



## JORGINHO: BRIEF HISTORY OF A YOUNG MAKONDE MUSLIM FROM AL SHABAAB<sup>1</sup>

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There have been several hypotheses about the composition and motivations of Al Shabaab, a group that has been attacking northern Mozambique, particularly Cabo Delgado province, since 5 October, 2017. They include the hypothesis that it is a group comprising nationals and foreigners, Tanzanian citizens in particular, intent on implementing Sharia in Mozambique (Habibe, Forquilha & Pereira, 2019). The probability of ethnic tensions is also suggested. For example, Yussuf Adam puts forward the idea of ethnic tensions setting the mainly Muslim Muani and Macuas against the predominantly Christian Makondes, whose historical connection with Frelimo since the 1960s and their participation in the armed struggle against Portuguese colonialism makes them the politically and economically dominant group in the province. More specifically, these tensions revolve around access to fertile land and the fact that the Makondes occupy senior political positions, unlike the other ethnic groups in Cabo Delgado (VOA *Português*, 2017). According to this thesis, it is a group comprising mainly Muslims (Muani and Macuas) who are fed up with the oppression of Christian Makondes. However, the dynamics of the conflict appear to be much more complex, as the group also contains individuals from the Makonde ethnic group, Muslims or Christians (who later adopted the Al Shabaab ideology).

Based on the story of Jorginho, a young Makonde Muslim, this text seeks not only to contribute to the debate on its ethnic diversity, but also to analyze the reasons why some young people join Al Shabaab. The study shows that, even though Al Shabaab had many Muani and Macua supporters, it has also managed to establish itself in some predominantly Makonde areas, such as Muidumbe, Nangade and Mueda districts where "former combatants" live and that are considered places of "Frelimo domination".

These areas are also close to Tanzania and contain a significant number of Muslim Makondes, a group that appears to have been initially more receptive to Al Shabaab propaganda. This paper is the result of research into Jorginho's Facebook page and interviews with his former friends and neighbours, some of whom refused to join Al Shabaab.

### Jorginho: from birth to adulthood

According to his Facebook account, Jorginho was born in Ngangolo village, Nangade district, on 9 October, 1989. In addition to Makonde, he speaks (spoke) Portuguese and Swahili.

According to local sources who knew him, Jorginho comes from a Muslim Makonde family and his parents (his father died in 2020) are former fighters of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo), residing in Ngangolo village, in Nangade. The same sources state that Jorginho attended Nangade-Ntamba Secondary School, Nangade district, and completed grade 10. However, in his Facebook page he claims to have studied in Pemba town and Mueda district.

Jorginho was very active on social media, writing mainly in Swahili. With a little patience it is possible to retrace some passages of his life, using his Facebook page. For example, it is possible to note that until mid-2014 he was still single and using social networks to find a wife. On 14 July, 2014, he posted a message on Facebook, where he claimed to be looking for a partner: "*Brothers in Islam. I am a Muslim; I am requesting assistance: I need someone to look for a Muslim girl aged between 17 and 22 years old who has never been married... I still don't have a wife. You can use +258 (...) to call me...*"

As of October 2014, he still had not been able to find a wife. So, on the 31st of that month, he posted again on his page that he was still looking, indicating the profile she should have: "*I am your brother in the faith. I am asking you Muslims and non-Muslims to help me find a Muslim wife aged between 14 and 20; one who fears God and was brought up in an Islamic environment*".

It is not known whether he obtained a wife through these social media posts. However, once married (from this marriage, he had two children: female and male), he feels he needs a second wife. To this end, on 25 November, 2016, he posts a message to his Facebook friends, asking for help in obtaining a second wife so that, according to him, he can comply with the principles of his religious faith. According to Jorginho, this wife should have the following profile:

1) *who identifies as Muslim*, 2) *who preserves herself*, 3) *who is no more than 25 years old*; 4) *who understands/knows the meaning of marriage and husband*.

Adding that she could be from any tribe, Jorginho asks anyone knowing of a woman with these characteristics to contact him by phone. However, there is no sign that he ever had a second wife. His Facebook account gives Montepuez district as his last address.

### Jorginho: a man of a thousand and one professions

On his Facebook page, Jorginho says that he worked as a driver for the Ancuabe District Youth Education and Technology Service (SDEJT), information that could not be confirmed. Local sources, also supported by images on his Facebook page, indicate that he was a bus driver (plate 100) and a truck driver in Montepuez district. Also according to the same source, he obtained his driving license in Pemba town.

Jorginho was also an artisanal prospector in ruby mines in Nanhupo, Montepuez district, an area well known for the presence of high quality rubies and for skirmishes between the authorities and the local young people who were mining them.

For example, in a photo posted on his Facebook page on 4 November, 2014, Jorginho wrote in Swahili: *looking for ruby money*.



In addition to being a prospector, images on his Facebook page in 2016 show that Jorginho was also a tailor and small food trader.

Although he was in Cabo Delgado province, it was not possible to identify his exact whereabouts when he carried out these activities.

### Jorginho within Al Shabaab

There are two versions of the process that led to Jorginho's radicalization. Some sources estimate that it was while he was in the ruby mines, where he met Tanzanian citizens who introduced him to radical Islam. According to this version, after working in the ruby mines, Jorginho went

<sup>1</sup> For ethical reasons Jorginho is a fictitious name

back home to Nangade where, together with other Al Shabaab supporters, he started to spread the group's ideology and tried to recruit other young people. It is also believed that around the same time he clashed not only with his parents, but also with other Muslims who did not identify with his version of Islam and whom he considered *kafirs/unbelievers*. As occurred elsewhere, following disputes between Al Shabaab supporters and other Muslims, Jorginho and his group were expelled from the *African Muslim Agency* mosque (Mesquita do Mercado Central in Nangade -Sede), and started to pray in makeshift mosques.



The second version states that Jorginho's radicalization took place in Nangade, where he sold clothes (that he would pick up in Tanzania) in the Nangade-Sede Central Market. The market was frequented by Sunni merchants from various countries, especially Tanzanians. It is said that it was through contact with these traders, who also attended the above-mentioned *African Muslim Agency* mosque, that led him to convert to radical Islam. It is also claimed that, after meeting the followers of Al Shabaab, he disappeared from family life for about a year, and no-one knew for sure where he had gone. When questioned about where he was, Jorginho replied that he had been in Nampula.

Meanwhile, several images posted by Jorginho on his Facebook page show him dressed in the Somali Al Shabaab fashion. For example, on seeing one of these images, published on 18 July, 2016, one of his friends, who had also been enticed by the insurgents but resisted, commented: "*You deserve to look like hallshabab!*" [You look very similar to Al Shabaab], and Jorginho replied: "*Agredeso*" [Thank you]. In these images, he is wearing a colourful scarf on his head and short trousers.

On the same date (18 July, 2016), he shared a video about the Al Shabaab group in Somalia on his Facebook page. It is a video published by Euronews in 2013, entitled: [Al-Shabab Islamists want Sharia law in Somalia in cross-border vengeful jihad](#), which explains not only the origins of the group, but also why and with whom it is fighting. When seeing how he is dressed and the video, it can be concluded that, to some extent, some of the young people who joined the Mozambican Al Shabaab were inspired by their Somali namesake. This could also be the reason behind the name Al Shabaab, its local name.

This finding is not surprising given that, according to local reports, young Mozambican followers of Al Shabaab were initially influenced by cassette recordings containing messages from the radical Kenyan cleric Abdou Rogo, in which he appealed for *Jihad* against those who did not share the same Islamic ideals. Many of these young people dreamt of travelling to Somalia for *Jihad* and, according to local reports, some of them did go.



#### Jorginho in the 5 October, 2017 attack

Jorginho left Nangade for Mocimboa da Praia, on a date that could not be determined, in order to participate in the initial 5 October attack. After the attack, he is said to have returned to Nangade, where he pretended that he had no connection with Al Shabaab. Questioned by the community about his disappearance, he said he had been in Nampula, which does not seem to have convinced his neighbors, who decided to destroy his house (along with those of other suspects) in December 2018. Seventeen houses belonging to insurgent family members were destroyed. Some individuals suspected of being part of Al Shabaab were beheaded by the population (Diário de Notícias, 2018). Jorginho was reportedly arrested but ended up being released as there was "insufficient evidence".

After his release, Jorginho disappeared without trace. After some time with no information as to his whereabouts, some people who lived with him claimed that he participated in another attack on Mocimboa da Praia town, in May 2020. The grounds for this assertion were a video of the terrorists in Mocimboa da Praia that circulated on social networks, in which he supposedly appears. The video appears to show Jorginho in the streets of Awasse, driving a Defense and Security Forces armored vehicle seized by "Al Shabaab" during the second attack on Mocimboa da Praia. This led people to conclude that Jorginho was one of the insurgents' drivers.

It is said that the video shows him with a huge beard. It should also be noted that he was dressed in blue clothes that, according to the same witnesses, was one of his favorite colours.

For a while, through phone calls Jorginho tried to persuade his old Nangade and Montepuez friends to join Al Shabaab. These are friends who, despite having received money from

Al Shabaab, refused to join the group. Those who refused were persecuted and killed (including their families) and their possessions destroyed. Some of Jorginho's friends had to flee from their home areas to safe alternatives or had to change their phone numbers.

#### But why did "Jorginho" join Al Shabaab?

It can be concluded that that, like other young people who joined Al Shabaab, one reason why Jorginho joined was because he fell under the external influence of radical Tanzanian sheiks who, in addition to radical talk against the government and the state led by *Kaffirs* or pigs, proclaimed that joining Al Shabaab and "*doing Jihad*" would get you into paradise: *Whoever dies in Jihad goes to paradise; he is a martyr*; this is how young people were convinced, through faith. Equally, he would have been attracted by promises of wealth. He was initially lured by large sums of money. Jorginho lived in difficult conditions and publicly expressed his frustration on his Facebook page, particularly in 2014: *maisha ni magumu sana*: life is very difficult, he said repeatedly.

Jorginho's story shows that Al Shabaab takes advantage of young people in difficult circumstances to seduce them, not only with offers of money, but also employment and eternal life. It also shows that Al Shabaab is an ethnically heterogeneous group; that some young people who have joined Al Shabaab in Mozambique draw inspiration from other radical Islamist groups such as Al Shabaab in Somalia; that even in areas traditionally or historically supportive of Frelimo, where "former combatants" live, Al Shabaab has been able to gain a degree of influence, particularly among Makonde Muslims.

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