

# Media Capture and Perspectives for Media Development in a Fragile Media System: Debating Journalistic Roles in Guinea-Bissau

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**Abstract:** Guinea-Bissau's media have negotiated their roles and freedoms within the postcolonial national construct since its official independence from Portugal in 1974. While the current media landscape is relatively pluralistic, journalists experience constraints from various sides: political pressures, unaccommodating regulations, lack of resources. The concept of media capture (Mungiu-Pippidi & Ghinea, 2012; Mabweazara et al., 2020; Schiffrin, 2021) allows the analysis of complex, subtle and structural constraints limiting media's ability to fulfil their roles. This paper traces the phenomenon on the macro level (context), meso level (organizations) and micro level (journalists) in Guinea-Bissau to interrogate how the concept plays out in a context shaped by fragility. The article draws on a literature review, official documents and semi-structured interviews. Following Dugmore's (2022) idea of precarity as an endogenous condition in many Sub-Saharan contexts, this paper argues that capture is engrained in a fragile system rather than being an exception or disruption. This has implications for international media development action, which can be hindered by or become a part of the capture.

**Keywords:** Media Capture; media development; fragile states; Guinea-Bissau; media freedom.

## INTRODUCTION

Guinea-Bissau's media have been experiencing aggravated restrictions of their freedom since the beginning of President Umaro Sissoco Embaló's government in 2021. Next to threats against journalists and an attack against a radio station (Darame, 2022), the government has increased licence fees for media outlets and attempted to close all radio stations who fail to pay them (MFWA, 2023). These measures happen in a nation state which has been debating its relation to democracy and the role of media since its independence from Portugal in 1974.

It has been described by international organizations and media with titles such as “fragile state”, “least developed” or “narco state” (Bybee, 2011; Da Santos, 2019). While the media operating in this context face various intersecting challenges, they are also addressed by Guinean and international actors as potential key contributors to the stabilization and democratization of the multi-ethnic and both culturally and ecologically rich country. Following the idea that media can be drivers of multidimensional development, international actors support the work of media with funding, capacity building and advocacy. However, these efforts are impeded by continuous political and economic instability as well as by the (media) development sector’s own biases – and the current setbacks raise questions about how efficiency could be increased.

To understand those factors that impact the media, this article attempts to analyse the situation of the Bissau-Guinean media through the lens of media capture. The concept of media capture, developed by scholars such as Mungiu-Pippidi (2008) and Schiffrin (2021), allows researchers to grasp a variety of aspects limiting media’s ability to fulfil their functions freely and independently. In contrast to concepts like censorship or control, which often put an emphasis on authorities as restricting actors, capture includes constraints caused, for example, by the private sector, through ownership structures, financing or subtle dynamics (Schiffrin, 2021, p. 4). As the appearance of various academic publications on media capture in recent years shows, it is a concept that scholars find valuable to apply to a variety of contexts, from authoritarian countries (Coşkun, 2020) to more liberal ones (Foroohar, 2021). This also indicates that the question should not be *if* media capture is present in one context or another, but rather *how* it plays out in relation to a given contextualization. Mabweazara et al. (2020) have adapted the concept to Sub-Saharan African contexts. Despite the obvious differences between countries and media systems in the continent, they find shared histories that foster media capture: While many Sub-Saharan African countries have experienced a wave of liberalization including multipartyism and increased media pluralism, many of them have since re-descended into ‘strong-men politics’, which captured media help to maintain (Mabweazara et al., 2020, p. 2155f.).

So far, there is no academic literature that uses the concept of media capture to analyse Guinea-Bissau’s media, but various publications include perspectives on media freedom (Barros, 2012; Bussotti et al., 2015; Sampaio-Dias, 2019). However, media capture seems to be a useful tool for describing the complexity of constraints Bissau-Guinean media are facing. While media development assistance aims to improve media’s conditions and capacities, capture may help to understand the difficulties of such undertakings.

To delineate how media capture plays out in Guinea-Bissau, this contribution will differentiate between the macro level (the context for media, e.g.,

the legislative, political and economic system of the country), the meso level (media outlets, organizations) and the micro level (journalists). Fengler and Jorch (2012) use the differentiation between the three levels to distinguish the types of media development assistance and where they locate in the hierarchy of influences. The paper is based on a review of academic and grey literature and official documents, as well as qualitative interviews with journalists and media development experts in Guinea-Bissau. The article is exploratory and does not attempt to cover all the facets, but to contribute to the debate through the perspective of a little researched case study. It aims to provide a brief introduction to the current media context in Guinea-Bissau and raise a discussion on how the concept of media capture can be applied in fragile contexts, and also the roles international media development efforts can play. The article opens with a brief overview of media capture and the specificities of fragile media contexts, followed by a short overview of the Bissau-Guinean media landscape and how capture at the macro, meso and micro level impact on it.

## **MEDIA CAPTURE: COMPLEXIFIED CONSTRAINTS**

Schiffrin (2021, p. 4) argues that “[w]hen journalists come under the control of business and government, they can no longer perform the multiple critical roles the Fourth Estate plays in a democratic society”. According to her, media capture is a concept that allows researchers to complexify the analysis of various constraints that journalists and media outlets face while trying to fulfil their roles. In contrast to other terms used for describing limitations of media freedom, media capture includes indirect dynamics, which can refer to control “either directly by governments or by vested interests networked with politics” (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2012, pp. 40-41). Media capture can be an analytical framework to research media control through soft power and by various actors (Schiffrin, 2017, p. 1033) and has often been applied to describe challenges with the consolidation of the media-politics relationship in states which have experienced transformations, especially young democracies.

Authors are adapting the concept to various local conditions, e.g. to clientelism in Latin America (Márquez-Ramírez, 2017). Other scholars specify the types of capture, such as ownership or cognitive capture (Stieglitz, 2017) or big tech platform (Usher, 2021). For Sub-Saharan Africa, a range of case studies is available (Asomah, 2022; Cagé & Mougin, 2023; Powell, 2017). In a qualitative meta-analysis of the existing research on capture in all regions of the continent, Mabweazara et al., (2020) conclude that there is a shared context of “well-oiled structural systems of political patronage in which the strongmen and their allies are deemed inviolable. A heavy stranglehold on the media is a key element

of this structural system of political patronage” (p. 2156). This is combined with complex economic conditions that increase the dependency on those in power (p. 2159). In Guinea-Bissau, a phase of political liberalization in the early 1990s, including the start of multipartyism and the foundation of various new media outlets (Lopes, 2015) was followed by civil war in 1998 and 1999 and an ongoing phase of political instability and coup d'états (e.g., Dabo, 2009). Katar Moreira (2020) describes the core characteristic of the strong-men politics determining the political scenery ever since as *matchundadi* (hegemonic masculinity).

Mabweazara et al. (2020) define three main types of capture: regulatory; through ownership; and via fiscal (financial and economic) enticements and controls. Legal or regulatory capture can happen when legislative measures are used to constrain media with political or other forms of motivation. For instance, registration, licensing or authorisation obligations are sometimes imposed on the private press, which is often closer to the opposition, but not on state media (p. 2164). Another example is when laws meant to address actual problems are misused against journalists, which has occurred with anti-terror laws introduced in Cameroon in the fight against Boko Haram (pp. 2164f). Ownership capture is closely tied to legislative and administrative issues. If media belong to powerful actors or their networks, this can influence their work and content. The authors cite examples from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Tanzania, e.g., a newspaper being publicly called out for not putting the president on the front page (p. 2167). Such actors can also use the fragile economic situation of media to affect capture through financial and economic incentives or controls, as the outlets will be more likely to accept income with “strings attached” (p. 2168), e.g. brown envelope journalism. The effects of capture on audiences still requires more research to fully understand its implications for public sphere and political processes (Dragomir, 2022, pp. 16f.).

## **MEDIA CAPTURE IN FRAGILE STATES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR MEDIA DEVELOPMENT**

Next to the complexity of media freedom constraints, Schiffrin's quote (at the start of the previous section) points to the roles that are ascribed to journalism as the Fourth Estate in a democratic system. Looking at media capture helps to understand more about whether, how and why media are able or unable to perform certain roles that are expected of them. Because role understandings and especially role performance (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2019) may differ greatly based on the media system and the wider society they are embedded in, it is important to take the structural, political and social conditions for journalistic work into account. The importance of free and independent media

as an indispensable part of democratic systems (Kumar, 2010) and national development (Anderson, 2016), is widely accepted, although it remains debated how exactly media and context impact each other and how these interrelations could be measured (Stremlau, 2014, pp. 2ff.). While roles that traditional media can play in democratic processes are newly discussed regarding the rise of social media as well as new intersecting global crises, in fragile states the debate departs from another starting point: the frequent experience of dysfunctionality of the media-politics nexus. The OECD defines state fragility as “the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacities of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks” (OECD, 2023b), which takes into account economic, environmental, human, political, security and societal aspects. The OECD in 2022 describes Guinea-Bissau as having high or severe fragility in the political, economic, environmental, human and societal dimension (OECD, 2023a). Other NGO prescribe similar categorization, such as a “least developed country” (UNCTAD, 2022) and a “small developing island state” (*List of SIDS*, 2022). Since the early 2000s, the country has also been called a narco-state, which means that important public institutions are infiltrated by or complicit with international organized crime, especially the cocaine trade (UNODC, 2011). State fragility hinders the performance of many sub-systems within a country – for example the health and education sector (WHO, 2022; Dansó, 2022) and also the media, which have to navigate a context of economic paucity, weak institutions and lack of accountability. In this sense, one could argue that media capture is experienced as a status quo in fragile states rather than a disruption, because the system does not provide stable conditions and reliable freedoms that would be limited by capture. Dugmore (2022) explains that in many African media contexts, ‘precarious professionalism’ is “inherent to employment environments and not exogenous interruptions to an expected pattern of stability and levels of remuneration conducive to a base-level sense of security and wellbeing.” (Dugmore, 2022, p. 151). The same could be argued for media capture, which in contexts of fragility may be engrained in the system rather than an experience of crisis. This perspective might change the view on the concept of media capture and on the habits of journalists working within unstable contexts.

Especially in fragile contexts, there is often a lot of influence on media from outside the country, for example by international media development actors. Media development refers to a variety of practices by which media are seen as drivers of social change – either using them as platforms for public debate, as distributors for messages that further development or supporting media as actors needed for development and democratization efforts (e.g. Manyozo, 2012; Scott, 2014). Usually, donors and implementors of media development assistance aim at supporting free and independent media and can thus offer an antidote

to capture tendencies. Frequently, for instance, media development actors push for the introduction of media accountability instruments to prevent certain capture effects within newsrooms (Fengler et al., 2022). However, in systems dominated by media capture, structures such as media accountability instruments may be unable to avoid being instrumentalized, too. An analysis of this nexus, in the context of Afghanistan where various international actors have tried to establish a new media system after 2001 concludes:

[T]hat in countries with heavy foreign intervention, where imported journalism values are layered upon previous and continued institutional arrangements and where violence and instability continue unabated, news media work is prone to ‘capture’ by a variety of actors outside media organizations. We suggest that future research could refine a typology with six distinct forms of capture – economic, political, cultural, legal, bureaucratic, and societal. (Relly & Zanger, 2016, p. 1233)

One aspect the study hints at is that dependencies can occur when media receive funding from international donors, e.g., through NGOs or UN agencies. Fengler (2022) calls this a ‘mimicry model’ for the context of accountability instruments (p. 572): certain measures wanted by media development actors, for example press councils, may be introduced but rather than really fulfilling the functions they were initially meant for, they are integrated into the old systems and practices. Schiffrin (2018) and Mabweazara et al. (2020) discuss how capture may also happen through donors such as philanthropic organizations which finance or own media outlets (Mabweazara et al., 2020, p. 2170). This is similar to capture effects that can happen when political actors finance media, because financing through donors may render media outlets unable to criticize them. Stremlau (2014) mentions that in conflict-affected contexts, supporting media can mean supporting specific political or ideological sides.

## METHODS

The research for this paper has been conducted as part of a PhD project which analyses the media system of Guinea-Bissau, with media capture as one of several shaping factors. It is a qualitative study, which includes desk research (review of academic and grey literature and documents); as well as semi-structured interviews and focus groups with Bissau-Guinean journalists, media experts

and international media development experts<sup>1</sup>. The interviews and debates, conducted in 2022 and 2023, was analysed using the software MaxQDA, following Kuckartz' qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2019; Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). A summary of the findings shedding light on media capture is selected here. In addition, descriptive information about the media outlets were collected (e.g., number of employees, sources of income etc.). Descriptions of the media landscape in the following section thus derive from the author's own data collection if no other source is mentioned.

The quotes have been translated into English from Portuguese, French or Guinean Creole by the author. For data protection, no names of interviewees will be disclosed. Instead, interviews and focus groups have been numbered and direct or indirect quotes will be denoted with (IV) for interview and (F) for focus group plus a number that has been allocated to each individual and the year.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF GUINEA-BISSAU'S MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Guinea-Bissau's media landscape comprises state-run, private and community media. The state finances the news agency *Agência dos Notícias da Guiné-Bissau*, the weekly newspaper *Nô Pintcha*, the radio broadcaster *Rádiodifusão Nacional* and the television *Televisão da Guiné-Bissau*. Among the private media, there are 16 radios, 2 newspapers but currently no TV station (Bodjam, 2022, p. 34f.). Community media<sup>2</sup> are non-profit broadcasters with little funds, some of which are supported by NGOs. Among the community media is 1 television broadcaster located in the capital, and approximately 31 radio stations (Bodjam, 2022, p. 34f.).

Media are centralized in the capital city Bissau. Bodjam (2022) claims 88% of the private radio stations are in Bissau. While there are no regularly updated data concerning media use, a survey commissioned by the United Nations Peacebuilding Office (UNIOGBIS) shows that radio is regularly consumed and by most people (António, 2020). Online and social media are of increasing importance and several media outlets have started online issues.

Guinea-Bissau's media development sector is rather small by regional comparison. Many development actors focus on issues such as peacebuilding or health and media are a tool they use to advance these goals, rather than focusing on the media more specifically, although this may be a side effect. Among the actors who have tried to develop the media directly was UNIOGBIS, which closed

1 For this paper, the quotes have been translated into English from Portuguese or French by the author.

2 While the definition of community media is debated (Bosch, 2014, p. 426), in Guinea-Bissau those media that are part of the National Network of Community Radios (RENARC) are counted in that category.

in 2022, and UNESCO, as well as the Media Foundation West Africa, funded by the European Union.

## MACRO LEVEL

By the macro level, I refer to the context that media are embedded in and the relation of media to other subsystems of society, such as politics. The lack of reliable infrastructures can be counted into this category. The most important aspects emerging from the analysis were capture through legislation or the implementation of laws, and the weakness of state institutions which are meant to provide the context for securing the media's rights, but do not fulfil their functions.

Regulatory capture is one of the most common threats curtailing media freedom in Sub-Saharan Africa according to Mabweazara et al. (2020, p. 2162). In Guinea-Bissau, media freedom is guaranteed in the constitution since the political liberation in the 1990s (Lopes, 2015). Bissau-Guinean citizens have the right to inform and be informed (CRGB, 1996). In addition, a number of other legal texts and amendments regulate the role of the media, including the Press Law (Bodjam, 2022). However, there are implementation gaps, and the existing law does not sufficiently regulate all types of media. These two shortcomings weaken the medias position within the state system and leave room for constraints.

An illustrative example to highlight the effects of absent legislation is the current discussion about radio licenses. On 31st March 2022, shortly after “a very murky coup attempt” (Schipani & Munshi, 2022), followed by an attack on a private radio in the capital, the communication ministry launched a communiqué stating that the licences of all radios who had failed to pay the fees for their renewal in recent years were cancelled (Cardoso, 2022) – affecting a majority of private and community radio broadcasters, most of which have little to no income. According to a list assembled by the National Network of Community Radios, the radios accumulated taxes of up to 1,956,250 GBF each (approximately 3000 Euro) by April 2022. The communiqué has been interpreted by experts as an attempt to limit press freedom:

The government takes advantage of the fragility of the organs to harm them, knowing that many organs have difficulties to pay license each year (...) because they think that these organs are bothering them. This strategy adopted by the government is a strategy that less serious people use to silence organs when they want. (F1:3:2022)

The communiqué accused the radio stations of not following the license fee regulation: while media outlets had to pay fees for their initial permission to start working, they did not pay for renewal and apparently were not asked to do so. In the existing media laws, the private media are only granted provisory



licenses (Bodjam, 2022, p. 32). This included the community radios, which are the most widely spread, yet in general the least regulated, despite attempts by local and international actors, including the UN, to improve the regulation for community media. Thus, this conflict is only possible because of a lack of clear legislation and a lack of both institutional and governmental interest in following up the law in recent years. Consequently, the outlets remain vulnerable to political arbitrariness. A decree published in October 2022 aggravated the situation as it raised the previously determined licence fees for all media (MFWA, 2023). Although as of now, none of the radios which have not yet paid the licence fees have shut down. But as IV:8:2023—a Bissau-Guinean human rights activist—notes the decrees will offer the possibility to shut radio stations in tense times, e.g., around elections.

This is not the only example showing the weakness of state institutions. Typical for patrimonial systems, the state institutions in Guinea-Bissau are highly susceptible to influence through “strong men” (Katar Moreira, 2020). The National Council for Social Communication, meant to hold media accountable for following the laws and ethical standards (Bodjam, 2022, p.26), is in practice, as various interviewees explained, an instrument without much power that is unable to perform its tasks but can be used by the government. In consequence,

The council only appears during the election campaign (...), when an outlet does not obey the rules for the diffusion of an advertising spot, the person is notified, but I don't know... I know in the true sense of the word the role of the council is much more than that. (F:4:2023)

For example, the council should be responsible for issuing press cards, which journalists associations as well as international partners have been advocating for. They believe press cards could help to “institutionalize” the journalistic profession and thus simplify protecting journalists and holding them accountable, but no action has followed. Another example is the lack of judicial investigation into attacks against media. A private radio station with the reputation of being critical towards the president was, in 2021 and 2022, attacked and destroyed by armed men, with one employee being severely injured, and despite calls by the journalists' associations, the attacks have not been investigated.

Media development actors engage on the macro level in Guinea-Bissau by training the military, police and politicians how to deal with media and what roles each of these actors should have in a democracy. They also advocate for the adaptation and implementation of media laws, for example providing a clearer regulation for the community media.

## MESO LEVEL

Concerning capture on the meso level (media outlets, journalists' associations, etc.) the data mostly point to ownership and organizational structures. While the state media are state financed, there are two types of private radios: seven commercial stations and nine religious stations (financed by Catholic, Protestant or Muslim stakeholders) (Bodjam, 2022, p. 33). Guinea-Bissau's advertising market is small and does not constitute a big portion of a media outlet's income. Financing thus comes through other sources and political parallelism is key in this respect: Among the commercial private media, many are either owned by politicians or receive occasional economic incentives. The director of a private radio station owned by an important political figure explains:

(...) you have good journalists and technicians, but you don't have money to afford them, so you must depend on politicians. On a certain political philosophy and so on. Then a radio station is opened, but a radio with a politician who pays salaries or rent. So, you cannot call this independence. (IV:6:2022)

Other than ownership, powerful actors influence media by granting or denying them invitations to official press conferences, access to official information, advertisement or the technological infrastructures needed for their work. The political affiliations of a media outlet are sometimes quoted as a reason for denying them access to these crucial services. The owner of a private newspaper, known to have been founded by a member of a political party, and which depends on the national printing press, recounts: "(...) sometimes they just say that they are busy and they cannot print our papers because the national press has many things to do, they always block us from printing our newspapers." (IV:9:2022)

There are various examples of media development on the meso level, e.g. radio stations that have been set up by international organizations, but also capacity building and management training, business models etc. In addition, international organisations pay radio stations to broadcast spots or programmes for them. In Guinea-Bissau, there are often actors that do not deal with media first and foremost, but with topics such as environmental protection (Barros et al., 2018). In consequence, airtime is spent on topics that have not been chosen by the newsroom. Barros, a Bissau-Guinean sociologist (2012) calls this phenomenon "agenda setting upside down" (p. 99-100). As Choudry and Kapoor (2013) explain, dependency on money from development actors can result in an "NGOization": Media start to accept tasks besides their journalistic work and mirror bureaucratic structures of NGOs. Such a non-journalistic character can sometimes be appropriated by the media outlets for strategical reasons. When the annulling of radio licenses was announced, representatives of community media negotiated

with the government by claiming that they provide important services to the communities and are key actors for local development and education (IV:7:2022). Here, journalistic roles sometimes merge with activist or developmental attitudes.

One journalist mentioned that when development organisations influence the editorial agenda of local media, “this is a good type of capture” (IV:1:2023) because beneficial values are promoted in these programmes. However, the complexities of international media development work, a field that has long been based on Western-centric values and only recently started to mainstream practices of monitoring and evaluation (Noske-Turner, 2017, p. 7), needs to be considered. Another point that cannot be explored in detail here, but which is of increasing importance throughout the region is the international actors engaging with the media who are not coming from a tradition of press freedom. A relevant example in Guinea-Bissau is Chinese engagement, although as far as the interviews have shown, this is mostly limited to occasional donations of technical equipment and to public diplomacy efforts. Media initiatives possibly coming from Russian, Turkish, Saudi Arabian and different religious actors should also be investigated in future.

## MICRO LEVEL

Well, despite everything, the people try to do an independent journalism. But it is an illusion. Because you go until a certain point (...) but when it comes to sensitive topics, they will not go in depth. (...) Firstly, because they do not have the means, and secondly, because it is dangerous. (IV10, 2022)

On the micro level, individual journalists are affected by capture through self-censorship, economic enticements, their relation to authorities and lack of access to information. Pointing to low professionalization and specialization, journalists and media development practitioners have repeatedly named education as the key factor for strengthening professional identities. Journalists have disclosed being conflicted about their journalistic roles at times due to contradictions between their ideals and their everyday reality.

The most dangerous topics to report about are criticism against individuals in power, political issues and organized crime (IV:10:2022). A journalist and blogger (IV:6:2023) known for critical publications has experienced repeated verbal and physical attacks. Showing a WhatsApp conversation between himself and the Bissau-Guinean president, he imparts: “I write what he doesn’t like, (...) and then he called to insult me. I recorded it just to have a proof.” Many other journalists self-censor to manage these insecurities. There is no significant tradition of investigative journalism, although occasional trainings and awards have been offered by international actors. However, there are no sustainable mechanisms

to ensure journalists' security in case they get targeted because of their investigation on sensitive topics. Recently, a network for investigative reporting was established, aiming to achieve better results through joined forces and to protect individual journalists by signing publications with the network's name.

Much of the capture on the micro level is related to precarious working conditions. Almost all journalists and technicians in community media work on a voluntary basis, except for one community radio station, which is funded by an NGO and provides annual contracts. In private radios, 77% of journalists do not have a work contract (Bodjam, 2022, p. 33). Even in the state media, the budgets are scarce and there have been regular strikes of the staff asking for salaries and equipment (African Insider, 2021). Consequently, journalists of all media are highly susceptible to accepting financial benefits in return for favours. A study by Sampaio-Dias (2019) uncovered that per diem payments are a common practice. Per diems "are smaller fixed amounts of money paid by sources in exchange for media presence or coverage" (p. 2350). In contrast to bribery or corruption, practices like brown envelope and per diem payments are not officially illegal, but according to Sampaio-Dias it is risky to overlook or underestimate them, as they can be just as detrimental to freedom of expression (p. 2363). Capture is a useful concept to grasp such issues because it allows the inclusion of subtle dynamics beyond official breaches of law. For example, in Guinea-Bissau, many media outlets lack the financial means to send reporters to other parts of the country. Politicians who travel to the regions during election campaigns often transport journalists in their cars and pay "30000 GBF per day for each journalist, and your accommodation 50000 GBF, so it's compulsory for you to support them, no way out" (IV:6:2022).

Interviewees mentioned that this explanation goes along with learned expectations concerning the relationship between journalists and politicians, which can be traced back to the time of the one-party-system that governed Guinea-Bissau for 20 years after independence. According to Reporters without Borders, the president called journalists *bocas de aluguer* (mouths for hire) (RSF, 2022). One interviewee, a reporter said: "There are ministers, they say they have a news, so we have to call this or that journalist to cover it. As if the journalist was the boy of the minister, but a journalist cannot be a civil servant." (IV:7:2022)

As this and other quotes confirm, most journalists are aware of the professional role expectation of independence, which is also fixed in the code of ethics that the journalists' associations set up with the support of UNIOGBIS:

3. The Journalist must refuse to be an instrument of political propaganda, economic interests or any other illegitimate interests;
4. Journalists shall reject all forms of coercion, bribery, pressure or any benefits arising from the exercise of the journalistic function which are not in line with

professional ethics, (...) (Código Deontológico dos Jornalistas da Guiné-Bissau, codes translated by the author.)

However, several journalists admit that they are not always able to abide by these ethical and professional standards. It seems that due to the “endogenous precarious professionalism” (Dugmore, 2022, p. 151) and the lack of trust in the reliability of state actors, institutions, regulations, and security, such practices are deemed inevitable despite their contradiction to professional ideals. A consequence, in the context of roles, could be a conflict between understanding and performance (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2019, p. 53). This complexity is of relevance when it comes to media development. For example, trainings might emphasize the professional standard of independence, but are insufficient to generate it in practice. As Sampaio-Dias mentions (p. 2352), the practice of giving per diems to participants in trainings exists in the development sector, as well as a debate around this practice. The giving of per diems is a response to the precarious conditions of the journalists, enabling the donor development actors to contribute to normalizing the exchange of favours against money in the journalism sector. Furthermore, most media outlets do not hold reporters accountable for following the code of ethics – again, the implementation of an initiative pushed by development actors is challenged by the structural conditions. However, the director of one private radio station financed by the Catholic church mentioned that the station had fired a reporter who accepted payments from a politician (IV:8:2022).

The contradictions that journalists experience lead to the issue as to whether the normative expectations that journalists are measured against must be adapted to the context, like Rao and Wasserman (2007), Wasserman and Rao (2008) suggest in their demand for more context-sensitive, glocalized journalism ethics that consider both history and values. Dugmore (2022), Matthews and Onyemaobi (2020) and Sampaio-Dias (2019) all make a similar point when emphasizing that the Western understanding of concepts such as precarity or bribery and corruption, rooted in historically shaped experiences, needs to be reconsidered in Sub-Saharan contexts. Such sensitivity should also be key in international media development work.

## CONCLUSIONS

The media in Guinea-Bissau seem to be constrained through various intersecting actors and dynamics, of which the state authorities are only one. This analysis attempted to spotlight media capture on the macro, meso and micro levels. They are closely connected, and issues related to regulatory and economic capture

permeate all the three levels. The juxtaposition of the levels shows how capture on one level fuels it on another. For example, the introduction of new licence fee regulations aggravates the economic paucity of media outlets, and the resulting precarious working conditions make it more likely for journalists to accept per diems or other dependencies. Macro level capture limits journalists' freedom to criticize the authorities, but self-censorship and dependencies on the micro level also hinder the establishment of a journalism that holds those in power accountable. The contradiction between verbalized rules or ideals and actual practices might be interpreted as a social or cognitive component of capture. The stretching, trespassing and redefining of boundaries of journalistic roles and professional standards seem to be tactics journalists apply to navigate the context of media capture.

The media capture lens is useful for analysing the situations of media in fragile states like Guinea-Bissau because it allows research to show the structural, systemic constraints media are facing. Instead of an occasional shock to an otherwise functioning system, capture permeates the media system and journalists find ways to creatively appropriate and adapt some elements of the process to be able to do their work. More attention should be paid to the implications that capture could have for media systems research, where there are still gaps regarding fragile contexts and the factors that influence transformations. A relevant line of study to draw on is the comparison of Post-Soviet states and the factors that influenced the diverse directions into which their media systems have developed (e.g., Mungiu-Pippidi, 2008). As Rodny-Gumede (2020) suggests, the insights from these analyses could be adapted to help describe the situations in postcolonial societies. The similarity is the need to nation-build and establish a new state-media relationship after the end of foreign domination, with contrasting results. Capture may explain dynamics that happen as the distribution of power and freedom are negotiated in a new national construct, which cause either fragility or stability.

It will be a topic for another paper to explore how far media capture has been embedded in the Bissau-Guinean system as a historic continuity, from laws to organizational structures and in the "socialization" of journalists, authorities and audiences. Path dependency (Frère et al., 2018) is a key concept to explore here.

In a captured system, even actors who would like to fight this dynamic may end up being part of the capture process. They can include media development actors, who aim to implant ideas that are counter-intuitive to the captured context. While this analysis does not suffice to make statements on the nature of these relations, it provides food for thought on the roles of "unexpected" agents of media capture. Media capture should be further researched regarding media development, in which the process acts as both a counterforce and a hindrance to media development, and also as an unintended side effect. This argument

ties in with debates concerning universal versus contextualized norms and values of journalism. The concept of media capture can contribute to the study of media system transformation in fragile states and in regions, which remain under-researched like Guinea-Bissau. This is relevant regarding new global crises and the need for media to provide spaces for free and independent information in ever more complex situations.

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