resistance arising within the political realm and the security sector itself should be openly addressed; furthermore, plans should be explained in a coherent, step-by-step manner and jointly developed in order to eliminate any unease in the face of unknown processes and changes held by those involved. Unfortunately, short financing and project cycles, inconsistent personnel, and a lack of competence on the side of donors in the areas of analysis and empathy have hindered such an approach so far.

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1. Introduction

The inauguration of a new government in the West African state of Guinea-Bissau in July 2014 signaled a fresh start for international cooperation in the police sector. Cooperation with donor countries had largely been suspended following a coup in April 2012. This new beginning was made possible by democratic parliamentary and presidential elections that took place in April and May of 2014, putting an end to two years of international sanctions, political isolation and economic stagnation (Kohl 2013a). In this context, the present report sets out to uncover and investigate problems that have arisen in the context of cooperation between Bissau-Guinean institutions and international organizations in the police sector. It likewise identifies the lessons that can be learned from projects implemented in past years.

The factors driving international engagement have been the persistent problems that have plagued the police sector for many years, deficiencies that were also evident prior to the coup in 2012. Moreover, mistakes made during previous security sector reforms have been an additional factor. These problems not only have a negative impact on security and law enforcement but likewise threaten to destabilize of the entire political system. This situation also bears significance for Europe considering Guinea-Bissau's current role as a transit country for drugs, arms and migrants. The vital issues facing the Bissau-Guinean police sector include absent or inadequate training along with dire underfinancing and associated equipment shortages. Competency areas between various police units, that are anything but clearly defined, generate their own set of conflicts. The brief but intense civil war in 1998–99 brought with it a critical turning point: it placed the police in a disadvantaged position in terms of personnel and infrastructure and likewise established an acute competitive situation between the police and the military that was motivated by power politics. This has fostered mistrust between these two institutions that continues to exist today (see ISSAT n.d.; Mainzinger 2011; Girão de Sousa 2013; Kohl 2013b).

Considering these difficult circumstances, a conviction prevailed among the International Community – particularly the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) – at the beginning of the new millennium that Guinea-Bissau must be assisted in carrying out a comprehensive security sector reform (SSR) (Kohl 2013b). It was generally known that cooperation in the area of police and security sector reforms would prove complicated on account of the diversity of actors and their often opposing perspectives and approaches (see Girão de Sousa 2013; Kohl 2013b). A question posed by this study is how this cooperation has manifested itself in practice thus far.

The involved donors decided on implementing a model police station to serve as an 'entry point' for reforms in the police sector. This particular project offers vital insights for the present investigation. In concrete terms, this study addresses the following central questions: What (potentially contrasting) interests, expectations, projections, understandings and perspectives held by the international as well as the domestic actors come into contact in the context of the model police station? How are the ideals of police work held by international experts translated, adapted or rejected locally? Which 'translation prob-

lems' and coordination and communication issues have arisen between Bissau-Guinean police officers and international donor organizations and their staff? To what extent can a model police station – as an isolated 'entry point' – actually serve as a catalyst for the envisaged reform efforts, especially considering the otherwise 'unexemplary' institutional environment?

I will start by presenting the theoretical and methodological approach used in this study. This is followed by a general outline of the development process through which the police sector in independent Guinea-Bissau has gone. The third chapter sheds light on the institutional and infrastructural frameworks that exist in relation to the model police station. The following two chapters discuss the police sector, in general, and the model station, in particular, as part of the police 'reform sub-area' partially characterized by opposing interests, expectations, understandings and perceptions. The fourth chapter subsequently sheds light on the perspectives held by the international actors involved, and, building on this, the ensuing chapter investigates the problems of everyday policing faced by the model police station and the Bissauan police more generally. An abridged narration of my experience accompanying several police officers during one of their patrols serves as the core for analyzing the 'police's reality'.

2. Theoretical and methodological approach

This study considers the norms and concepts intended to embed security sector reforms in Guinea-Bissau to represent 'traveling models'. Such models that are 'imported' into new 'settings' undergo a process of translation: through their integration into new local social, cultural, political, geographic and economic contexts, they undergo complex changes. They are 'translated' in this process, meaning that they are recontextualized and, as such, implanted into new contexts (see Appadurai 1996; Czarniawska/Joerges 1996; Hannerz 2002; Latour 2007; Merry 2006):

“Accordingly, in the course of a translation, parts of a web of belief [...] as Willard Van Orman Quine [...] calls it, are transported to a new environment and come into novel relations with, at times, similar and, at times, divergent components of other webs of belief, leading to the creation of something new. [...] Translation as a core operation likewise goes beyond translating from one idiom into another and also beyond traditionally conceived intercultural translations” (Kaufmann/Rottenburg 2012: 222; translated from the German original).

Traveling models can entail ideas and practices as well as narrative structures, thought processes, convictions, programs and legal or normative orders. They find their expression through documents, constructs, images, artifacts and the like. In the course of their journeys, the models correspondingly undergo innovations and transformations. As such, the one-way transfer of models as described by globalization as unilateral North-South

transmissions and the simple adoption of models in new places does not exist as such.² Differing from the political science theory of norm localization, as argued by Amitav Acharya (2004), the organizational-sociological approach used here focuses on sub-national actors and processes.

The 'local ownership' norm demands a programmatic translation of security sector reform approaches, declaring this a basic requirement for any successful reform process (OECD 2007: 64–65). This highlights the global scope claimed by the concept of security sector reform. The present report argues that local participation in reform practice remains marginal despite such commitments (see Kohl 2013b). As I demonstrate, experts who spread security sector knowledge often assume the simple diffusion of norms and overlook the necessity of adapting these concepts to local conditions and demands. It would appear that many security sector actors harbor behavioristic attitudes, according to which people are passive recipients. As such, instructors can "[...] strengthen a desired behavior and weaken an undesired behavior [...] by manipulating the behavioral consequences" (Mietzel 2001: 20; translated from the German original). Such an approach implies that lectured knowledge will passively be 'saved' and internalized by the learners (Mietzel 2001: 24). Thus, normative expectations differ from reality in respect to the implementation of security sector reforms in Guinea-Bissau. This report demonstrates how countless international experts in the area of security sector reform who are convinced of the effectiveness of 'their' approaches often either implicitly or explicitly adhere to a Modernization approach. Modernization theory assumes that social development follows a linear progression according to which the 'developed world' serves as a global ideal to be imitated (see Gardner/Lewis 1996: 19).

The following analysis is essentially based on a number of participative observations – 'thick participation' (Spittler 2001) – that are supplemented by informal talks and formal interviews from September 2014 held with police staff in the context of the model police station in Bissau. It likewise draws on previous field research conducted in February and March 2013. Additionally supported by interviews and talks to informants beyond the scope of the model police station, the body of empirical material leads to a thick description of various situations.³ Other than the name may imply, a thick description does not merely amount to a descriptive presentation of events but is rather an analytical, interpretive reconstruction and interpretation of the multifaceted, empirical processes and occurrences under investigation (Wolff 1992: 343–344). The added value of this approach lies in the possibility of retracing the perspectives, understandings, experiences and expectations held by actors in the context of police reforms; by granting them a voice, their views are made comprehensible. These actors do not merely comprise Bissau-Guinean police officers but also the staff of international organizations. This research perspective stands

2 The World Culture Theory by John W. Meyers (2005) abides by such an approach. This is similar to the neo-institutional approach of institutional isomorphism proposed by Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell (1983) that speaks of an assimilation of processes and structures within organizations.

3 For the sake of making the text more readable, I forego referencing every statement made in the following sections.

in contrast to the majority of existing literature on the topic of security sector reforms in Guinea-Bissau that have often exclusively focused on policies, thereby hardly considering the actors involved in concrete reform measures, if considering them at all.

3. Paths of development in the Bissau-Guinean police sector

With a land area covering 36,000 square kilometers – slightly smaller than Switzerland – and a population of around 1.45 million (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2009), the Republic of Guinea-Bissau is one of the smallest countries in Africa. Around 370,000 people inhabit the country's capital, Bissau. The former Portuguese colony is among the poorest countries in the world and has been marred by political and economic instability as well as wide-spread corruption. The recent national budget for 2014 totaled 183 million Euro; of this total, 95 million were covered by external contributions. For the sake of comparison: the German city-state of Hamburg, with a slightly larger population, had a budget totaling 12 billion Euro for 2014. Though Guinea-Bissau's populace is culturally, ethnically and religiously heterogeneous, residents share a creole lingua language as interethnic communication medium. The country's police apparatus is subsumed under the Ministry of the Interior. Besides the security police, the ministry is also responsible for the traffic police, a rapid-response unit and the immigration authority. There is likewise a national guard, for which the Ministry of the Interior shares responsibility. According to a count from 2011, these authorities comprise nearly 4,000 staff, which corresponds to 275 police officers per 100,000 residents. Germany, in comparison, had 244,000 members in its police forces in 2012 (Eurostat 2014), resulting in a ratio of 301 officers per 100,000 residents.

When Guinea-Bissau gained its independence from Portugal in 1973–74 following a bloody anti-colonial war of liberation, developing the police force became one of the tasks of the new left-leaning one-party government. The government found many partners among communist states, which, until the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, supported Guinea-Bissau in building its police force in various ways: countries such as the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic offered educational and training courses for prospective senior officers. Czechoslovakia sent trainers to the 'Escola Nacional de Polícia César Dabó' police academy – established after independence –, while the Democratic People's Republic of Korea dispatched coaches to teach self-defense techniques from the Far East. After the country gained independence, many former freedom fighters entered the police forces and received further training. At the time, police work in Guinea-Bissau drew from authoritarian and communist role models; the (secret) police seemed to be omnipresent. During the initial years of their formation, the police forces were involved in the politically motivated silencing of critics as well as the murders of hundreds of alleged opponents of the regime (Forrest 1992: 54). The liberalization of the country's political system starting around 1990 had an impact on both police work and other authorities operating under the Ministry of the Interior. The beginning of the 1990s was marked by a different form of politicization among the military and police. In apparent geo-political competi-

tion with Portugal, the French Government established a rapid-response unit in Guinea-Bissau at the time – said to be close to the president.

The civil war in 1998–99 represented a pivotal turning point. The conflict comprised of two warring parties: the police forces mostly supported President João Bernardo ‘Nino’ Viera while the armed forces sided with former Chief of Staff Ansumané Mané and his junta. This conflict not only established deep mistrust between the police and the military, which is still felt today, it also led to the ingrained neglect of the police’s infrastructure: the military assumed control of the police academy and used it for other purposes, a small police laboratory established by Czechoslovakia was shuttered, personnel archives destroyed, and the issuance of service IDs was discontinued. Even worse was the fact that regulated recruitment no longer took place. Instead, unqualified individuals who had joined the police in the aftermath of the war remained on the force. Other grave problems that have plagued the police forces include a weak presence in the country’s interior, deficient levels of training, poor working conditions, low wages, corruption, and undefined scopes of authority among the various units (see Handem 2008: 154, Girão de Sousa 2013: 65; ISSAT n.d.:8). Additionally, there has been a relatively large ratio of officials in managing positions compared to low-ranking police officers.

As such, starting in 2005, many actors within the International Community became convinced that reforms to Guinea-Bissau’s police, armed forces and judiciary were imperative. The reform process gained steam in December of 2006 when representatives at a donor conference agreed to implement a security sector reform (Republic of Guinea-Bissau 2006); the ‘Security Sector Plan of Action for the Restructuring and Modernization of the Security Defence Sector’ was concluded in the year that followed (Peacebuilding Commission 2008: 3). The creation of the ‘United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau’ (UNIOGBIS) in 2009 focused on this objective, succeeding the ‘United Nations Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau’ (UNOGBIS) that had been established in 1999 (Mainzinger 2011: 74–76). UNIOGBIS assumed various functions that included conducting a count of police personnel, educating and training police officials, helping to establish a model police station – in cooperation with the ‘United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’ (UNODC) –, and providing assistance for training programs on ‘community policing’ (see also ISSAT n.d.:8; Mainzinger 2011: 77). The ‘EU Mission in Support for Security Sector Reform in Guinea-Bissau’ (EU-SSR), created in 2008, also entailed a major police force component (see Kohl 2013b: 9–10). A large part of the EU’s efforts focused on juridical regulations and the embedding of police work, including the delineation of areas of authority among various security institutions – relevant institutional regulations for the police sector did not exist at the program’s outset (ISSAT n.d.: 8). Another priority area was professional training followed by a number of infrastructure and equipment projects (which were hardly carried-out). Ultimately, the EU would use the occasion of a military intervention in April 2010 to allow the mission to expire by the end of that year (Girão de Sousa 2013: 67–68).

One of the comprehensive reform measures that UNIOGBIS and the EU implemented was a structural reorganization of the police sector. Of course speaking of ‘the’ police sector in Guinea-Bissau is a gross oversimplification: as in other countries, multiple police units

exist in parallel. In Guinea-Bissau, many units have existed in the past along with the security police 'Polícia de Ordem Pública' (POP), namely: the traffic police 'Polícia de Trânsito', the rapid-response unit 'Polícia de Intervenção Rápida' (PIR), the border police 'Guarda Fronteira', the immigration and border authority 'Serviço de Migração e Fronteiras', and the intelligence agency 'Serviço do Estado de Segurança da Informação'. In addition to these, there have also been a criminal police force 'Polícia Judiciária' under the Ministry of Justice, a forest protection force 'Guarda Florestal' under the Ministry of Agriculture, a maritime security force 'Polícia Marítima', and the financial police authorities 'Guarda Fiscal' and 'Fiscamar' (see Guerreiro 2011: 11; Girão de Sousa 2009: 21, who does not, however, mention the PIR). On the advice of experts from Southern Europe, the EU merged all of the named institutions – except for the secret service, the rapid-response unit, the security and traffic police forces – into a new national guard, the 'Guarda Nacional', based on its pendant in Portugal but placed it under the Ministry of the Interior (see Monteiro/Morgado 2009: 4). However, this led to a conflict with UNIOGBIS, whose representatives opposed the creation of such a paramilitary police force (Girão de Sousa 2013: 78). UNIOGBIS staff today accuses the national guard of human rights abuses. The military coup in 2012 was, in part, due to the military perceiving of the newly formed national guard as direct competition to itself. Following the coup, the military placed the national guard de facto under its control, as it did all other non-military security forces.

The UNODC is another 'player'; it is engaged in the areas of providing the criminal police with training and equipment (along with Portugal) and has likewise supported the creation of a 'Transnational Criminal Unit'. Furthermore, the Brazilian Government founded a training center for Guinea-Bissau's security forces (Centro de Formação das Forças de Segurança da Guiné-Bissau) near the capital, which had offered various training courses until the military coup of April 2012 (see ISSAT n.d.: 10–12). After the EU pulled out, Angola dispatched the 'Angolan Military Mission in Guinea-Bissau' (MISSANG) at the beginning of 2011; this mission aimed at reconstructing police buildings and training a few dozen police officials – primarily members of the rapid-response unit – at the police academy in Luanda. Due to the military coup in April 2012, the Angolan mission had to pull out of Guinea-Bissau and was thus unable to realize a number of projects (such as the construction of a new police academy, a police depot and police stations). The coup also forced other donors to suspend reforms associated with the police.

The broad involvement of diverse external actors has also resulted in failures for Guinea-Bissau's security sector – a detrimental factor of former international interventions criticized in more depth elsewhere (Kohl 2013b). As police work has generally exhibited very low levels of standardization from a cultural, legal, organization and administrative perspective, the degree to which such diversity among donors either contributes to or is to the detriment of reforms and congruency within the police sector becomes all the more relevant.

After a hiatus of over two years, international cooperation in the police sector finally resumed in the wake of elections in April and May 2014, and it included the model police station project.

4. The model police station in Bissau

With the aim of creating an ‘entry point’ for the reorganization of the police forces, UNIOGBIS elected to establish a model police station in Bissau – a well-known measure that has proven itself as a successful basic model for international cooperation in police sector in other countries (such as in Nigeria). This project is a prime example of a ‘traveling model’. A general assumption lying at the core of this approach is that “innovations best take place at the margins of an organization away from prying eyes. Once success is proven in the margins, innovations can spread by organic diffusion rather than by institutionalization” (Vermaak 2012: 227). The creation of such a model police station was likewise meant to be of “central importance for police reform approaches whose impacts sprout from the foundations and develop into reform processes – in other words, bottom-up” (Mainzinger 2011: 77; translated from the German original). The model police station was envisioned as “a miniature representation of the entire reform process in the police sector, at least in a number of central topical areas” (Mainzinger 2011: 77; translated from the German original). This includes community policing, the selection and verification of police officials, deployment standards, equipment and financing standards, administrative regulations, professional training and equality. This concept therefore extends beyond the mere construction of a police station: it targets qualification, standardization and procedural measures and assumes the integrity of police officers to be vital (Mainzinger 2011: 77f). As such, those selected to serve in the model police station were – according to statements from its representatives – said to be trained in the area of community policing in 2010–12. Even before it was commissioned, one political scientist provisionally contracted by the UN in Guinea-Bissau was certain that the establishment of the model police station in cooperation with the respective public agencies had already “positively influenced the corresponding structures and processes within the police authorities and thereby generated capacities for the entire reform process itself” (Mainzinger 2011: 79; translated from the German original).

The decision to erect the station in the neighborhood ‘Bairro Militar’ (literally: ‘Military Quarter’) in the capital of Bissau was strategic in nature: until a short time prior, this neighborhood in the northern part of the capital was considered “a republic with its own laws and many criminals”, as one interviewee put it. Home to 60,000 residents, Bairro Militar is indeed a district for people with little money; as such, it has also been a settlement area for many domestic and foreign migrants. According to other residents in Bissau, the police used to suffer from a very poor reputation in this neighborhood until just a few years ago, a situation that culminated in the murder of two police officers.

As police officers at the model police station explained, the former station was very small; the new building was erected a distance away from the previous one and offered more space. The path to commissioning was, however, a long one, as one UN staffer confidentially admitted: the construction company that won the bid embezzled a portion of the money allotted by UNIOGBIS – resulting in a “nightmare” situation. UNIOGBIS was either unable or unwilling to allocate any additional funds; this meant that money originally intended to pay for equipment such as solar panels and police cars had to be reallo-

cated. Despite these shortcomings that were the result of corruption, the police station is still, by far, the best equipped in the entire country. According to one UNIOGBIS staffer – a police officer by profession – who introduced the station in the presence of the commander, the station was connected to the UN’s promotional strategy; they allowed me to take pictures of the station and speak with the people working there. With the nodding approval of the commander, the UN representative proudly stated that the police officers here already possessed a “different mentality”.

The current station has to deal with a rather inconvenient location in terms of road connections, situated in a northern and relatively remote part of the neighborhood. Until the bypass road (still under construction in September–October 2014) was completed, access to the station in the rainy season was especially difficult as the main street was unpaved and laden with deep puddles and potholes. The one-storied building is spacious and houses ten offices, two break rooms, a waiting area and three jail cells located behind the building. A small kitchen is situated at some distance from the cells along with an annex building housing a generator. Since the police station is currently not connected to the, otherwise unreliable, power grid, it mostly draws its electricity from a neighboring private school. There are no funds available for diesel to power the generator; when UNIOGBIS holds training courses, the UN staff has to bring fuel with them. During my time at the station, there was only one vehicle available for use – an additional, damaged, pick-up truck had been inoperable for some time. The ministry only allots the station 20 liters of diesel per week, which limits the usability of the vehicle. At the time, reaching the station by phone had been limited for nearly three months since the phone charger was missing. Apart from a sample device, the station does not possess a radiotelephone; it does, however, have a room intended for use as a radio station, currently being used for storage. Consequently, the police officers are forced to make use of their private phones. During my various visits to the station, the secretary’s office was vacant and the computers along with their printers were inoperative. Minutes of meetings, notices and reports were drafted using a decade-old mechanical typewriter. The ministry had not provided the station with any handcuffs, though one police officer of a higher rank had managed to procure some on his own. The situation with firearms is no different: only a small number of the officers possess private guns while the machine guns stored at the station are outdated and ammunition is hardly available. The Ministry of the Interior provides an additional benefit to the officers in the form of rice and cooking oil for making lunch in the station’s kitchen. The officers supplement this with fish – the cheapest source of protein – using their own money – allegedly. According to one civil servant, a total of 50 male police officers and 2 or 3 female police officers carried out rotating shifts at the station during my time there.

Talks with numerous officers working at the model police station suggest that the poor situation facing the station has been the direct result of the coup in April 2012 and the ensuing suspension of cooperation with UNIOGBIS. Political events have ushered in a crisis for this project that was initiated with high hopes 2011, bearing negative consequences for the police station and its staff. As in other administrative areas, the general lack of international financial support meant that wages were often paid months behind schedule (see Silva Dias 2010: 99) and that investments remained absent. The grip of the

military over the Ministry of the Interior has resulted in a change of leadership positions, leading to a loss of management skills; consequently, there has been a general decrease in interest for the UNIOGBIS model police station pilot project. This has further undermined the already weak capacities of local authorities to adequately maintain the station financially and administratively.

The model police station represents an attempt to transplant successful police structures and approaches applied in the so-called 'developed countries' elsewhere. Having been only marginally adapted, the station finds itself in a social, political and economic context that abides by differing forces and logics. The pre-conditions briefly outlined here uncover some of the challenges that confront such 'exported' island structures when devoid of external support structures. This situation brings up the question of the extent to which misunderstandings, ignorance and false conceptions on the side of international donor institutions have led to translation problems in the transfer of norms related to security sector reforms in Guinea-Bissau. Moreover, the question also arises as to how the functional logic of the, supposed, dysfunctionality of Bissau-Guinean structures affects the implementation of reforms.

5. Misunderstandings, false perceptions and ignorance in police reforms

There has generally been a tendency among UNIOGBIS (and other international donors) to present the model police station in Bissau (and the security sector reform in general) as a success: ultimately, the jobs, financial contributions and the very continuation of the related projects and programs are at stake. One implicit source of pressure has resulted from the necessity to attract experts to work on the projects. Relatively short project durations and job contracts – Guinea-Bissau is not considered an attractive country in the eyes of many 'expats' – increase the turnover rate of staff from international organizations such as UNIOGBIS. Consequently, while projects constantly receive renewed energy from new staff, recent hires must, at the same time, constantly be acquainted with their assumed positions and familiarize themselves with the country. This situation can lead to rather peculiar results, as the example that follows illustrates.

Misperceptions in the development and implementation of projects

During my last research stay in Guinea-Bissau in late 2014, I came to know a UNIOGBIS staffer who had just recently arrived in the country. Up until that point, she had only visited the interior regions a few times and was not very familiar with local place names, let alone the situations there. She had previously spent several years working on another security sector project on a different continent related to the police and the media. She wanted to transfer these experiences to Guinea-Bissau, she explained. Her intention was to bring persons responsible for the media within the police sector together at one table

with representatives from print media across the country and thereby promote communication and exchange. However, it was very improbable that any such police media representatives existed in the first place. She was apparently also unaware of the facts that newspapers were solely released in Bissau and that the general populace almost exclusively used radio media as a source of information.

This example again highlights the fundamental lack of understanding as to realities in the country and in everyday police work. Members of other organizations active in the Bissau-Guinean security sector have criticized UNIOGBIS for its distance (even geographic) to existent realities. One local expert, for example, explained that UNIOGBIS “doesn’t catch much”. This observation was based on the fact that a UNIOGBIS representative had named the centrally situated city of Bafatá as a ‘cidade modelo’ (model city) solely because a series of projects supported by the International Community existed there (the rehabilitation and expansion of the correctional facility, the opening of an access-to-justice center and the renovation of a courthouse). He apparently overlooked or simply had no knowledge of the facts that the police and the courts there were hardly ‘exemplary’ or that they struggled with large financial, logistical and educational problems, not to mention corruption. The ‘heights’ from which members of UN organizations operate is also demonstrated by the following example: a part of UNIOGBIS’ activities is dedicated to – recently strengthened – (attempts at) coordinating activities carried out by international donors by way of monthly meetings of diplomatic representatives and representatives from international organizations in Bissau. Emblematic of the diplomatic hindrances facing effective and pragmatic cooperation are the administrative questions that the meetings get caught up in: who is allowed to take part at the meetings, who should sit in the second row of seats, who should be granted speaking and voting rights. Cooperation with the Bissau-Guinean authorities is likewise characterized by such administrative and bureaucratic obstacles. As several staffers from the UN organizations informed me, they would first have to wait until the drawn-out process of reshuffling leadership positions among the relevant ministries and authorities was finished by the middle or end of 2014 to again have access to diplomatically ‘correct’ contact persons. Program and project leaders were not allowed to violate protocol by negotiating with unauthorized representatives from the ministries and authorities.

This, of course, does not imply that the staff does not reflect upon the problems and deficiencies facing security sector reform projects – on the contrary. The staffer previously mentioned criticized the national guard’s role in human rights violations, which had just been uncovered in the course of a security sector reform also being implemented by her organization. The same staffer likewise complained about the fact that the donor institutions delivered vehicles produced, not by a single, but by various manufacturers, which made maintenance and the acquisition of spare parts more cumbersome. However, UN staff also often took critical stances towards their own projects: some UN police officers I spoke with complained of the deficient communication and sporadic work done with Bissau-Guinean police officers as well as the bureaucratic processes demanded by their organizations.

The problem of local participation and local capacities

After the police academy that the Angolan Government planned to construct could not be realized, the fact that a building in which officers may receive their several-year police training does not exist in Bissau is indicative of the major hurdles that persist. Currently, a training center financed by the Brazilian Government – which, according to a Brazilian federal police officer, possesses modern equipment of a higher level than that used in Brazil – is too small to permanently host several police academy classes at once. There had clearly not been any discussions held with Angola or other donors to address this question prior to September 2014. Insecurities likewise exist, such as those harbored by high-ranking civil servants who fear to be made accountable for unwelcomed decisions, often resulting in decisions remaining unmade. Last, but not least, a high degree of opposition to possible changes and reforms that is never openly expressed likely also plays a major role – as has been common in other contexts (see Vermaak 2012: 232–33, 243). Moreover, communication within the authorities, the respective institutions and among various positions is also a problem in itself.

The idea of ‘local ownership’ was generally positively depicted during official talks to international experts. One staffer expressed that the authorities should draft curricula for police training locally; UNIOGBIS, however, would only be able to stand at the sidelines and offer advice thus far, i.e. without initiating such a process. She said that, after years of reform efforts, it was now time to finally develop a concept for police training, albeit with the impetus necessarily stemming from the Bissau-Guineans. However, this, in itself, presents a problem as a lack of capacities within the ministerial hierarchies undercuts such demand-oriented approaches. My interview partner went on to say that, so far, UNIOGBIS staff have had to organize the courses in their entirety on their own and often have to provide PowerPoint presentations for the training sessions; the organization now wishes to distance itself from this practice in order to promote ‘local ownership’. The disadvantage inherent in such a demand-oriented approach is that “it leaves participants to their own devices, refusing to help them address their tough issues and blind spots” (Vermaak 2012: 233). A better approach would be to use workshops in order to:

Discuss with participants what issues matter enough to make the discomfort of unclear help and an unfamiliar approach worth enduring. The help requested/offered here is not the leading factor here but rather which issues are most suitable for innovation. (Vermaak 2012: 235)

Yet these sorts of planning workshops are time and resource intensive.

Implicitly or explicitly, numerous UN staff members working with security sector reforms also appear to be of the conviction that approaches to problems that entail a significant degree of involvement by relevant civil servants in the police sector and ministries are bound to fail from the very beginning anyway, believing that locals are corrupt and generally incapable of handling modern equipment. Statements made by one of the UN staffers whom I talked to during my field research in 2013 in reference to the model police station are indicative of this conviction:

There was also the problem of fuel we provided for the generator. But the generator is always off because there is no fuel. We provide them with computers and printers and so on but as there is

no fuel to run the generator, the computers don't work and people do not touch them. They will forget everything that was taught. That's Guinea-Bissau!

For this interviewee, involvement was more of a risk than it was a solution, which he justified with reference to the corruption that occurred while constructing the model police station: "UNIOGBIS wanted to give capacity to the local institutions to build [the model police station] [...]. It was a real mess!" For him, involving local parties responsible and those affected was not the answer, rather the exact opposite:

I don't know what to tell you about this. For me, it's [i.e. security sector reform] just a waste of time and money. This is my personal opinion [...]. Because you [as UN] don't have any capacity to rule, to make them do things!

These examples are indicative of the Modernization theory-like mindsets mentioned earlier (see Gardner/Lewis 1996: 19). This perspective understands security sector reforms to entail a one-to-one transfer of 'Western' norms taken to be superior and it is critical of local translations. It stands in opposition to the officially mandated local ownership norm, highlighting the discrepancy between normativity and practice.

Poor understandings of local relations

As the following exemplary excerpts from the field are meant to demonstrate, some UN staff members have a more differentiated outlook. Despite this, many still abide by the tenets of Modernization theory. In October 2014, I participated in a one-week refresher course for community policing that was held at the model police station and attended by nearly 20 of the station's police officers. The UN police officers in charge of the event, who hailed from various countries in Europe and the Americas, gave the impression of being both engaged and competent. One of them criticized that police officers generally had to work 24-hour shifts. He ardently questioned this situation and vehemently called on the Bissau-Guinean police officers to end the practice, citing that they would be physically unable to perform their tasks due to fatigue. He suggested implementing a 3-shift system as was common in his home country. After the officers had heard his arguments, one of them retorted that they would be unable to change this situation since it was mandated by the ministry and the commissioner's office. At another course session that addressed, amongst others, the issue of informing schools and other public institutions about police work, the same police officer called on the station's chief to set-up awareness-raising measures as, again, was common in his own country. Even after the participants explained that the ministry and commissioner's office did not allow the police chief to leave the station for such purposes, the officer further pushed the matter during the group-work phase.

If one were to only take this example, it would appear that the majority of UNIOGBIS staff members adhere to the concept of a unilateral North-South transfer of knowledge. On the other hand, they have also internalized the 'local ownership' norm that is propagated in the area of security sector reforms. A UN police officer repeatedly encouraged participants in one of the course sessions to seek out their own, innovative solutions when faced with inadequacies and shortages. His colleague from UNIOGBIS repeatedly stressed that the solutions to problems cannot come from the outside; they should organize them-

selves on their own and find realistic, obvious measures – everything was a matter of organization. They were, in fact, suggesting that the participants avoid mere imitation (Vermaak 212: 233) of – methodologically questionable – practical models, which may function elsewhere, and focus on creating locally adapted solutions. In so doing, they did, however, quickly run up against the limits of practicality by grossly underestimating the seriousness of the problems facing local police officers.

When the police officers complained that there was only one vehicle available to them and that its use was limited due to a lack of fuel, one of these UNIOGBIS staffers suggested that the officers use a *toca-toca* to reach their dispatch locations. *Toca-tocas* are low-cost group taxis that commute along pre-determined routes in Bissau and in the country's interior. The staffer apparently assumed that security personnel would be able to use public means of transportation free of charge as is the case in many European countries; this is not the case in Guinea-Bissau, though, being that these group taxis are privately operated. Who would pay for the transport costs considering the limited public funds? The UN staffer ultimately could not find a response to this question. The officers would simply have to negotiate with the drivers or go on foot, according to a UNIOGBIS staffer in another context. He was soon astounded to learn that the station was responsible for a patrol area that extended far beyond the borders of *Bairro Militar*; at the same time, he had never heard of some of the important neighborhoods covered by the station. Another, albeit marginal, example that occurred in the same course one day prior demonstrates the lack of knowledge held by the UN staffer – who had already been in the country for several months; it likewise reflects the divergent degrees of experience that exist. This particular staffer repeatedly provided examples meant to illustrate the importance of traffic controls. What he was unaware of, however, was that the security police had nothing to do with this matter: traffic was an area within the exclusive authority of the traffic police. The participants responded this with a shrug of their shoulders but did not openly voice any disagreement. Well-intentioned attempts by one unsettled, otherwise self-confident, UNIOGBIS staffer to offer alternatives for overcoming equipment shortages came across as fruitless: when the police officers complained that they had to restrain arrested individuals with shoe laces since they did not have any handcuffs, he suggested that they try to use the bendable branches of a guava tree. He showed empathy for the 'frustration', the 'tristesse' and the anger in relation to the working conditions of his Bissau-Guinean counterparts. Consequently, he called on the police officers to voice their dissatisfaction, saying that they would have to go beyond mere criticism and also act. He recommended that they appeal to the Ministry of the Interior about the equipment deficiencies they face. According to countless police officers and the police chief himself, this approach had previously resulted in little willingness or capacity on the part of the ministry to enact changes.

Pedagogical, methodological and acceptancy deficits

UNIOGBIS' attempt to place more importance on local powers in the area of education and training was made evident on the first day of the training course as a Bissau-Guinean lawyer held a lecture on human rights in police work. The lawyer provided few concrete examples – even upon request – and the lecture remained highly abstract, theoretical and

had a very limited impact on the officers present, which became evident during my talks with various participants after the course. During a subsequent course, one of the participants asked the UN police officer leading the course in which cases human rights could be violated. His response – “on February 31 of last year – never!” – was met with laughter but it again highlighted the limited impacts that arise from translating ‘exported’ abstract ideas or practical, professionally relevant concepts into local terms – be they conveyed by local or international trainers. Despite assertions that norms from the security sector reforms can translate into other ‘webs of belief’ (Willard Van Orman Quine, see Kaufmann/Rottenburg 2012: 222), many schoolings ended in unchanged realities that bear little resemblance to such translations.

Generally speaking, the contents of the training sessions I observed in Guinea-Bissau were partly presented in ways that were both detached from the professional practice and also heavy on theory. This might have been due to the fact that most of the trainers had little didactic experience to draw from. Practical exercises that took place during a separate session on the last day had not been integrated into the theoretical explications nor were any detailed evaluations provided apart from some brief verbal feedback. The didactical method of using group work to investigate cases and topics and likewise clarify uncertainties was rarely applied in a comprehensive manner. This accords to the perception held by Alice Hills (2012: 754) who made the following statements based on her own field research on police reforms in Nigeria:

[...] transmission, as it relates to police, is better analysed and promoted in terms of technical knowledge and material interests than norms, important aspects of which clash with local political interests and police culture (though norms and values may be embedded in technical skills). Further, the knowledge concerned is a utilitarian form of information (of knowledge in practice), rather than the normatively based theoretical forms of knowledge promoted by donors (knowledge as practice). This implies that successful transfer – a transfer capable of accommodating or embedding a specific type of knowledge – requires the development of a hybrid form of understanding whereby recipients construct, exercise and validate an adaptive form of knowledge [...].

As I was able to observe on numerous occasions, the police officers actually ‘woke up’ when practical examples and problems were brought to the table, which, as many admitted, they would have liked to investigate more deeply. Possibly as a result of the perceived lack of practical exercises and training sessions as well as deficient professional and legal knowledge among the civil servants at the model police station, UNIOGBIS voiced a plan to dispatch UN staff to the station in order to work on concrete cases with the Bissau-Guinean officers three times per week.

Moreover, it is often evident that the trainers – none of which are professional teachers – abide by a logic that assumes schoolings induce simple, behavioristic effects. They initially presume that the trainees will passively absorb, save and implement the knowledge transferred to them, a process implicit in the theory of Behaviorism (see Mietzel 2001: 24). The fact that this is not the case and that freshly trained officers fall back into ‘undesirable’ and corrupt patterns of behavior puzzles them. A Brazilian officer who worked at the police training center in Guinea-Bissau sponsored by the Brazilian Government reported about his experience with a traffic control manned by 20 police officers. A number of the officers present had participated at a theoretical and practical training course at ‘his’ cen-

ter. Exhibiting surprise and a bit of anger, he explained how the Bissau-Guinean officers had “forgotten everything” that he and his colleagues had tried to teach them. Such an experience can surely lead to disappointment among the trainers: while living under difficult life and working conditions, they invest a great deal of time and effort to educate and train their local counterparts but their engagement appears to be for naught in their view. Though I never witnessed a UNIOGBIS police officers openly expressing frustration towards their Bissau-Guinean colleagues – on the contrary, they were quite friendly and constructive –, it was the small gestures that were telling of the fact that they did not take the local officers at the model police station seriously and that they did not view them as equals. Such gestures included sighs or furrowed brows during our talks meant to indicate that something at the station was amiss. Though the equality between the international and the Bissau-Guinean ‘partners’ was stressed in official statements, a hierarchy was clearly in place. This was evident in situations such as the one mentioned earlier with the station’s commanding officer, who was treated as a movie extra by the UN staffer who presented the station to me. Other situations also confirmed this, such as when one of the UN police officers told a Bissau-Guinean officer to tie his shoelaces at the start of a seminar in the morning. The same officer verbally confronted one of the local police officers harshly for wearing slippers to the training instead of laced boots. In another situation, one of the UNIOGBIS staffers commanded police officers attending a seminar to form a queue during an attendance registration. These status differences that extended beyond mere rank differences and that were never openly addressed clearly demonstrate that the majority of officers in Guinea-Bissau – at least, and particularly, those under the leadership level – were treated as ‘wannabe’ officers rather than as ‘actual’, ‘full-fledged’ police officials. These examples bear witness to the inherent sense of superiority felt by international experts who, despite official statements to the contrary, exhibit a belief in a transfer of security sector norms in line with Modernization theory rather than a translation of these norms.

A faith in technology

International organizations such as UNIOGBIS also carried out educational programs, the practical applications of which were, however, questioned by both the Bissau-Guinean participants and the UNIOGBIS representatives, implicitly or explicitly. UNIOGBIS organized a five-day training course in September 2014 for around twenty members of the security police, national guard, rapid-response unit and immigration authority on the topic of a personnel database. In 2011–12, UNIOGBIS contracted a local IT technician to create a basic Microsoft Access database to register all civil servants working in the Ministry of the Interior’s security institutions. After the personnel archives were destroyed during the civil war in 1998–99, an overview of the existing staff no longer existed. This data was handed over to the ministry just before the coup in April 2012; UNIOGBIS had received the “master file”, as I was told. So far, the database has seldom been utilized. Not only has it not been updated since the handover, the course participants are even unable to use it. This is because the program itself is only stored locally on a single computer at the ministry while the other institutions do not even have computers. Course participants have repeatedly complained that they quickly forget the contents they were taught being

that they never had the opportunity to actually apply them. Despite these criticisms, the IT technicians and UNIOGBIS staffers as well as the Bissau-Guinean course participants themselves were convinced that the database represented a leap forward. The latter, in particular, perceive technology to be a crucial factor for enabling successful police work and also view it as a symbol of social development. This relates to the concept of “politics of membership in ‘world society’ [...]” (Ferguson 2002: 558), the drive to be on par with countries in the ‘global north’ that are perceived as ‘superior’. According to the IT technician, UNIOGBIS planned to provide the security institutions in the country’s interior with computers and grant them access to the server that stores the database. How this was to be realized remained an open question, especially considering that even the model police station in Bissau constantly struggles with energy constraints while the ministry is not in a financial or technical position to maintain IT equipment. A question that I posed to a UNIOGBIS representative asking whether a physical paper archive would not be advantageous – in light of the chronic electricity, financial and capacity deficits – went unanswered, perhaps because it was not considered a serious inquiry. This example of the technology-focused, Modernization theory-ridden mindsets held by the project initiators highlights the low degree of sophistication and the inappropriate sequencing inherent in many projects. It also provides further evidence for the lack of translation processes and embedding that occurs with regards to international security sector reform concepts and norms – thus (attempted) unilateral transfers prevail over a “travel of ideas” (see Czarniawska/Joerges 1996).

International organizations are all too glad to offer short-term training programs in various areas of the security sector (as well as others) on account of the fact that they are easily quantifiable and do not require much cost or effort. At the same time, such programs can be advertised by the organizations, donors and the media/public themselves as proof of their engagement. Nevertheless, the criticism voiced by the same Brazilian police officer is also valid in this context: the short-term training courses lack continuity and their focus is too particular. On the other hand, it is also doubtful whether longer-term programs would change the behavior of the police officers as the behavioristic perspective held by many organizers (implicitly) assumes. Even if police officers were to internalize the knowledge they are taught at these short-term training programs, fundamental structural deficits would remain a reality in the Bissau-Guinean police sector.

Unexpected and overlooked momentum

Those who support the establishment of model police stations as a central pillar of security sector reforms (such as Mainzinger 2011: 77) are convinced that this ‘bottom-up’ approach can influence relevant police and institutional structures and affect additional positive changes. One point that should be mentioned here is that the understanding of ‘bottom-up’ as used by Christian Markus Mainzinger differs from its use in other contexts. While ‘bottom-up’ here solely refers to desired changes that are hoped to ‘emerge’, the term is otherwise used in reference to approaches to planning and implementing reform projects by way of governmental institutions, members of the security forces, civil society and the populace of a respective country (see Kohl 2013b). The hope that reforms

in the entire police sector can be driven by the creation of a 'bottom-up' model police station can, in fact, result in the exact opposite outcome. There are two reasons for this: rather than serving as a beacon that positively radiates upon the other police authorities (see above, Vermaak 2012: 227), in the medium term, the station could represent a fish out of water, unable to survive in the sea of 'bad practices' within higher-level and adjacent governmental organizations in the security sector. The station would become dependent on this context and incapable of decoupling from it. In the worst case, the model police station could become the target of an ideological opposition movement, a "[...] chain reaction of consequences which are not only unplanned, but sometimes undesirable as well" (Czarniawska/Joerges 1996: 19).

Secondly, solely focusing on the police station overlooks the fact that such an approach largely bypasses the very institutions within the police and security sector that are crucial for accompanying, supporting and, as it is, realizing reform projects: the mid-level officials within the Ministry of the Interior and the police headquarters. In fact, a hierarchy conflict exists in the police structures of Guinea-Bissau: many younger (though not necessarily lower-ranking) police officers I spoke with expressed the view that the decision-makers ('chefes') at the police headquarters are largely incompetent, corrupt, opposed to new ideas and were disinterested in what happens on the ground at the police stations. In other words: the 'chefes' merely sit around and do not act on their own initiative. Numerous high-ranking police officers within the 'comissariado' (police headquarters) completed their training in former authoritarian and communist countries and therefore may possess little experience with or understanding of approaches to police work that stand in opposition to their acquired authoritarian management styles.

This is, for example, the case in the context of (non-existent) awareness-raising campaigns mentioned earlier as well as community policing. Additionally, these senior officers feel neglected since training programs tend to only benefit new and younger police officers. From their perspective, this could equate to an affront on their status. One example of this: In the context of the database training course, a colonel within the Bissau-Guinean police who had just held an introductory speech approached me, saying he was seeking out international cooperation in the police sector since the training courses currently offered only targeted new officers and not officers such as himself. He asked whether the German Government offered such programs. He continued by explaining that he had studied in the former Soviet Union and that human rights had not been an issue at the time. Besides that, he operated a plantation and was looking for investors from Germany. This final remark demonstrates that an additional reason for the passivity among the police management may be that many see their professional positions as potentially threatened by younger officers and may also fear the loss of lucrative (including potentially illicit) 'secondary sources' of income. All in all, it seems too short sighted to place all of one's bets on the alleged power of an isolated model police station, despite the idea's appeal. Higher cadres that feel excluded can easily block reform efforts. One future possibility lies in the eventual replacement of leading officials by younger recruits who possess more capacities ('mas capacidade'), though this is by no means the only one.

A question of mentality

One crucial factor for the failures of reform efforts mentioned by the international experts on the ground was the ‘mentality’ of Bissau-Guineans in general and the police officers in particular. Guinea-Bissau has been characterized by a self-victimization discourse (Trajano Filho 2002: 154–157; Kohl/Schroven 2014). This discourse describes a collective, Bissau-Guinean way of life marked by resignation, deprivation and suffering in the face of adverse economic and political circumstances and a shared colonial as well as postcolonial autocratic experiences. At the start of the 1990s, observers ascribed the population with a “mentality of dependence” (Acção para o Desenvolvimento 1993: 41; translated from the Portuguese original). Apart from that, this discourse includes the wide-spread belief among many Bissau-Guineans that “[...] their things are of less worth” as a cultural coordinator working at the Brazilian cultural center in Bissau put it (Figueira 2013: 245). Complementary to this and equally wide-spread among the public administration are strategies of ‘extraversion’, as Jean-Francois Bayart (2012) labels them. This analytical concept refers to a strategy utilized in African societies of turning alleged dependence into a resource. A constant flow of financing is guaranteed through the targeted mobilization of foreign resources – financial and technical cooperation, foreign investments, and the like.

Yet, how do ‘mentalities’ and ‘extraversions’ manifest themselves in the police reform arena? When a UNIOGBIS staffer brought some plastic chairs to a training course at the model police station, a debate ensued between one of the involved UN police officers and one of the officers employed by the station. The police officer remarked that UNIOGBIS could also deliver an air conditioner to cool the station. He added that UNIOGBIS members were, in fact, ‘patrocinadores’ (‘sponsors’) of the model police station. The UNIOGBIS officer retorted irritated and angrily, but remained calm as he stood in front of his Bissau-Guinean counterpart, and stated that that the officers only ever made demands but would first have to change their mentality before additional material support could be discussed. The UNIOGBIS officer and another of his colleagues asked the local officer if he had an air conditioner at home. The officer said that he lived on an island in the middle of a rice field in one of the far-lying areas of Bissau and that he did not have an air conditioner. He added that the air was pretty cool there. Behind closed doors, the UN officers remarked with a smirk that this and other statements made by the local officer were “nearly philosophical” and that he simply liked to talk.

As such, the UNIOGBIS experts from the ‘global North’ ascribed a deviant mentality to the Bissau-Guinean police officers, again indirectly confirming the gap that exists between the ‘global North’ and the ‘South’. This example also implicitly bears evidence of the Modernization theory orientation held by many experts. The behavior of the Bissau-Guinean officers in no way has to be associated with a deviant mentality. In fact, taken from a local perspective, UNIOGBIS turned itself into the source of financing for the police station; as such, the UN missions would appear to be the ‘correct’ addressee for such requests, especially considering that the local officers cannot and do not want to depend on assistance from the unresponsive higher levels within the ministry. In this regard, the strategy of extraversion, i.e. to externalize costs, adopted by government representatives

indeed pays off. On the other hand, the request for the air conditioner was not far-fetched: the training sessions were taking place during the peak of the rainy season, which is accompanied by high temperatures and humidity. Attending classes at the muggy station turned into a sweaty and physically demanding affair for all the participants, hardly alleviated by the constantly running fans. Might the climatic conditions in the police station – standing unprotected from the sun’s direct rays – have been the reason why police officers and the police chief himself along with his deputy could constantly be found sitting under the shade of some nearby mango trees – in uniform or in civilian clothing – rather than inside the station? They could be seen sitting or standing around, at times napping on a mat, while ladies from the market sold them cool drinks and snacks. This did not go unnoticed by the UNIOGBIS staff, who deemed this to be entirely unprofessional and likened it to an escape from work – yet they never tried to find out the reasons for this practice. A logic of extraversion and a specific discourse of suffering certainly do exist in Guinea-Bissau; however, ‘mentality’ cannot be used as an umbrella explanation for every alleged dysfunctionality.

In order to comprehend the deep-seeded motivations and the rationality stemming from the given social, economic, political and professional context, we must peer behind the scenes at the functioning of model police station and observe the reality of daily police work when not influenced by the atmosphere of the training sessions or the presence of the UN officials. In so doing, the logic driving the actions of the officers – hastily dismissed as absurd and an expression of ‘incorrect’ mentalities by UNIOGBIS staff – might, in fact, appear plausible.

6. On patrol with the police: views from within

What does the average working day in the life of a security police officer at the model police station comprise of? How ‘exemplary’ are the things that befall him/her day in and day out? Fortunately, I was able to go on patrol with a group of police officers after one of the UNIOGBIS staffers had explained the model character of the police station to me in the presence of the police chief, adding that this sort openness was one of the pillars of UN public relations.

The setting

I arrive at the model police station on Friday morning at around 9:30. The station serves as a welcomed source of water for many women living in the area. They transport the water in buckets that they balance on top of their heads. We were fortunate with the weather this day: the recent gray weather and rain had cleared up. I see relatively few police officers at the station at this time. The police car is not parked in its usual spot but is on the way to the police headquarters at the edge of the city center.

Had I arrived a bit earlier, I would have been able to observe – as I would two weeks later – one of the police officers carrying a sewing machine that had been disassembled into various pieces from the generator shack over to the veranda of an apartment building across the street. I would get to know this officer a bit better during the training session: he was a trained tailor who had joined the war in 1998–99 in support of the president at the time. After the war, he remained in the service and was considered hot headed by his colleagues. The very low salary of 28,400 CFA francs (equal to around 43 Euro per month) that he received as an ‘untrained’ officer was not enough to feed a family in Guinea-Bissau: the rent for a small apartment in a peripheral part of the city, without running water or power and with precarious sanitation, costs at least 10,000 CFA francs per month; a 50 kg sack of rice costs around 18,000 CFA francs, a 5-liter bottle of cooking oil 4,000, 1 kg of meat to feed 4 people 1,500 per day, and a portion of vegetables another 1,000 per day. The tuition and fees for the local public school cost between 3,000 and 4,000 per month. Considering these expenses, even when the ministry paid the full salary amount on time and even though the officer received his lunches at the station, the minimum salary for a police officer renders it impossible for a family to survive. The officer's former, trained profession was therefore a valuable source of supplementary income; he could do the sewing work both during and after his shifts at the station. Another officer told me, in confidence, that he secretly works for a private security company on the side from which he earns an additional 50,000 CFA francs per month; this was the reason why he occasionally arrived at the station late or tired.

Preparations

Before we set off, one of the officers takes a printed-out satellite image taken from Google Maps (supplied by UNIOGBIS) to provide me with an overview of the station's patrol area, which was much larger than I had expected, extending far beyond Bairro Militar. The area extends north of the main traffic artery for about six kilometers, up the airport, and covers an area that is heavily populated. Without a police car or motorcycle, it takes a long time to reach the far-lying residential areas, as I would experience. One of the officers tells me that they only do two patrols (one daytime and one nighttime) in one of the nine patrol areas daily – one after the other over nine subsequent days – that take around four hours each. Each patrol team comprises three to twelve officers depending on the assigned area and the type and magnitude of problems and dangers to be expected there; the teams are generally strengthened at night. The officers said that it was challenging to work at night time since they did not have any flashlights and that they are forced to make use of their mobile phones for light. It was likewise difficult to call for back-up, they reported. I am skeptical whether the officers actually patrol the far-away parts of their patrol areas and if the deployment plans actually correspond to reality. According to some residents, the police officers used to patrol these distant areas, though this was apparently discontinued following the coup. I notice that the officer leading the patrol needed the route explained to him by the officer on watch, clearly being unfamiliar with the area. The officers do, without a doubt, go on patrol, as is evidenced by the following cases and arrests they made.

As the four of us are ready to depart at 10 o'clock, another officer who was meant to be on the patrol is absent, having not shown up for work that day. Might this have something to do with the fact that it is already the middle of September and August's paychecks have not yet arrived? I ask whether the police chief is doing something about the absence. A police officer tells me that the chief is tired, "i kansa", of requesting, without success, equipment or other improvements, including the regular payment of salaries, from the ministry. Like many other officers, the police chief appears to be frustrated and disillusioned. Our patrol group consists of one senior officer and two younger ones – one of the latter is replacing the missing officer. During the patrol, the senior officer tells me that they received their salaries very irregularly in the months after the coup in 2012. He had graduated with a degree in teaching and had worked as a teacher for nearly 20 years before joining the junta in 1998 in the fight against the president. He later switched to the police but, despite having an education and being tasked with writing reports for the station, he still only earns the base salary of 28,400 CFA francs per month. A request for a promotion that he made a few years back had been unsuccessful and had 'disappeared' into a drawer. It could be that the senior official who allowed the request to 'disappear' wanted to suggest a 'financial contribution'. Without a paycheck in the time after the coup, he was late reporting for service since he first had to borrow money from friends and family or to ask for credit at the market. His wife earned a bit of extra money by selling fruits and vegetables on the street. His two patrol mates are only half his age, in their mid-twenties. They both completed their 11-month training at the police academy in Angola a few months prior and had recently been assigned to the station. According to information I gather, many of their co-workers had quit their posts at the station due, on the one hand, to outstanding salary payments and poor work conditions and, on the other, to experiences with violent confrontations that they could not handle since they lacked equipment. They tell me during our patrol that, similar to other new officers who joined the model police station in the wake of the coup, they never completed the special training course in community policing. Several officers at the model police station were previously so-called 'angolanos' (Angolans) assigned to the rapid-response unit and were therefore members of the Bissau-Guinean training group in Luanda in 2011–12. Nevertheless, with a salary of 60,000 CFA francs, they earn twice as much as their senior colleague, the former teacher, who is, understandably, displeased with this situation.

On patrol

Before we can finally commence work, we first have to go from to the Missirá district of Bairro Militar, situated 4.5 kilometers away at the southeastern end of the station's patrol area. As the police car has not yet arrived back, we decide to take a toca-toca to our destination; I offer to pay for the other officers, roundtrip. We quickly find seats in a collective taxi, drive through Bairro Militar along the main street, turn off onto the main artery road towards the city center, and disembark at an entrance to Missirá at around 10:30.

While the senior officer resolutely heads towards a 'cacifo' (a small hut in which everyday products are sold) in order to demonstrate community policing to me in more detail, the two younger officers stand to the side and appear a bit timid and distanced. The

operator of the *cacifo* tells us that there have been repeated assaults on the sales huts during the night recently. The officer asks the operator whom he asked for assistance. He first called on the justice police who operate a detention center less than one kilometer away, though no one had come. He then appealed to the market police – the two largest markets in Bissau, the Bandim and Caracol markets, are both located close to this part of the city –, yet this again proved futile. He finally sent a list with the names of the damaged *cacifo* businesses to the chair of the Merchant Association, who promised to take care of the matter; he has not yet seen any concrete results. The officer is astounded but points out – rightly so – that neither the justice police, in charge of criminal affairs, nor other police stations carry responsibility here but, rather, solely the police station in Bairro Militar. The merchant seems somewhat perplexed, citing that he was unaware that the far-away model police station is responsible for them. In the course of our patrol, we repeatedly come across residents who are unaware of this relationship. They also have little knowledge of the differing functions of the various kinds of police units. And why should those who experience criminality turn to a far-away police station that they do not even know how to contact in an urgent situation such as this? A central emergency number does not exist while the transport problems, especially at nighttime, are a matter in themselves. The officers have no other choice than to distribute their (private) mobile numbers and those of their co-workers on slips of paper for any future cases that may arise.

It is also evident from other contexts that the populace does not reach out to the police based on their areas of authority. Some of the officers later told me that the owner of a local nightclub at the margins of the Bairro Militar had close contacts to the rapid-response unit, which he calls upon anytime there is trouble at his club. Thus, due to relations such as this, the security police force is, for all intents and purposes, not in charge here. I also learn from other acquaintances that relations play a major role during emergencies: when these acquaintances woke up one morning to discover that their hi-fi equipment had been stolen during the night, they contacted a close acquaintance of theirs who worked at the rapid-response unit. He directed them to a friend of his at the justice police, who then visited them with some of his co-workers in order to record the case. Proportionality is also an important factor here: as most people are generally aware that the ‘normal’ police is ill-equipped, another friend of mine called the better-equipped rapid-response unit for help when a neighbor’s son threatened him and his son with a gun, rather than depending on the security police. Once the officers from the rapid-response unit had peacefully and confidently deescalated the situation, the nearby police station was left with the task of consoling the conflicting parties in a discussion a few days later.

We continue on through the neighborhood. One of the younger police officers lives here and this is the first time that many of his neighbors have seen him in uniform. He is also the one who shows the other two the way and informs them of the problem areas here. In the course of the patrol, the officers search for other *cacifos* and give each one their telephone numbers. They do not invite those they encounter to come to the station to file a report, nor do they initiate investigations. The security situation in the neighborhood is tense, especially at night. According to statements made by the victims along with their neighbors and family members, assaults are carried out by youths. A group of older men eating and drinking around a table along an unpaved main street welcome the pres-

ence of the 'patrulha' (patrol) while conversing with the officers and relate the problems that occur in the neighborhood. They say that machine guns have even surfaced during certain arguments. One of the men mentions 'Mango Verde' as an area known to be particularly dangerous – it is situated in the middle of Missirá, at the end of a small boulevard flanked by large mango trees. It would theoretically be possible to request back-up – from the rapid-response unit, for instance – but would have to be approved by police headquarters, the former teacher tells me. This demonstrates that part of the police's work is bureaucratized and enjoys little flexibility, leaving the police officers to their own devices and, in turn, decreasing morale. Moreover, one might ask whether the officers would be willing to risk life and limb for the miserable salaries that they receive, which, beyond that, are often paid irregularly. As this is happening, the two 'Angolans' start doing as their officer and directly address other merchants and groups of people.

We finally reach the center of the neighboring district, Bairro de Ajuda, shortly after 1 pm and come to a large junction along the main artery road. The sun has started beat down intensely as the officers take a toca-toca back towards the model police station.

7. Operational logic within the police

In the weeks that follow, I converse with other officers at the station and also talk to many friends and acquaintances about the security situation and police work in the country. The officers repeatedly complained that residents did not cooperate with them and were likewise unhelpful during criminal investigations. On the contrary, many residents of Bissau feel disappointment towards the police and take them to be both incompetent and corrupt. Despite this, most residents stand behind 'their' state even if they heavily criticize the ways that it functions and operates. On the other hand, they themselves resort to such dishonest, 'corrupt' practices when the opportunity presents itself or the situation demands it. In other words, "[...] the actors simultaneously condemn the practices that they justify" (Blundo/Olivier de Sardan 2006: 133; also see Kohl 2009). In want of alternative security service providers, the populace time and again turns to the police, though often lacking the knowledge or contact information to appeal to the 'appropriate' police unit. For the police officers, their entire work environment is characterized by disillusionment and disappointment. They are highly frustrated knowing that they will be unable to reach victims of crimes because they lack means of transportation and fuel. This is one reason why, over the course of years and decades, the practice of collecting unofficial 'route' and 'processing fees' – taken to be 'corrupt' by outside observers but 'normal' by the majority of residents – has established itself through the police. Similar 'duties' exist within the border patrol, whose officers usually collect a 'stamp fee' of 1,000 CFA francs (around 1.50 Euro) from people who do not possess a passport. Customs agents request a 'sumo' (literally 'juice') or a 'fim de semana' ('weekend') or refer to an approaching national holiday (Christmas, Easter, Greater Eid, Tabaski, Women's Day, etc.), while drivers preventively present traffic police officers with a small sum of money to avoid an bothersome

inspection. My friends and acquaintances almost unanimously reported that, in cases when they called on the security police for assistance, they had paid a fee called a 'deslocação' or 'travel' (fee) of around 5,000 CFA francs (or 7.50 Euro) when the officers arrived – who, lacking a vehicle and/or fuel, must generally rely on a taxi. What are these collected payments used for? If we believe the police officers with whom I spoke, then the fees are not a means to supplement their incomes but are rather spent on covering costs such as taxis, copying notices and other documents and procuring work materials – not one of the police stations possess a copy machine. When an officer has to copy documents, he is given coins from the station police chief – who also pays for his transportation to the police headquarters via group taxi – to deliver the required correspondence. One may indeed notice that this 'deslocação' of 5,000 CFA francs is calculated quite generously. My interviewee candidly admitted that part of this money is set aside for co-workers who are sick or have other needs. In spite of assurances from the officers to the contrary – along with their mischievous grins –, we cannot, of course, exclude the possibility that some of this money is also used to supplement their incomes or to buy fish for lunch at the station. As persistently as I asked, I never received a satisfactory answer as to how they were able to buy fish considering that they, particularly the lowest ranks, earn such low salaries and that the ministry only provides them with oil and rice. The fact that the police chief and his deputy privately make use the police car remained of marginal importance.

Ethnographic observation does, of course, reach its limits when criminal cases are processed behind closed doors or when apprehended alleged delinquents are being dealt with. Whether and what amount of money flows into the model police station remains within the sphere of speculation, but its influx is probable. One practice that the officers highlight is the attempt to consensually resolve cases at the station ('fassi justiça' in the local creole language, meaning 'doing justice'). Different from one Portuguese lawyer who argued that the police deters residents from appealing to the courts directly, seeking payment for their own 'police jurisprudence' instead (Silva Dias 2010: 99), it seems that those affected by criminality also have an interest in finding a solution to their problem as soon as possible. Thus, the police turn into 'moderators' between the perpetrators and victims. This stems from the perception that the justice system is likewise inefficient, corrupt and very slow. The costs related to filing a report and pursuing the subsequent legal process are unpredictable and hardly affordable for many affected parties. Most of the populace is likely unaware that those able to prove they are without means have recently gained the right to receive support for processing costs as well as an appeal to free legal consultations.⁴ Uncertainty also exists that one may become the victim of a corrupt judge when pursuing the case in court. For many people, mediation by the police is therefore a welcomed alternative – especially in relation to minor offences – to long, potentially costly processes with uncertain outcomes. The fact that money is exchanged in this context is common knowledge; affected parties satisfied with the police's work even pass them extra

4 These are the results of the UNDP FORTES program, 'Programa de Fortalecimento do Estado de Direito e Segurança', the Program to Strengthen the State in Justice and Security.

cash out of thankfulness. While residents voice complaints about the poor work done by the police, officers are plagued by profound frustrations, adversities and pressures, and these most likely desensitize them over time. Consequently, a work ethic that confirms this negative image of the police ends up manifesting itself.

The system currently in place is not, however, devoid of all logic. Such a situation of “disorder” can actually represent a “political instrument”, as Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz (1999) accurately state. There are, of course, profiteers who benefit from the existing practices in everyday police work. Jean-François Bayart (2012) and Barbara Christophe (2005) have shown how influential circles within the state and the private sector intentionally fabricate government dysfunctions and simulate reforms in order to tap foreign resources. Bissau-Guinean officers of lower rank surely lose out from such practices – as opposed to their superiors and high-ranking politicians:

For those at the bottom end of society, like lowly civil servants, the sale of the limited amount of power they possess is virtually their only means of survival. Higher up, extortion is of the major avenues of enrichment; it facilitates social advancement and the upholding of one’s position [...] [It enables them] to meet the expectations of their clients and, hence, to enhance their status. (Chabal/Daloz 1999: 99)

Concurrently, corruption becomes something commonplace, especially among higher-ranking civil servants:

Provided the beneficiaries of graft [...] redistribute along lines that are judged to be socially desirable, their behaviour is deemed acceptable. Corruption [...] is a habitual part of everyday life, an expected element of every social transaction. (Chabal/Daloz 1999: 99)

In reality, it is less the officers at the model police station who are in ‘lucrative’ positions but rather the decision-makers at the police headquarters who have the necessary authority and, in turn, power. Positions at the model police station tend to be ‘drier’, less ‘lucrative’ posts that offer little ‘maneuverability’ and provide fewer opportunities for gaining additional ‘income’ (see Blundo/Olivier de Sardan 2006: 89–90). A prime example of ‘additional income’ generation was reported to me by one police officer: a patrol once arrested a juvenile who had openly been consuming ‘liamba’ on the porch of his apartment. The possession of this drug, a type of hashish, is a punishable offense in Guinea-Bissau. Shortly after arriving at the station in Bairro Militar, the officers received a call from a superior at police headquarters, a leading police cadre with a long service history. Following his training at the Bissau police academy, this officer completed a three-year training program in a country in the former Eastern Bloc. He ordered that the juvenile be released immediately. This was a crushing order for the involved police officers as it put their work into question since the case could not proceed on its own. The officers were furious and complained to me that this superior officer was acting on corruption. They presumed that a family member or a friend of the juvenile had ‘convinced’ the officer at the police headquarters to let him go and to not pursue the case.

The hierarchical police system demonstrated the meaninglessness of the police officers’ work in this case, especially when one considers the appalling working and living conditions and administrative constraints. It also shows that ‘surgical’ involvement, as suggested by the model police station approach, is not enough to curb corruption and bad work practices. In other words: the insular concept of the model police station as a global,

“traveling model” (Czarniawska/Joerges 1996; Kaufmann/Rottenburg 2012) quickly runs into its limits. With its broad application in many countries and its promise of finding ‘translation’ into local structures, the model is only partially able to meet the expectations of experts, at best. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, many of these ‘translations’ have been unplanned and have likewise not been in the interest of the reform planners. Against this background, Bissau-Guinean police officers and staff, rather prematurely, hold onto the hope that the new, younger generation with ‘mas capacidade’ (more capabilities) will be able to improve the general situation in the police sector from within the existing hierarchy. However, the promotion of these new, younger employees does not automatically imply that the functional logic of the entire police sector will change; the given environment, pressures, dependences and the like will continue to persist. Facilities such as the model police station may even represent a threat to profitable professional practices in the eyes of the superiors and invoke powerful opposition (on the latter, see Girão de Sousa 2013: 81).

8. Conclusions

The interests, expectations and perceptions held by the Bissau-Guineans and those held by UNIOGBIS – as the main actor in the area of police reforms – are divergent. The international institutions and those who staff them often possess little knowledge of the country or the dynamics within the police, at least on the ground. The discourses of ‘mentality’ promoted by international experts overlook the need for self-reflection in relation to their own work; they likewise undermine an interest in more profound cooperation with local authorities from various levels of the police hierarchy that could otherwise grant them greater insight into daily problems, motivations and the logic of police work and likewise promote mutual action in creating improvements. It is no wonder, then, that contact between UNIOGBIS staff and police officers outside of the management level does not exist beyond a bare minimum. The UN orients itself to state-level actors; as daily police work is far removed from the central state, this practice results in a mismatch between the UN and local police officers. Human resources and work practices within UNIOGBIS do not appear to aim at addressing or investigating actual causes of what is occurring locally; the priority is set on ‘marketing’ alleged successes so that they can secure subsequent projects and jobs. Projects and approaches such as the model police station or the aforementioned cooperation project between the police and the media – still in the planning phase – are well intentioned. They do, however, partially overlook the actual needs of police officers and staff. Police reforms will not be effective if local staff are not taken into consideration. The case of the electronic instead of paper police database is one example of the lack of translation and adaptation in relation to existing conditions in Guinea-Bissau. Even though the central tenets of ‘local ownership’ advocate such an adaptation of reform strategies and concepts, the situation in Guinea-Bissau illustrates how

deficient the embedding of this 'traveling model' has been in security sector reforms (see Czarniawska/Joerges 1996).

The model police station and the short-term professional training courses have proven to be of limited impact owing to the fact that they are too abstract and superficial; moreover, they do not adequately reflect actual local relations and, as such, are unable to garner the interest of participants. The concrete implementation of the reforms has been based on a lack of understanding and empathy for local issues, structures and challenges. Taken from the perspective of the police officers on the ground, their work is undermined by insufficient financial resources, communication problems with superior authorities, and a lack of support from the management within the police. This leads to a feeling of demotivation and forces them to resort to practices that are considered 'corrupt' and 'dysfunctional' by international observers. As the example of police training has shown, project coordination by UNIOGBIS (and other organizations) appears to be inconsistent while harmonization among the donors is wanting. Not only is the Brazilian-built training center too small to handle all the multi-year training programs, ideas to develop a police educational curriculum only surfaced a whole ten years after the first reform plans were drawn.

UNIOGBIS and other donors are convinced that the model police station serves as an 'entry point' that will positively influence the rest of the police sector, including the higher levels. An in-depth, individual analysis carried out by the donors in cooperation with local and international experts (including scholars experienced in qualitative social research) would prove useful in this context. The police station is under threat of suffocating under procedures and structures and likewise on account of a middle management that is not sufficiently integrated. Low levels of financing undermine the officers' obligation to expand their knowledge, skills and, ultimately, the recognition of their work as being for the service of the populace and in accordance with human rights. Better incorporating the police sector's middle management is not the only requirement necessary to confront these issues: financial resources must likewise be secured and long-term cooperation must be sought with officers on the ground that as inclusive and as far-reaching as possible. This would allow for problems to be analyzed and for solutions to be developed in a broad a way as possible – also potentially promoting the reduction of corrupt practices. UNIOGBIS does not, however, seem to possess the personnel able to implement such a strategy. There is no doubt as to their aptitude for police-related matters; UNIOGBIS staff make the impression of being highly engaged and professional. On the other hand, they appear to be inadequately prepared for their tasks and responsibilities in Guinea-Bissau (see Mainzinger 2011: 70). Their knowledge of security sector reform seems primarily limited to 'trendy concepts' and they lack the necessary empathy, background, competence, drive and ability to delve into problems on the ground. They also lack didactic skills and the ability to analyze and process existing issues. UNIOGBIS primarily positions itself as a player detached from the local police; it operates diplomatically, inflexibly, superficially and bureaucratically and exhibits an unwillingness and/or an inability to become involved in basic work at the police stations. Media-friendly self-presentations and short-term impacts often take priority while diplomats get lost in administrative matters. Closer and deeper cooperation above and beyond the diplomatic and ministerial levels could

prove effective here. Additionally, education and professional training would have to be made more praxis-oriented and increasingly focus on material aspects, without, however, reverting to the unsustainable 'train and equip' approach (see Mainzinger 2011: 81). Well-founded, grassroots analyses of fundamental problems within the police (or security) sector combined with improved communication among the actors, useful equipment, and basic practical training in the fundamentals of policing while, at the same time, incorporating the police sector's middle management could prove to be the combination of elements that leads the way forward.

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