Understanding the religiously motivated violence in Cabo Delgado, Northern Mozambique

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Abstract

Since October 2017, an Islamic insurgency has spread extreme suffering across the predominantly Muslim province of Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique. More than 2,000 people have been killed, hundreds of villages have been burned, farms have been destroyed, and nine municipalities have been controlled by Muslim extremists. The severe violence is the result of various factors in northern Mozambique and neighbouring Tanzania, including a wealth of natural resources, illicit trade, widespread government corruption, and the skill of the extremist movement in disseminating and promoting its ideology. This article examines the characteristics of the people of northern Mozambique, who is behind the killings, why they are doing it, and the impact on Christianity in the region.

Keywords Contemporary Christianity, persecuted Christians, religious extremists, al Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jamo/Ansar al-Sunna (ASWJ), Al-Shabaab, and Islamic State (IS).

Northern Mozambique has been severely impacted by Islamic extremist activity since October 2017. This article examines aspects of the "Mozambican Al Shabaab," the rise of a culture of fear, and its consequence for Christians in the region.

1. Background

1.1 The geography of northern Mozambique

The province of Cabo Delgado, with 2,320,000 inhabitants, is on the northern tip of Mozambique, bordering Tanzania, and the Indian Ocean (see Figure 1 for a description of the jihadist insurgent attacks). According to the *World Population Review* (2020:1), 56% of Mozambique's 31.26 million people are Christians and 17.9% are Muslims, but the north is predominantly Muslim. Perkins (2019:5) states, "Presently, the majority of Mozambique's Muslim community is located in northern provinces, with upward of 58 percent of Cabo Delgado following Islam."

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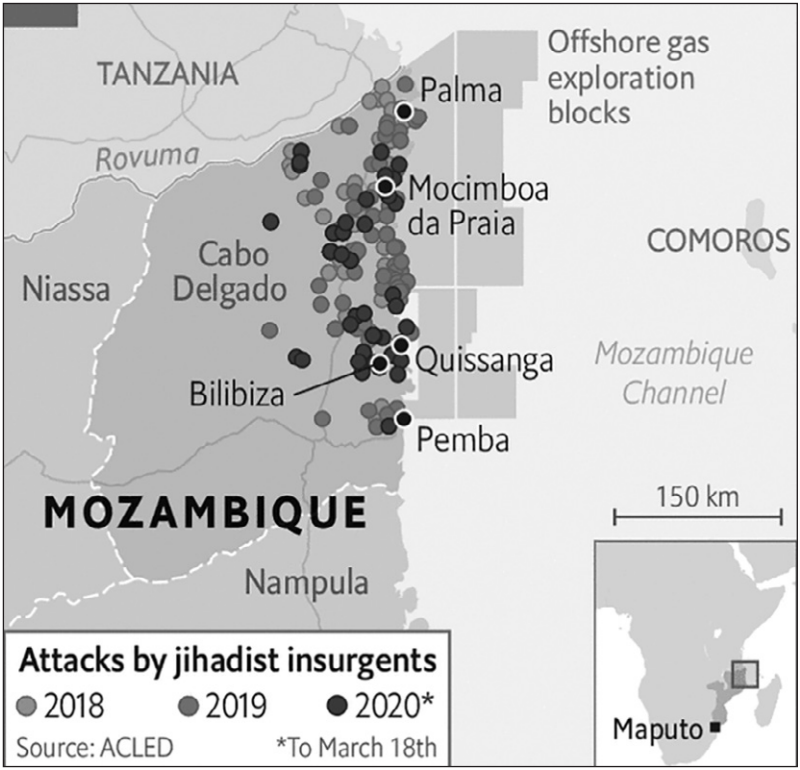

Figure 1. Illustration of terror activities in Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique, perpetrated by Islamic extremist groups such as the Al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ). Source: Boro (2020:1)

The three main tribes in Cabo Delgado are the Makonde, the Macua and the Mwani. The other tribal groups of Swahili ancestry, living mostly in the coastal areas, also tend to follow Islam (Afonso, 2011:4).

Figure 2 illustrates the terror activities in the area of Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique, perpetrated by Islamic extremist groups such as Al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ). According to West (2018:1), "Ansar al-Sunna [ASWJ] started as a religious organization in Cabo Delgado in 2015 … and only later became militarized. Its early members were followers of Aboud Rogo Mohammed, the radical Kenyan cleric who was shot dead in 2012." However, confusion has been present from the start because others, such as Habibe et al. (2019:10), have stated that although the initial group was called ASWJ, "The group is called Al-Shabaab [and sometimes even Mozambican Al-Shabaab] not only by local communities but also by its members." Indeed, in this situation confusion is quite widespread.

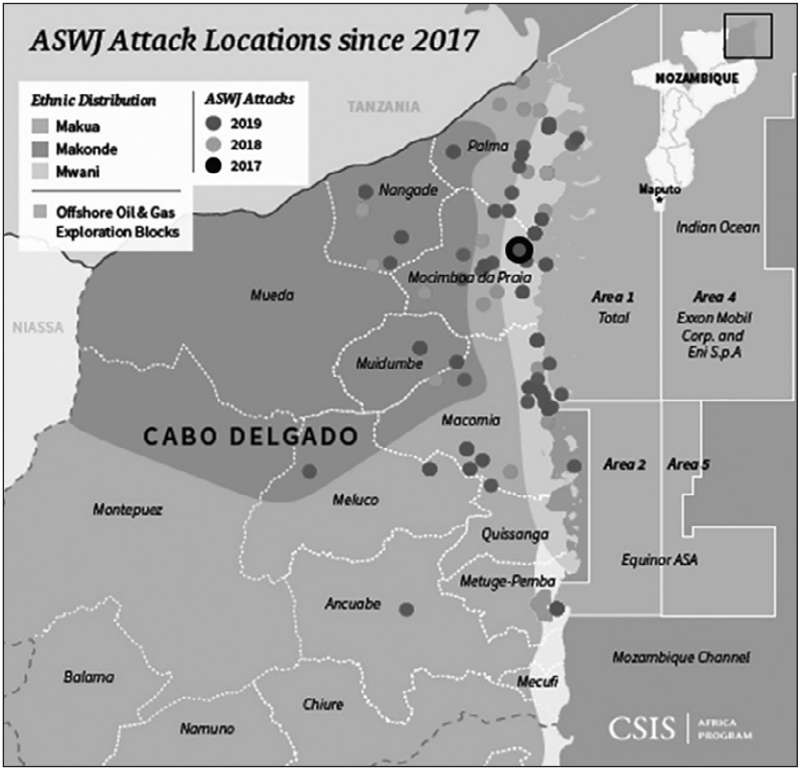

Figure 2. Location of the three main tribal groups in northern Mozambique. The map also identifies locations of attacks by the Al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ) Islamic extremist group. Source: Columbo (2019:5)

Despite pressure from the national government to suppress tribalism and regionalism, ethnicity still plays a significant role in social control in Cabo Delgado.

Three essential aspects of the region's background must be considered: the characteristics of the people of northern Mozambique, the illicit international trade routes, and the growing presence of Islamic extremists.

1.2 The bold people of northern Mozambique

Interpreting the violent crisis in Cabo Delgado requires a comprehensive understanding of the people living in the area and their tribal affiliations, which cross the border with Tanzania. The Berlin Conference (1884-1885) imposed boundaries in Africa by which the three main tribes discussed in this article were divided between northern Mozambique and southern Tanzania (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2011:1).

Colonial influence and international laws have pushed for a detribalization of the 83 ethnolinguistic Mozambican groups (Cardoso 2005:66). This trend has exacerbated hard feelings over the division of tribal groups through national borders determined by colonizers. Consequently, the people of Cabo Delgado have long been living in a sensitive region potentially aspiring towards independence (Funada-Classen 2012:170-171), one in which political violence can be easily triggered.

In describing the daring attributes of the African tribes responsible for the introduction of Islam into Mozambique, Cardoso (2005:66) stated that the Swahili population "is Islamised." According to Bonate (2010:574), there is archaeological evidence suggesting that since "the eighth century, … coastal northern Mozambique was part of the Swahili world, [sharing] Islamic religious conceptions and practices." Cardoso (2005:66) added that the Macua tribe has been Islamized for hundreds of years.

The Makonde tribe initiated the fight for Mozambican independence in 1961 (Funada-Classen 2012:221) and fiercely resisted the Portuguese presence (Regalia 2017:7). According to Funada-Classen (2012:222), since that time of resistance, the Makonde elders of the Mozambican counterpart have "had an extensive network and links with the Makonde in Tanganyika [Tanzania], and the bond was strong enough to be used for exchanging political information." The Makonde tribe tends to be Roman Catholic or practitioners of traditional religion (Cardoso 2005:66).

Based on the northern Mozambican coastal shores of the Indian Ocean, the Mwani have been described as a "clan of 'leopards' who live a long time." Most violent attacks have targeted the Mwani tribe's territory, which is located close to the maritime borderland from the Tanzanian border down to Pemba (Columbo 2019:5), even though they are also predominantly Muslim, which may suggest the presence of motives other than religion. In a 2020 interview, Bishop Germano Grachane, of the Diocese of Gurué in northern Mozambique, stated that some of the Mwani tend to adhere readily to extremist positions. The regions of the more powerful Makonde and Makua tribes have generally been less affected, although those regions are also being attacked in an area spanning up to 200 kilometres from the beaches inland (Columbo 2019:5).

1.3 Natural resources and illicit international trade routes that altered the social balance

The immense wealth of natural resources discovered in northern Mozambique's four provinces (Cabo Delgado, Niassa, Nampula and Zambezia) during the last two decades, combined with the existence of illicit international trade routes, has contributed further to traditional tribal and violent tendencies, altering the social

balance. Criminal lords control these natural resources and commercialize them by their various routes of illicit trade. These criminal lords have also established international networks that benefit from the deep-water ports and small airports in the region. Haysom (2018:6) explains, "Within this region, there are several organized criminal operations for the trafficking of ivory, rubies, timber, drugs and people, and … [several] other trades that create a dynamic criminal economy, operated by multiple criminal actors." The Niassa Game Reserve provides a location for game-related trafficking, particularly in ivory (Haysom 2018:10).

The economic situation is quite unstable, as no single group has strong territorial control (Haysom 2018:6). This illicit trade has "driven corruption" and "created both grievance and opportunity for the local community," conditions that have made the region ripe for extremist influence. Unfortunately, "The alleged members of this mafia … [have] their links to the ruling party and control of key port infrastructure" (Haysom (2018:7). Besides, the judicial system does not always fulfil its function; as Haysom (2018:7-8) asserts, "They have never been charged with trafficking or convicted as such. The nature of their relationship to the state we characterized as an elite pact."

Therefore, the natural resources discovered in Cabo Delgado have become a curse instead of a blessing to the local populations. For example, the *Mail and Guardian* (2018:1) states:

> Nearly a decade after rubies were first found in northern Mozambique; the discovery has proven a poisoned chalice, says traditional local ruler Cristiana Joaquim. Instead of riches and reward, what could have been a windfall has brought harassment, violence and even a local ban on farming.

Obviously, not all resources are easy to sell via illicit trading. However, according to Haysom (2018:10-11), many of these natural resources travel via illicit routes, involving migrants from various other African countries. "Some of these networks have strong ties with Southern Tanzania. At several points along the Tanzania-Mozambique border, traffickers … [can] find routes" (Haysom, 2018:11). Elephant poachers from Niassa travel to Tanzania and heroin is carried to South Africa and other places. Human trafficking also occurs.

Haysom (2018:12) explains that "Migrants fleeing from recruitment by Al-Shabaab [the Somali extremist group], famine and poverty" have settled in Cabo Delgado. However, others have established "networks, [which] also laid the basis for ex-fighters to establish links with local communities – particularly in Mocímboa da Praia and Palma" (Haysom, 2018:12). To add to the problem, "The profits have not translated into basic services or broad employment opportunities. … The state

has participated directly in the illicit economy. Northern Mozambique exhibits a classic compound set of factors that allow several problems to fester" (Haysom 2018:13-14).

The level of corruption amongst state employees at border posts is very high. Despite the apparently tight control, "Customs officers are allowing people to pass with such goods as guns, wildlife trophies, drugs and mineral resources, in exchange for bribes that amount to a decent income" (Haysom 2018:15). The proliferation of corruption has caused residents to question the legitimacy of the Mozambican authorities present on the ground (Funada-Classen 2012:30). Additionally, "Illicit trade [is] strongly socially and economically embedded in the north, and this makes it more difficult to disentangle them from the militant funding sources or shut them down entirely" (Haysom, 2018:21). As Haysom (2018:16) puts it, "This illicit economy has been facilitated by relationships between overtly corrupt (but never prosecuted) senior government figures and the businessmen making a killing from illicit trade." Even foreign companies exploit and abuse "local people, with the backing from the state" (Haysom, 2018:16). Consequently, the illicit international trade routes have encouraged the increasing presence of Islamist extremists, which is discussed next.

1.4 The growing presence of Islamic extremists in Cabo Delgado

The initial extremist group to be established in northern Mozambique was Al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ) with "its origins in Somalia since 1991" (Vuuren, 2020:1). According to Vuuren (2020:1):

> In Mozambique Al Sunna has been active militarily since October 2017, when they first attacked the town of Mocímboa da Praia, capital of the similarly named district within the Cabo Delgado province. However, research indicates that they may have been active in the Cabo Delgado province since at least 2015, albeit not under that name.

Habibe et al. (2020:11) state that the group "focussed its recruitment efforts both locally/nationally and abroad, notably Tanzania or the Great Lakes region." Since then, the movement "has slowly built a resilient and diverse economic base in Mozambique, recruiting young men … [and] providing them with capital to enter … both the illicit and licit economies" (Haysom 2018:16-17). The initial intentions of the extremist leaders were disguised; they "began to recruit young people into their mosques and madrassas (rather than an armed movement) with the offer of business loans" (Haysom 2018:17). These young people could then invest the money as they wished.

According to Haysom (2018:17), ASWJ's recruits had generally not attended school beyond eighth grade. "All of them owned small businesses selling miscellaneous commodities, such as rice, sugar, and mobile-phone credit. At the same time, some of them were involved in illicit businesses, such as illegal ruby mining, elephant poaching and the smuggling of the proceeds of wildlife and mineral-resources crime." Over time, these men all developed their businesses into international and interregional trade. When the call to arms came, recruits were required to sell the assets they had acquired, presumably to fund the attacks that began in October 2017. "In the week before the Mocímboa firefight, young men across the towns of Cabo Delgado sold their stock, stores and houses and left their home areas to travel to Mocímboa da Praia" (Haysom 2018:18).

There is apparently a link between the Mozambican Islamic extremists and the Al-Shabaab group in Tanzania (Haysom 2018:18). Al-Shabaab is seeking to control the entire region from Kenya to northern Mozambique (Haysom 2018:22). The movement is "referred to with a generic term – *waloke wa Kiislamu* (born-again Muslims)" (Haysom 2018:19), and its members have a strong hatred for Christians.

1.5 Who is behind the Islamic attacks in northern Mozambique? Al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ), Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State (IS)

The confusion of who really is driving the Islamic extremists' attacks in Cabo Delgado and beyond is enormous when some call them Al-Sunnah Wa-Jama (ASWJ), others label them as Mozambican Al-Shabaab, and recently the Islamic State (IS) has appeared in the terror scene. Columbo (2019:3) stated that on "June 4, 2019, IS claims presence in northern Mozambique following alleged attack on June 2."

As Fabricius (2020a:1) underscores, although ASWJ has been the first insurgent Islamic group to emerge in the attacks in Cabo Delgado, "ASWJ has taken no public 'credit' for the attacks, the Islamic State (IS) ostensibly has." The answers to the following questions are still a mystery:

> [IS] … has so far claimed responsibility for 27 of the attacks, according to some security analysts. This raises questions about how IS and ASWJ are related. Is ASWJ the local affiliate of IS? Is IS simply claiming credit to boost its public stature, especially since the loss of face caused by the fall of its caliphate in Syria and Iraq?" (Fabricius 2020a:1).

In addition, another name given to the perpetrators of the Islamic insurgents is the Mozambican Al-Shabaab, because of its apparent link to the Somali terrorist organization (Ali 2008:1). Opperman (2018:1) states, "On 11 October 2018, an

article published in *Shabada News* gave way to speculations that the Mozambican Al-Shabaab has officially associated the group with the current violence in Northern Mozambique, attributed to cells … referred to as 'Shabaab.'" Nevertheless, the Mozambican Al-Shabaab is different from other Islamic terrorist groups bearing the same name. As Opperman (2018:1) points out:

> Initial attacks in October 2017 introduced al Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jamo/Ansar al-Sunna as a group embedded in a geographical confined space seeking an alternative in religious custom and culture in Cabo Delgado. However, since the initial attacks, Shabaab cells remain blurred by the lack of a centrifugal ideology, structure, and leadership. An extremist ideology as a commonality between the cells cannot be discarded, but the lack of precise information implies that motivation for attacks remains speculative.

2. The extremists' activity in Cabo Delgado

Beginning in October 2017, there has been a "wave of violence in Cabo Delgado … attacks on villages have continued sporadically" (Mavhinga 2018:1). Approximately 1,100 people were killed in the first year of violence (Opperman 2018:3) and an estimated 150,000 Mozambicans have been displaced. However, according to a report by *Nlabu* (2020:1) as of the date of its publication on 27 November 2020, there were

> at least 424.000 individuals … displaced as of late September, a 17 percent increase from the previous month. Of the total displaced, over 144,000 are in areas that are hard to reach due to security concerns.

VOA-News (2018:1) commented, "Residents of the affected area suggest the attackers include people from east and central Africa and have often forced local communities to observe Sharia law."

Pabst (2018:2) explains, "Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama kicked off its campaign of violence with attacks on police stations and government buildings, but quickly moved on to attacking villages and churches." The government responded with what President Nyusi himself described as a "ruthless" campaign that has included hundreds of arrests. Consequently, Pabst (2018:2) believes that "The current situation sounds like the recipe for a long-term, low-level insurgency." Although the government has control over the villages and towns, terrorist attacks are perpetrated as "hit and run" (Pabst 2018:2), that is, attacking swiftly and immediately running away to hide in the forests or across the border into Tanzania.

Many of the extremist fighters entered Mozambique from Tanzania. *VOA-News* (2018:1) reported, "Police in Tanzania have arrested 104 militants it accused of

planning to set up bases in neighbouring Mozambique. … They say the suspects admitted they were going to Mozambique to join radical camps."

On both sides of the border between Mozambique and Tanzania, police have sought to control the violence. Kenyan weekly newspaper *The East African*'s correspondent in Mozambique Emídio reported in 2018, "Armed Tanzanians are seeking to establish a base in Mozambique, police said Friday, after the arrest of dozens of suspected militants from Tanzania in connection with deadly Islamist attacks across the border" (Josine 2018:1). According to Fabricius (2020a:1), "Senior Kenyan prosecutors and analysts have said there are jihadist links all the way from Somalia, through Kenya and Tanzania, to Mozambique."

As of late 2018, Mozambican authorities said they had arrested 470 suspected extremists, of whom 52 were Tanzanian (Opperman, 2018:3).

Figure 3. The police headquarters in Quassanga attacked and destroyed by Islamic insurgents on March 23, 2020. *Source:* Standard (2020:4).

The Mozambique government's response to the attacks was swift but not decisive. The government deployed armed forces including Russian military contractors in an attempt to maintain order. However, periodic violence continued unabated.

Then, in late March 2020, ASWJ achieved its greatest military success, overrunning the port town of Mocímboa da Praia. The attack was carried out by both land and sea. The attackers captured the town's military base, as was confirmed by a Mozambican police spokesperson (Fabricius 2020b:1; see Figure 3).

According to a report I received from a Christian missionary working in the region, the resulting devastation was terrible. Thousands fled for their lives, without anything other than their clothes. Hundreds of villages containing thousands of houses were burned to the ground, including the nearby *machambas* (small farming grounds) that provide food for the families.

The informant indicated that many people now prefer the risk of sleeping in the bush rather than going back to their homes. Alternatively, some agglomerate in the main towns such as Mocímboa da Praia, in homes that now have as many as 50 people living in them.

The local informant stated that the terrorists' tactic is to rapidly attack, spread terror, run away swiftly, and then return afterwards to make sure their plan worked out. Reportedly, they aim "to establish an Islamic caliphate based on Sharia Law" (Swart n.d.:11) in the resource-rich region of Cabo Delgado and southern Tanzania.

Furthermore, women, including church members, have been kidnapped and raped, according to Filho (2020:1). One of those abducted was Cacilda Elias Eugénio, wife of the senior pastor of the International Church in Mocímboa da Praia. In Namaluco, the Assemblies of God church was destroyed, and 109 houses of church members were also ruined. The killings have affected Christians from all denominations; however, the extremists' targets have been indiscriminate.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees' delegate in Cabo Delgado, Eduardo Burmeister (2020:1), indicated that 100,000 people had been displaced throughout the province due to the recent escalation of violence. Burmeister stated that as of the date of his report (7 February 2020), "In total, at least 28 attacks were carried out in the province since the beginning of the year. The attacks have now spread across nine out of the 16 districts in Cabo Delgado." Mira (2020:1) claimed a total of "156,400 people affected by loss of property or forced to abandon home and land in search of safe locations." However, as mentioned above, the number has climbed to 424,000 displaced people (*Nlabu,* 2020:1), or even to more than half a million according to information provided by one on-site source (who requested not to be identified) in personal conversation. A recent Portuguese news report by *SIC Notícias* (2020) states that the situation is out of control, there are abandoned corpses and many children walking around lost in the forests because their parents were killed.

According to a BBC News/Africa report on 9 November 2020, "Militant Islamists beheaded more than 50 in Mozambique. … The militants turned a football pitch in a village into an 'execution ground,' where they decapitated and chopped bodies" (Tembe 2020:1). The report indicated, "Up to 2,000 people have been killed and about 430,000 have been left homeless in the conflict in the mainly Muslim province. The militants are linked to the Islamic State (IS) group, giving it a foothold in southern Africa" (Tembe 2020:1).

Additionally, as the attacks spread towards southern districts of Cabo Delgado and came within 100 kilometres of the provincial capital, Pemba, thousands were fleeing to that city. The villages left behind in the face of the Islamic extremists' advances are now destroyed and abandoned. Most populations have no belongings and minimal provisions, including food, shelter, or personal identification documents.

In my function as deputy director of the World Evangelical Alliance's Religious Liberty Commission, I visited Pemba twice to meet with pastors in distress, on 1-6 August 2018 and 17-23 December 2019. The experience in Pemba was chaotic, with most hotels closed because the tourists who usually flock to the area due to its beautiful beaches and pleasant weather had stopped coming. Without tourists, the fishermen have few customers, as most local people have no resources to pay for fish as tourists do. Participants said that living conditions had worsened greatly due to the Islamic attacks, which had impeded business from flourishing. Just about two weeks before my visit in 2018, according to my local Christian missionary informant, the police had closed one mosque in Pemba after finding an arsenal of AK-47s, ammunition and other types of weapons there.

Even though the ASWJ extremists appear not to be specifically targeting Christians, many of those killed or displaced have been Christian. One participant showed a video from 24 June 2018, depicting ten young men who had been beheaded while leaving their Church Service (International Institute for Religious Freedom 2020:1).

In a seminar that I conducted in Pemba on 5 August 2018, several pastors spoke of how their members had been affected by the violence and killings. Surprisingly, all of them displayed the courage to continue their evangelistic work and plant new churches. They said, "If we die, we die for Christ." A local church member who had visited the town of Palma said that although there Christians experienced fear immediately after the attacks, many have returned to rebuild their homes. She and other informants said that Christians in general were engaging in fervent prayer and were encouraged to speak out about their faith in Jesus and establish new churches under the trees.

3. Factors contributing to the crisis

3.1 Wahhabism and its link to the militancy in Mozambique

Blanchard (2008:1) defines Wahhabism as "a puritanical form of Sunni Islam … practiced in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, although it is much less rigidly enforced in the latter." "The word 'Wahhabi' is derived from the name of a Muslim scholar, Muhammad bin Abd al Wahhab, who lived in the Arabian Peninsula during the eighteenth century (1703-1791)" (Blanchard 2008:2). In present days "the term 'Wahhabism' is broadly applied outside of the Arabian Peninsula to refer to a Sunni Islamic movement that seeks to purify Islam" (Blanchard 2008:1).

The arrival and spread of Wahhabism in Mozambique represent the most recent of several historical transformations of Islam in this country (Perkins 2019:5). Wahhabism has been present in Mozambique since the 1960s. Bonate (2007:56) states that Wahhabism "began emerging in the 1960s [in Maputo]"

but was not accepted by the local chiefs in Northern Mozambique. However, in response to a 1976 government decree that outlawed associations, including religious entities, the Wahhabi group initiated a process to counter the government move (Bonate 2007:57). In a meeting held in the Anuaril Isslamo mosque in Maputo on 23 December 1978 and led by Abubacar Ismael Mangira, a decision was reached to create the *Conselho Islâmico de Moçambique* (Islamic Council of Mozambique) (Bonate 2007:57). In addition, Mozambican Muslims remained divided as many Muslim associations affiliated with a new organization, the Congresso Islâmico de Moçambique (Islamic Congress of Mozambique) (Bonate 2007:57). Despite the two competing Islamic organizations' efforts to unify Islam in Mozambique,

> the Northern Mozambican Muslim leadership, perceived as both "un-modern" and either completely African "traditionalist" or following an Islam which had "syncretized" with these "traditions," were not able to play any significant roles in the official Islamic public sphere or be considered as unequivocally and legitimately "Islamic" (Bonate 2007:57).

3.2 Stigmatization

The response to the attacks by Mozambique's armed forces and police has included widespread stigmatization of Muslims. According to Opperman (2018:1), the armed forces were "regularly targeting and harassing Muslim members" and as a result "Muslims have expressed concern about unwarranted prosecution in Cabo Delgado." Trust in police enforcement is low, and "finger pointing and fear within communities inevitably lead to increased aggressive behaviour" (Opperman 2018:1).

When dealing with the situation, the Mozambican police frequently base their actions on religion, family connections and nationality rather than on facts that could help them gain convictions in criminal prosecutions. In this unpredictable context, local citizens can be expected to have little trust in outsiders, whether they are criminal culprits or representatives of humanitarian organizations (Opperman 2018:2).

3.3 Rumours and lack of reliable news

The local populations are reacting in panic (Opperman 2018:2). They do not comprehend the developments taking place around them. The fluidity of the situation is such that the people are unable to plan rational responses and instead act in unpredictable, diverse ways.

One reason for this attitude is the lack of reliable local information. Opperman (2018:2) commented:

> A lack of verified and detailed information on Cabo Delgado is a result of the security sector releasing blurred statements coupled with media outlets lacking access and resources. … [The lack of detailed information] results in the proliferation of unverified or fake information which [tends] to inflate attacks, beheadings, and casualties.

Strangely, national, and international news agencies have been almost silent about the killings in northern Mozambique. National legislation may be partly responsible for this silence. The Mozambican Decree No 40/2018 of 23 July 2018 includes a statement that this law

> establishes the legal framework for fees to be charged for registration, licensing, renewals, endorsements, advertising inserts by the print, radio and television media, including digital platforms, as well as for accreditation and accreditation of journalists and national correspondents, foreigners and autonomous collaborators, in the Republic of Mozambique.

This new legislation has made media activity in the region extremely difficult and expensive, "resulting in reporting being [overly] controlled, and not necessarily a shared and survival stream to those who need it the most: the people of Cabo Delgado"; moreover, the minimal media coverage has contributed to "the lukewarm response to the crisis by the regional and international community" (Opperman 2018:2).

3.4 Radicalization of local Muslims

Both Al-Shabaab's influence and negative reactions to broad-brush enforcement tactics and unwarranted use of force are creating an ever-growing schism between the local population – or at least its Muslim component – and the Mozambican government. Opperman (2018:3) states:

> Excessive use of force could lead to the affected families joining cell structures, refraining from sharing information on cell presence and planned attacks or food and shelter to cell members. Sheikh Saide Habibe, quoted in the *Mail and Guardian*, warned that "These young people begin to feel marginalised and seek to gain space, but … traditional leaders occupy this space, and they find in Al-Shabaab an opportunity to be realised."

Opperman concludes that the extremist organization has "adapted to the new security plans so that it has influence today in northern Mozambique. It benefits from the discontent of the people and the injustice of governments."

Mark Pabst (2018:2) agrees with this assessment, stating that the "attacks appear to have some sympathy, if not outright support, from a portion of the local population" and that "the government's heavy-handed response could even increase sympathy for the militants among certain groups." Amongst the Muslim population, there is an increasing preference for sharia law, "something unlikely to be popular in a religiously diverse province like Cabo Delgado" (Pabst 2018:2).

3.5 Oil and gas reserves

Pabst (2018:2), a senior correspondent for *Oil Security* magazine, stated that "The country's newfound gas wealth has the potential to either improve the situation or make it worse." He explains, "Mozambique is poised to become the next big thing in liquefied natural gas. If it fails to settle its security situation in the Cabo Delgado Province, it could also become the next big thing in African insurgencies" (Pabst 2018:1). Opperman (2018:3) noted that "the Mozambican Government does not want much international focus on the current instability, for fear of scaring off potential investors."

4. Conclusion

Since ancient times, tribes inhabiting the northern region of Mozambique have been relatively independent in thought and action, with a tendency to embrace dark witchcraft involving supernatural powers. However, they have accommodated other religions such as Islam and Christianity. The wealth of natural resources and the availability of illicit trade routes have attracted Islamic extremists to the region. These extremists have perpetrated violence against Christians and also against Muslims who do not support their terrorist activities.

There appear to be two main reasons for the killings and violence in northern Mozambique. The first is the opportunity to acquire easy wealth to fund the extremists' operations; the second is to gain increasing control over the entire area, with the eventual goal of imposing sharia law in the region. The extremist activity has had a severe negative impact on Christianity in the region; however, Christians persevere in their worship and Christian service.

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