

Migration Dynamics and the Making of the Jihadi Insurgency in Northern Mozambique

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Abstract

Drawing on extensive fieldwork conducted in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa Provinces, this article analyses the links between migration dynamics and the development of the jihadi insurgency in Northern Mozambique. It argues that the advance of the insurgency made use of the dynamics of external and internal migration, which fed a vast network of recruitment to *Al-Shabaab*, facilitated essentially by the porous nature of the border with Tanzania and by fishing activity on the islands of the Cabo Delgado coast. The article investigates the intense cross-border dynamics (Mozambique/Tanzania) and the way these dynamics have been exploited by the *Al-Shabaab* group for recruitment purposes. In addition, it shows that there is a long tradition of migration in Northern Mozambique, from Nampula coastal districts (Angoche, Mossuril, Ilha de Moçambique, Nacala-a-Porto, Nacala-a-Velha, and Memba) to Cabo Delgado coastal zones (specially Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia, and Palma) linked to fishery activities. Most of the young people who have been recruited from Nampula coastal districts to join the *Al-Shabaab* group were attracted by the “dream” of finding a job in the fishery in Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia, or Palma districts, in Cabo Delgado Province, as has always been the case in the past.

Keywords

Migration, jihadi insurgency, recruitment, *Al-Shabaab*, Northern Mozambique

Resumo

Baseado em extenso trabalho de campo nas Províncias de Cabo Delgado, Nampula e Niassa, este artigo analisa as ligações entre as dinâmicas de migração e o desenvolvimento da insurgência jihad no Norte de Moçambique. O artigo argumenta que o avanço da insurgência se serviu da dinâmica da migração externa e interna, que alimentou uma vasta rede de recrutamento ao *Al-Shabaab*, facilitada essencialmente pela porosidade da fronteira com a Tanzânia e pela atividade pesqueira nas ilhas da costa de Cabo Delgado. O artigo investiga a intensa dinâmica transfronteiriça (Moçambique/Tanzânia) e a forma como essa dinâmica tem sido explorada pelo grupo Al-Shabaab para fins de recrutamento. Além disso, o artigo mostra que existe uma longa tradição de migração no norte de Moçambique, dos distritos costeiros de Nampula (Angoche, Mossuril, Ilha de Moçambique, Nacala-a-Porto, Nacala-a-Velha

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e Memba) para a zona costeira de Cabo Delgado (especialmente Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia e Palma) ligadas à actividade pesqueira. A maioria dos jovens, que têm sido recrutados nos distritos do litoral de Nampula para integrar o grupo *Al-Shabaab*, foi atraída pelo “sonho” de arranjar um emprego nas pescas nos distritos de Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia ou Palma, na província de Cabo Delgado, como sempre foi no passado.

Palavras-chave

Migração, insurgência jihad, recrutamento, *Al-Shabaab*, Norte de Moçambique

Introduction: The Origins of the Insurgency

In early October 2017, a group consisting mostly of armed youths attacked state institutions in the municipality of Mocímboa da Praia in the northeast of Cabo Delgado province. Known locally as *Al-Shabaab*, the group had set itself up in Mocímboa da Praia and other Cabo Delgado districts well before 2017, preaching a radical Islam in the local mosques, forbidding children from attending public schools and banning all collaboration with the state authorities (Habibe, Forquilha, and Pereira 2019; Morier-Genoud 2020). At the start, there was strong resistance by local Muslim religious leaderships, who not only did not accept the “ideology” of *Al-Shabaab* because they regarded it as an aberration and contrary to the teachings and principles of Islam, but also denounced the group to the local authorities (Habibe, Forquilha, and Pereira 2019). However, far from a single and concerted reaction on the part of the government authorities to confront the group, there were significant differences in the way the matter was dealt with in each district. While in Chiure District, for example, the government reacted firmly, resulting in the dispersal of the members of the group to other districts, in Mocímboa da Praia the local authorities regarded it as an internal matter among Muslims and, as such, something that should be solved in the mosques. As time went on, the conflict between members of *Al-Shabaab* and the local Muslim leaderships became ever more visible, particularly in Mocímboa da Praia district. Expelled from the local mosques, the group built their own places of worship and their own *madrassas*, thus giving greater expression to their sectarian nature (Morier-Genoud 2020). A group which was, in the beginning, merely religious and preached and demanded the practice of a radical Islam, the introduction of Sharia law, and opposition to any form of collaboration with the state, *Al-Shabaab* came to include military cells and hardened its discourse as from late 2015. It then launched armed action on 5 October 2017.

Likened to banditry which merely disturbs public order, the phenomenon quickly took on alarming proportions. Attacks began to multiply. Two months after the first attack, the police had already detained 251 suspects, of whom thirty-seven were Tanzanian citizens (Marcos 2017). In December 2017, the Mozambique Republic Police (PRM), was in the area and visited Mocímboa da Praia and Palma districts. At the rally held in the Mocímboa da Praia district capital, the general commander of the police, Bernardino Rafael, gave an ultimatum to the Mocímboa da Praia attackers. He gave them seven days to hand themselves over to the authorities (Marcos 2017). However, the violence continued and, in the weeks and months that followed the attack on the Mocímboa da Praia district capital, the security

situation deteriorated on the ground. Between late March and mid-April 2020, armed violence reached levels never previously seen, with the assault on and temporary occupation of three towns in the districts of Mocímboa da Praia, Quissanga, and Macomia. Four months later, in August 2020, the advance of *Al-Shabaab* on the ground was consolidated with the capture and occupation of the port town of Mocímboa da Praia, a strategic place from which the insurgents planned and executed attacks against neighbouring districts.

From October 2017 to early 2021, before the foreign military intervention by troops from Rwanda and from the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the *Al-Shabaab* group evolved significantly on the ground. Indeed, from a religious sect focusing on some districts in Cabo Delgado in 2010–2012, with ramifications in the neighboring provinces of Nampula and Niassa, the group transformed into a military movement with jihadi characteristics. From Mocímboa da Praia, where the first armed attack occurred in October 2017, the group expanded its actions to other districts, namely Macomia, Quissanga, Muidumbe, Nangade, Ibo, Meluco, and Palma; from attacks on villages and small hamlets, the group moved on to attack large population centers, particularly district capitals, posing a serious challenge to the security situation in the region, with strong political, economic, and social impacts.

How can the rapid advance of *Al-Shabaab* be explained, and what local dynamics favored the development of their actions on the ground before the arrival of the Rwandan and SADC troops? Based on extensive field research in Nampula, Niassa, and Cabo Delgado provinces, this article analyzes the link between local migration dynamics and the development of the insurgency in northern Mozambique. We argue that the advance of the insurgency made use of the dynamics of external and internal migration, which fed a vast network of recruitment to *Al-Shabaab*, facilitated essentially by the porous nature of the border with Tanzania and by fishing activity on the islands of the Cabo Delgado coast. We develop our argument in three phases. Firstly, we describe and analyze the frontier dynamic between Mozambique and Tanzania characterized by a certain porosity of the border, which facilitates the illegal circulation of people and goods, feeding illicit activities, some of which are associated with the development of the jihadi insurgency on the Mozambican side. Secondly, we describe and analyze the phenomenon of the migration of fishermen from the Nampula coastal area to the Cabo Delgado islands located in the Bay of Montepuez and in the Quirimbas Archipelago. With this, we want to show how this longstanding phenomenon in the region took on a new dynamic in the context of the jihadi insurgency in Northern Mozambique. Finally, we try to show how, on the one hand, the frontier dynamic between

Mozambique and Tanzania and, on the other, the internal migration of fishermen from the Nampula coast have fed the recruitment network of the *Al-Shabaab* group, allowing it to expand its ranks and consolidate its actions on the ground.

The research for this article followed a qualitative methodological approach, resorting to semi-structured interviews, observation, and focus groups discussions. The interviews covered the following previously selected categories: a) administrative authorities of the districts covered by the research; b) Mozambican immigration officials at three border posts on the frontier between Mozambique and Tanzania, namely Chiuledze (in Mecula District), Matchedge (in Sanga District) and Cobué (in Lago District); c) fishermen who migrate internally, particularly in the Nampula coastal area; and d) people internally displaced by the war. The focus group discussions were held with migrant fishermen who had returned from the Cabo Delgado islands and people displaced internally by the war. In all, sixty-five interviews and ten focus group discussions were held. The fieldwork took place between July 2020 and July 2021, for a total of fourteen weeks, covering some districts of Nampula, Niassa, and Cabo Delgado. In Nampula province, the field work took place in the coastal areas, known as the place from which migrant fishermen depart who go fishing on the Cabo Delgado islands. These are the districts of Angoche, Ilha de Moçambique, Mossuril, Nacala-a-Porto, Nacala-a-Velha, and Memba. In Niassa province, the interviews and focus group discussions were held in districts bordering Tanzania and Malawi, namely Mecula, Sanga, and Lago. In these districts we visited the three border posts mentioned above. Finally, in Cabo Delgado province, the field work was undertaken in the Pemba, Palma, and Chiure districts.³ All the interviews and focus group discussions were held in Portuguese, utilizing a translator/interpreter, a member of the research team.

Migratory Movement along the Mozambique/Tanzania Border

Mozambique and Tanzania share a common border, which coincides essentially with the course of the Rovuma River, over a length of 756 kilometers. Although it is one of the oldest borders (Newitt 1995), the border between Mozambique and Tanzania, like other African borders, appeared in its current form following the Conference of Berlin in 1884–1885 and the subsequent treaties. One can mention, for example, the treaty between

³ Because of the lack of security in some districts in the province, it was not possible, during fieldwork, for us to visit the districts directly affected by the armed violence (Quissanga, Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia, Muidumbe, Nangade, and Mueda).

Germany and Portugal, which dates from 1886 (Newitt 1995; Souto 1995), and the subsequent agreements between Portugal and Britain, after World War I, when Germany lost its possessions in Africa. The frontier is formed by two regions on the Tanzanian side (Mtwara and Ruvuma) and two provinces on the Mozambican side (Cabo Delgado and Niassa).

Officially, there are five border posts on the Mozambican side, namely Namoto and Negomano (in Cabo Delgado) and 2nd Congress, Chiuledze, and Cobuè (in Niassa). Unlike the other four frontier posts, the Chiuledze post is rudimentary, without adequate infrastructures and frontier services.⁴ Despite this, the Chiuledze post, due to its location, plays a very important role in controlling the movement of people and goods in the frontier zone of the vast Niassa Reserve.

As happens in frontier areas, the populations living on both sides of the Rovuma River have historical, economic, cultural, and even religious ties that date back for several centuries (Newitt 1995; Pelissier 1984). The current cross border dynamics show how arbitrary the border decisions made by the European colonial powers in the late 1880s are. Indeed, people living on both sides of the border share common history, culture, language, and, in some cases, religion. Over the last sixty years, two important factors stand out in the development of these multiple ties, namely the wars (colonial and civil) and informal cross-border trade, catalyzed, to a large extent, by the porous nature of the frontier. Indeed, the colonial and civil wars on the Mozambican side resulted in refugees who settled in Tanzania and, despite this, continued to maintain links with their respective families and communities in Mozambique. Furthermore, the dynamic of informal cross-border trade facilitated and strengthened the ties between the populations on the two sides of the frontier, and created an economy based essentially on agriculture, fishing, and consumer goods. A report assessing the informal trade on the border between Mozambique and Tanzania, based on fieldwork undertaken by a joint mission in 2006, shows evidence of cross-border trade in food, characterized by the flow of foodstuffs from Mozambique to Tanzania (maize, paddy rice, sesame) and consumer goods from Tanzania to Mozambique (domestic articles, clothing, bicycles, radios, motorcycles) (Bata et al. 2006).

Our interviews in the frontier districts of Cabo Delgado (Palma) and Niassa (Mecula, Sanga and Lago) suggest that, in recent years, this trade has intensified, in some cases galvanized by artisanal mining, particularly in the districts of Montepuez, and in Lago and

⁴ The Chiuledze post does not possess conventional buildings. The border services operate out of improvised tents.

Sanga, on the border with Tanzania. Given the absence of a transport network for the movement of people and goods from the border to the mining area, the acquisition of motorcycles sold in Tanzania became popular in, for example, the locality of Matchedge (border post on the Mozambican side). Acquired essentially by local youths, these motorcycles are an important source for income generation. But the border dynamics between Mozambique and Tanzania cannot be reduced just to the legal cross-border trade. They also, and above all, include smuggling, trafficking, and illegal migration, feeding a variety of networks of organized crime on both sides of the border (Haysom 2018; Habibe, Forquilha, and Pereira 2019).

Migration and Illegal Mining: Two Faces of a Complex Phenomenon

The growth of illegal mining in the three provinces of northern Mozambique (Cabo Delgado, Niassa, and Nampula) has fed and intensified migration, often clandestine, facilitated by the porous nature of the frontier between Mozambique and Tanzania (Haysom 2018). Interviews with the local authorities in Matchedge and Lupilichi localities, in Sanga and Lago districts respectively (in Niassa Province, for example), confirm the link between illegal mining and the growing clandestine migratory movement of citizens from Tanzania, Kenya, and the Great Lakes region. The case of ruby mining in the administrative post of Namanhumbir in the Cabo Delgado district of Montepuez is probably one of the best illustrative examples of the link between migration and illegal mining (Maquenzi and Feijó 2019).

Undertaken within the perimeter of the area granted to Montepuez Ruby Mining (MRM),⁵ the illegal mining in Namanhumbir has been marked by recurrent conflicts, not only between MRM and the miners (Mozambicans and foreigners), but also between the latter and the state. According to the Mozambican press, since the start of its operations in 2012, MRM has complained frequently of the invasion of its concession by illegal miners (*Carta* 2020; *Diário Económico* 2020). In February 2020, after a group of illegal miners had seriously injured three MRM officials and set fire to a company vehicle, MRM stepped up its appeals to the Mozambican state to put a halt to illegal mining. But three years earlier, as from February 2017, the Mozambican state had unleashed a polemical campaign, marked by violence, with the objective of expelling illegal miners from the mining area. At this time,

⁵ A company owned 75% by Gemfields and 25% by Muiriti Limitada.

speaking of the operation to the press, a representative of the Mozambican police in Cabo Delgado province said:

We removed 3,672 people. Of these, 1,010 are Mozambicans and the rest are foreigners. This is an ongoing operation. It aims to remove all those who are prospecting for this mineral (rubies) illegally, and who have come to Montepuez municipality, attracted by this activity . . . It was a forced operation, because the people did not want to leave their homes and leave the mining prospection areas. Hence it's a coercive operation, so that they leave. Many Mozambicans, under police pressure, left by their own means. The immigrants were removed with our resources, of the security forces, some returned to where they had come from and others were repatriated. The PRM is continuing to repatriate those immigrants who are in an illegal situation. (Melo 2017)

As can be noted from the above extract, most of the illegal miners involved in this operation were foreign citizens (2,622 or about 72%). Data provided by the Mozambican police in Cabo Delgado say that among the illegal foreign miners expelled, there were citizens from Tanzania, Gambia, Senegal, Thailand, and Mali (Teixeira 2017). By far the largest number of illegal miners came from Tanzania, to such an extent that the incident involved the Tanzanian diplomatic representation in Maputo. The press cited an official in the Tanzanian Foreign Ministry in the following terms:

The main responsibility of the Government of Tanzania, through the Embassy in Maputo, is to ensure that the interests of the Tanzanians who comply with the law, and even those who do not, are protected. The official there will enter into dialogue with the government of Mozambique to guarantee that the Tanzanians are safe and we shall deal with the logistics in order to bring them back. (Teixeira 2017)

Back in 2006, in another operation, this time in the locality of Lupilichi (on the border between Mozambique and Tanzania) in Lago District, Niassa Province, the police expelled about 4,600 foreigners who were illegally exploiting gold (*Moçambique para todos* 2006). Most of them were Tanzanians. In addition to illegal mining, they were also stimulating cross-border trade.

The operations carried out by the Mozambican police to dislodge the illegal miners from Namanhumbir and from Lupilichi were accompanied by the excessive use of force and violence. Many miners lost their possessions during the operations, and there were criticisms by human rights organizations, denouncing police brutality during the operations (Teixeira 2017). During our fieldwork, many interviewees mentioned the police violence against the illegal miners, particularly in Namanhumbir. Some of these foreigners took refuge in other Cabo Delgado districts, notably in Mocímboa da Praia, shortly before the start of the armed violence. It is important to note that evidence on the ground suggests that there were foreign illegal miners who had been in contact with radical circles in Tanzania before their illegal entry into Mozambique, and that the sites of illegal mining had also become spaces for the dissemination of Salafist ideas (Habibe, Forquilha, and Pereira 2019).

External Migration and the Establishment of the Jihadi Insurgency

As mentioned above, in October 2017, the first attack against state institutions and the civilian population took place in the town of Mocímboa da Praia, undertaken by a group known locally as *Al-Shabaab*, who were demanding the practice of a radical Islam. Some authors believe that some of the illegal miners expelled during the police operation in Namanhumbir, particularly foreigners, joined the group of attackers (Chichava 2020). Despite the debate about the identity of the insurgents, it is known today that the attackers in Mocímboa de Praia included members of a local sect who had set themselves up in some districts of Cabo Delgado at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century (Morier-Genoud 2020). Inspired by the ideas and teachings of radical Tanzanian and Kenyan Muslim clerics, notably Aboud Rogo, the sect was established in some districts of Cabo Delgado by Mozambicans who had studied in radical madrasas in Tanzania (Habibe, Forquilha, and Pereira 2019; Morier-Genoud 2020).

After its foundation, the sect developed with the help of Tanzanian clerics, some of whom had settled in Mozambique through ties of marriage (Habibe, Forquilha, and Pereira 2019). Contact with Tanzania was fundamental in the development of the sect. In Cabo Delgado, in Niassa and in Nampula, our interviews suggest that radical Tanzanian Islamic religious circles played an important role in the development of the sect. For example, when looking at the profile of the leaders who carried out the attack on Mocímboa da Praia on 5 October 2017, one notes that they all had links with Tanzania, either through trade, through studies in Tanzanian madrasas, or through the fact that they were themselves Tanzanian

nationals (Habibe, Forquilha, and Pereira 2019: 13–15). We found a similar situation in Niassa. A local Muslim leader interviewed during our research told us how three young men from Niassa, who practiced a radical form of Islam had been in contact with radical circles in Tanzania:

Faridi Daude, Murane Daude and Saide Aide Mbuane are young men who were born here in Niassa. They went to study in Tanzania in the madrassa of Imam Xhafi in Tanga. There they imbibed ideas of Salafism. From there, they came back to Mozambique . . . They are from here, from Lichinga district. In around 2015/2016, these youths had a well-designed plan to penetrate the mosques of Lichinga and to begin working from below . . . Saide Aide Mbuane began to attend the stalls to spread his ideas. He began at the Khaiba mosque, near the train station here in Lichinga. He was discovered by the leader of the mosque, who is a member of the Islamic Council of Mozambique (CISLAMO). Then Saide Aide Mbuane began to show openly that he had a radical group . . . He began to speak against elections, saying that, if people voted for a non-Muslim President, they were voting for disbelief and idolatry. In 2016, the CISLAMO, delegation in Niassa, denounced the anomalous situation in the mosques to the provincial government, even before the events in Mocímboa da Praia . . . But the Government's reaction was to say "that's your problem, there in the mosques."⁶

Youths going to Tanzania to study in local madrassas was an established phenomenon in northern Mozambique, well before the start of the jihadi insurgency. Our interviewees said that this practice is frequent among the families of some Muslim leaderships with certain responsibilities in the local mosques. In the cases where they are unable to send their children to Tanzania, Maputo has been an option if they can obtain scholarships. That is the case, for example, of a leader in one of the mosques in the Marrupa district capital, in Niassa Province, whose son is studying in Maputo. For historic reasons, the prestige of the Tanzanian madrassas and the reputation of Tanzanian Muslim clerics in the imaginations of many Muslims from humble families in Northern Mozambique has been one of the factors driving families to send young men to study the Quran in Tanzania. Local conceptions and practices of Islam in northern Mozambique have been deeply shaped by East Coast African Islam and Swahili traditions, particularly those traditions coming from Zanzibar and Comoros in the

⁶ Interview with Sheik Adam Bonoumar, Lichinga, 8 December 2020.

late 1880s (Bonate 2010). These links to Swahili world have played an important role in the reputation of Tanzanian Muslim clerics in Northern Mozambique. But these young men have not always crossed the border between Mozambique and Tanzania legally. Since the start of the jihadi insurgency in Northern Mozambique and the subsequent strengthening of vigilance along the border, Mozambican and Tanzanian authorities have referred to intercepting young men moving in both directions. They linked their movements to the study of radical madrasas in Tanzania and, in some cases, their later incorporation into the ranks of *Al-Shabaab* in the bush of Cabo Delgado. In this regard, an officer of the Mozambican Frontier Guard, stationed at the Chiuledze border post, said:

Last week, we intercepted a minibus here at the border post, with about eight young men inside. They said they came from Nampula Province and were going to Tanzania. Since the youths did not have up-to-date documents, we were suspicious, and we began to interrogate them about the reasons for their trip. After a lengthy interrogation, we discovered that they were going to Tanga in Tanzania to study . . . They had contacts there and promises to study the Quran in local madrasas. We sent the youths back to where they had come from.⁷

We encountered a similar situation at the Cobué border post, in Lago District, Niassa Province. In this regard, one of the local immigration officials told us the following:

Two weeks ago, a group of thirteen young Tanzanians was intercepted, here in Cobué. They entered from the Mbamba Bay border post in Tanzania . . . and by boat they came down Lake Niassa to Cobué. From Cobué, they were going to Metangula . . . from Metangula to Lichinga and from there to Marrupa. Once in Marrupa, they would enter Cabo Delgado province, where they would join the insurgents. Fortunately, there was a denunciation here in Cobué and we managed to intercept the group. Three days ago, another group of seven young men, also Tanzanians, was intercepted. Recently, we have been seeing strange movements similar to what happened in Cabo Delgado in the early moments of the armed violence. The movement has been stepped up, here in Cobué. When they arrive, they sometimes try to entice local youths with sums of money or promises of jobs in Cabo Delgado.⁸

⁷ Interview with Américo António, Chiuledze, 23 September 2020.

⁸ Interview with Maria Luís, official at the Cóbue border post, Cóbue, 10 December 2020.

But it is not only Tanzanian citizens who cross the Mozambique-Tanzania border to join the ranks of *Al-Shabaab*. Our interviews show that there are also citizens from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia among them. The porous nature of the border and the lack of resources of border officials, particularly on the Mozambican side, have made the frontier line extremely vulnerable to clandestine immigrants, many of them associated with organized crime, smuggling, and trafficking of all kinds and, in recent years, with the development of the jihadi insurgency in Northern Mozambique. This wave of migration has also brought into Mozambique individuals from war zones (particularly from the Democratic Republic of Congo) with military experience and involved in organized crime networks. Furthermore, the porous nature of the borders has also allowed the entry into Mozambican territory of individuals linked to Salafist circles particularly from Tanzania, Kenya, and Somalia, many of whom are also involved in illegal mining. Hence the illegal mining sites have become spaces for the dissemination of Salafist ideas and for recruitment.

While it is true that the jihadi insurgency takes advantage of the border dynamics, particularly the porous nature of the border between Mozambique and Tanzania, it also exploits the internal migratory movements characteristic of the coastal zone of Nampula, linked to fishing in the islands of the Quirimbas Archipelago, off the coast of Cabo Delgado Province. We shall discuss this issue in the following section.

The Coast of Cabo Delgado: Eldorado and the Jihadi Insurgency

The departure of artisanal fishermen from the coastal zone of Nampula⁹ to other regions is a longstanding phenomenon (Muanamoha and Raimundo, 2018). Among the pull factors (Peixot 2004; Patricio 2015; Rocha-Trindade 1995) in their destinations, we found the search for better fishing opportunities, particularly linked to an increase in income, and learning better techniques for catching fish. According to our interviews, the migratory movement of fishermen from the Nampula coast goes fundamentally in two directions: to the coast of Cabo Delgado and to the coast of Zambézia and Sofala. For Cabo Delgado,¹⁰ the destinations are the Bay of Montepuez and the Quirimbas Archipelago, while for Sofala

⁹ These are the districts of Angoche, Mozambique Island, Mossuril, Nacala Port, Nacala-a-Velha, and Memba.

¹⁰ The fisherman from Nampula who migrate to Cabo Delgado mostly come from the districts of Mozambique Island, Mossuril, Nacala-a-Porto, Nacala-a-Velha, and Memba.

and Zambézia,¹¹ the artisanal fishermen from the Nampula coast migrate to the Bank of Sofala (*Wamphulafax* 2014).

For our analysis in this article, we made particular use of information gathered from migrant fishermen heading to the Cabo Delgado coast, where the pull factors are, above all, the opportunities that the Bay of Montepuez and the Quirimbas Archipelago offer in terms of the quantity and quality of fish produced (Gell 1999), which are expressed in higher incomes for the fishermen. Comparative data from the survey of households of fishermen and fish farmers from Cabo Delgado and Nampula Provinces show interesting differences, to Cabo Delgado's advantage. For example, while in Nampula the average number of months of highest income from fishing and aquaculture is four months, it is five months in Cabo Delgado. In this period, the income per household per month is 15,000 meticaís¹² in Nampula and 21,000 meticaís¹³ in Cabo Delgado (Amade 2017a & 2017b).

Based on our interview, we identified two types of artisanal fishermen who migrate from the coastal zone of Nampula to Cabo Delgado. The first type of fishermen consists of migrants who go to the Cabo Delgado coast for a long period. In general, they are young fishermen who intend to settle and raise a family in Cabo Delgado. From time to time, they return to their places of origin for a short visit to their relatives. Many of them have prospered in Cabo Delgado from fishing. Some witnessed in their villages the arrival of the first members of *Al-Shabaab*, well before the start of the armed violence. With the war, they have lost everything and were forced to return to Nampula. One of our interviewees told us his story as follows:

I was born here in Quissimajulu, Nacala-a-Porto. I am a fisherman, and in 2003 I went to Cabo Delgado, specifically to the Mucojo administrative post, in Macomia district. I decided to move to Mucojo, because I was fishing better there and made a profit from my business of selling fish. I owned two boats that were seventeen and four meters long. I also had fishing nets . . . goats and palm trees. I witnessed the start of the armed conflict [of *Al-Shabaab*]. I saw two mosques that young radical Muslims attended. These youths came into conflict with their parents. The Government intervened and those youths were arrested. They told us they were taken to Maputo. But when they came back to the village [Mutone village], they did

¹¹ They are mainly fishermen from Angoche and Moma.

¹² Equivalent to 237 USD at the exchange rate of 63.2 MZN to 1 USD.

¹³ Equivalent to 332 USD at the exchange rate of 63.2 MZN to 1 USD

not agree to follow the guidance of the government and they spread to Mocímboa da Praia and began to wage war . . . At the beginning, these youths sold their goods, and their houses, so that they could have money and travel to meet other youths of *Al-Shabaab* . . . and the war began. At the start, the village where I was living organized for self-defence. We organized ourselves into groups of ten people. Using machetes and spears we guarded our village. Later the head of the village asked the government for firearms. Those with machetes and spears guarded the village in groups, while those who had firearms patrolled. But when the security situation worsened, I decided to return to my birthplace, here in Quissimajulu, Nacala-a-Porto.¹⁴

A similar story was told by another interviewee, who also migrated to the Cabo Delgado coast in search of better conditions for fishing:

I went to Cabo Delgado in 2010. I decided to stay in Macomia, in the Quiterajo administrative post. I am a fisherman. When I arrived there, I liked the lands . . . I obtained a plot of land, I built my house, and I married there. Until 2014, there was no problem. But as from 2014, the situation began to change. The Tanzanians began to arrive, who brought a new way of practicing Islam. When I arrived in Quiterajo, there was only one mosque in my village. When these Tanzanians arrived, they went to build a new mosque. Then the confusion began. The new believers went to the new mosques, and with new rules: the men should wear turbans, and knee-length shorts, and they called us “Kafir” . . . even though we are Muslims. At that time, some youths were selling goods in the village, and they said that with the money they wanted to pay for trips to Somalia to go and study . . . they began by selling fish. Then they sold their houses, and finally they moved to Mocímboa da Praia and there the war began. I was living in Ilala village. There we also decided to organize ourselves for the self-defense of our village just as they were doing in other villages. In our village, we formed groups of 15 people to patrol. I was a member of one of the patrol groups . . . we were using spears. One day the *Al-Shabaab* began to attack and behead the people who were patrolling the village . . . it was then that I gave up. It didn’t take long . . . the Al-Shabaab burnt down my village. I lost six sets of fishing gear and nets, a solar panel, a battery . . . everything was set on fire. That day, before they left,

¹⁴ Interview with Momade Juma, Quissimajulu, 10 July 2020.

the *Al-Shabaab* promised to return. So, I decided to flee with my family, and return to Quissimajulu, here in Nacala Port.¹⁵

The second type of fishermen consists of migrants who go to the Cabo Delgado coast for a short period. In general, they are people who intend to earn money to solve specific problems in their families in their places of origin: building or improving houses, costs of marriage, health problems, etc. This type of migrant is common in the Baixo Pinda village, in Memba District, from which many fishermen have gone to the islands of Cabo Delgado. One of the interviewees, who returned from Cabo Delgado three years ago, explained:

Normally, it [migration to Cabo Delgado] works like this: the fishermen plan before migrating: “this year I’m going to Mocímboa da Praia to fish. The aim is to build a better house with the money I earn from fishing.” Then he (the fisherman) goes to Cabo Delgado. As you can see, here in Baixo Pinda, there are many improved houses . . . they all belong to fishermen who have returned from the islands of Cabo Delgado.¹⁶

Over the years, an extremely efficient informal mechanism has developed locally which allows artisanal fishermen to migrate to the coast of Cabo Delgado. It is a mechanism that essentially involves two types of stakeholders.

The first type of stakeholder consists of boat owners. They are “small businesspeople” who have managed to accumulate some money, thanks to the business of selling fish. Most of them come from the coastal districts of Cabo Delgado, notably Macomia, Quissanga, Mocímboa da Praia, and Palma. There are also cases of boat owners from Tanzania. Each boat owner sets up his own labor recruitment network, which makes it possible for individual fishermen to come to the Cabo Delgado coast. According to our interviews, with the arrival of *Al-Shabaab*, these labor recruitment networks took on a new meaning, in the context of recruiting young men to the ranks of *Al-Shabaab*. One of the young fishermen who worked on the Cabo Delgado coast in recent years told us of his experience:

¹⁵ Interview with Rajabo Amade, Quissimajulu, 10 July 2020.

¹⁶ Interview with Amade Ali, Baixo Pinda, 7 July 2021.

I went to Cabo Delgado to work for a boss [boat owner] from Mocímboa da Praia. When the war began, I didn't know that my boss was working for *Al-Shabaab*. One day, he came to talk with us and said: "today we're going to have a visit . . . take advantage of it because you're going to have a lot of money." It turned out that the visit was by members of *Al-Shabaab*, who came to entice us with money to join their group.¹⁷

There were also cases when some members of *Al-Shabaab* were also "bosses" in that they owned fishing boats or were buyers of large amounts of fish for later sale in the cities of Pemba and Nampula or even in Tanzania. Speaking about the first moments of the insurgency on the Cabo Delgado coast, one of the fishermen explained:

In the first moments, *Al-Shabaab* came as bosses. They used to buy a lot of our fish, and they were paying well. They could pay, for example, 50,000—100,000 meticaís in one go. Many of them [*Al-Shabaab*] were educated people and they spoke a lot about the Koran . . . They used to tell people to go into the mosques wearing shoes on their feet . . . This was before the first attack against Mocímboa da Praia. After this attack, many young men were recruited to join *Al-Shabaab*. They were enticed with jobs, money . . . the youths were going to work (in fishing) and then they fell into the hands of *Al-Shabaab*.¹⁸

The second type of stakeholder in the informal mechanism that allows migration are individual fishermen, recruited locally. Consisting mostly of young men, these fishermen migrate to the coast of Cabo Delgado looking for job opportunities and work for the boat owners mentioned above. The journey from the Nampula coast to Cabo Delgado follows well defined routes along the coast, with stops at some islands. It is organized by the boat owners. One of the interviewees gave his experience of the journey in the following terms:

Normally, people receive information about the journey. The boat owners send notice saying that on day X, boat Y will leave for Cabo Delgado. The boat owner himself gives information about the journey. In the case of Memba, in general the boats leave from the zone of Metemane. When they leave from Metemane, they

¹⁷ Interview with Issufo Abudo, Baixo Pinda, 3 July 2021.

¹⁸ Interview with Nicolau Alberto, Baixo Pinda, 7 July 2021.

spend the night in Serisse in the Lúrio administrative post. The next day, the boat sets off towards Pemba and Ibo. It stops at Tanzua, in Quissanga District, and the next day the boat leaves for Pangane, Mucojo, in Macomia District. Then the boat travels on to the islands of Quiranhone, Dimbuzi, and Igungu, in Mocímboa da Praia, and Kifuque, in Palma District.¹⁹

Upon arrival, the fishermen find a network of solidarity formed by other migrants, who, in general, are from their own zones of origin. Thanks to these solidarity networks, they obtain financial resources to set themselves up in the places where they arrived before beginning their work commitment with their respective bosses who were at the origin of their journeys to Cabo Delgado. These solidarity networks also operate as an important factor for the social and economic integration of the fishermen in the places where they arrive.

The dynamics of external migration (on the frontier between Mozambique and Tanzania) and of internal migration (fishermen going from the Nampula coast to Cabo Delgado) described and analyzed above took on a new impulse in the context of the establishment and development of the jihadi insurgency in Northern Mozambique. They allowed the establishment of radical religious cells and the recruitment of youths to the ranks of *Al-Shabaab*. We discuss this in the following lines.

Radical Religious Cells and Recruitment to *Al-Shabaab* in Northern Mozambique

Before the first attack against Mocímboa da Praia in October 2017, there was already evidence of the existence of radical religious cells in some districts of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa. With the eruption of armed violence, these cells came to operate as important elements in recruitment to swell the ranks of the insurgents in Cabo Delgado. When one looks at the establishment of these cells, it is interesting to note the similarity between what happened in different districts of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa in terms of stages: first, the religious cells are established, and thereafter the military cells. Our interviews show that the religious cells were established by Tanzanian or Mozambican individuals who attended mosques of a Salafist tendency in Tanzania.

When these individuals arrived in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa, they first sought to penetrate the local mosques. Examples of this are the cases of Mocímboa da Praia and Macomia (Cabo Delgado Province) before 2017, the case of the Mutotope zone on the

¹⁹ Interview with Magid Sulemane, Baixo Pinda, 3 July 2021.

outskirts of Nampula city in 2017, or Memba in 2016 (Nampula Province), Mecula in 2017, and Lichinga in 2014/15 (Niassa Province). In all these cases, *Al-Shabaab* met with resistance from the local Muslim religious leaderships, whether from the Islamic Council of Mozambique (in the cases of Mocímboa da Praia, Lichinga, and Mutotope), or from the Islamic Congress (in the case of Mecula). Following this, they decided to build their own mosques, and, at the same time, some young men began to leave to join the group of insurgents in Cabo Delgado. The resistance from the religious leaderships was accompanied with denunciations to the local authorities. However, it is important to note that, unlike Cabo Delgado, the cells in Nampula and Niassa have been unable to militarize and launch large scale armed actions against state institutions and the civilian population. This difference may be related to at least two factors, namely: a) better coordinated action in Nampula and Niassa between the government authorities and the local Muslim religious leaderships in denouncing members of the group and, in some cases, neutralizing them; b) difficulties faced by the group in establishing logistics capable of unleashing and continuing armed attacks in Nampula and Niassa. Despite this, in the areas where the group has managed to establish radical religious cells, these cells have come to operate as important poles for recruiting young men in order for them to join the ranks of *Al-Shabaab* in the districts of Cabo Delgado. How does this recruitment take place? We shall deal with the matter in the following section.

Dynamics of Recruitment

Evidence on the ground suggests that the elements that comprise the *Al-Shabaab* group do not come solely from Cabo Delgado. Indeed, dynamics linked with the evolution of the violence have allowed *Al-Shabaab* to set up a vast and complex recruitment network, allowing it to include fighters not only from abroad, but also from various places inside Mozambique, notably from Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa, a fact which, to a large extent, denied the hypothesis of an “ethnic war.” Indeed, the conflict in Cabo Delgado cannot be seen as a war of Mwani people against Makonde people. In fact, the ranks of *Al-Shabaab* includes people from different ethnic groups, including Mwani, Makonde, and Makwa.

The growing literature on extremist movements of a jihadi nature (Hansen 2018; Sageman 2004; Neumann 2013; Schuurman 2019; Zenn 2014) converges in considering that recruitment is not uniform, in that there are differences in the way that recruitment occurs in the various jihadi groups. For example, Omenma, Hendricks, and Ajaebili (2020), in their

comparative work on *Boko Haram* and *Al-Shabaab* of Somalia, stress that the two groups prioritize different recruitment strategies, resulting from the political configuration of the countries in which they operate.

As for northern Mozambique, our interviews suggest that *Al-Shabaab* exploits local social, economic, political, and religious dynamics for purposes of recruitment, focusing its action on differing aspects, namely religious cleavages within Islam locally; ethnic divisions; taking advantage of the anti-State/Frelimo narrative; micro-credit schemes intended to stimulate small businesses of future recruits; and promises of jobs in Cabo Delgado in fishing (for the case of young men from the coastal districts of Nampula) and in mining and other types of activity (for the youths from Niassa districts). The anti-State/Frelimo narrative builds on the failure of government public policies mainly in the sectors of education, health, water, and sanitation. It is reinforced by social inequalities and the feeling of social, political, and economic exclusion, and is mobilized by *Al-Shabaab* in the context of jihadi insurgency in northern Mozambique.

In many cases, the incentives for recruits are based essentially on two aspects: high wages, believed to exist in Cabo Delgado; and the possibility of improving living conditions (for example, by building improved houses for the families of recruits in the urban centers of Nampula and Niassa from the money earned from supposed jobs in Cabo Delgado). In terms of the target group, recruitment is aimed essentially at young men, mostly living in conditions of great vulnerability, expressed in the absence of jobs and prospects, particularly in the coastal districts of Nampula (Angoche, Ilha de Moçambique, Mossuril, Nacala-a-Porto, Nacala-a-Velha, and Memba) and the Niassa districts bordering on Tanzania (Sanga) and Cabo Delgado (Mecula and Marrupa). Under these circumstances, *Al-Shabaab* has structured its recruitment discourse by manipulating factors that are not only religious but also involve opposition to the state. Our interviews show that the recruitment strategies used by *Al-Shabaab* in Northern Mozambique rest essentially on the dynamics of the local context, a fact which makes recruitment a contextually determined phenomenon.

Evidence from research on the conflict in Cabo Delgado suggests that the jihadi insurgency in Northern Mozambique is a part of global terrorism in that it makes use of a vast transnational jihadi network in terms of ideology and recruitment (Bonate 2022; Morier-Genoud 2020; Habibe, Forquilha, and Pereira, 2019). The claims from the Islamic State of authorship of the attacks in Cabo Delgado, from June 2019 onwards, reinforced the need to place Mozambican Al-Shabaab in a broader picture of jihadi surgencies in Africa and beyond. Indeed, when looking at the literature on violent jihadist movements in Africa and their

relationships with global terrorism, it can be concluded that the case of *Al-Shabaab* in Cabo Delgado is not an exception (Hansen 2018; Oyewole 2015; Forest and Giroux 2011). These are groups that result from local dynamics and, at a certain point in time, seek a connection with global terrorism by promising loyalty. However, as Hansen (2018) stresses, one should not lose sight of the relevance of the local dimension of these groups, in that it is the multiple local cleavages that allow insurgencies to develop.

Conclusion

The local dynamics of migration in northern Mozambique constitute an important entry point for the analysis and understanding of the establishment and development of the jihadi insurgency. In this article, based on extensive field work, we have tried to show that the advance of the insurgency has made use of the dynamics of external and internal migration, which have fed a vast network of *Al-Shabaab* recruitment, facilitated essentially by the porous nature of the border with Tanzania and by fishing activity on the islands off the coast of Cabo Delgado. The porosity of the border with Tanzania lies at the origin of a strong migratory movement associated with illegal mining. This movement has brought into Mozambican territory, on the one hand, individuals linked with Salafist circles particularly from Tanzania, Kenya, and Somalia, and, on the other, individuals from war zones (particularly from the Democratic Republic of Congo) with military experience and involved in international crime networks. For its part, the internal migratory movement of artisanal fishermen from the Nampula coast to Cabo Delgado has gained a fresh impetus in the context of the insurgency in northern Mozambique and has transformed into an important factor in recruitment to the ranks of *Al-Shabaab*.

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