



João Feijó

## Social Asymmetries

Clues to Understand the Spread of  
Islamist Jihadism in Cabo Delgado





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Islamist Jihadism in Cabo Delgado**

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## INTRODUCTION

Since late 2017, Cabo Delgado province in the extreme North of Mozambique has become a stage of violent armed conflict. While in the first months the conflict was confined to coastal areas - mostly Islamic and characterised by a long history of exclusion - the following years saw a greater capacity to penetrate to the interior and South. From 2020, with the attack and occupation of four district offices and the threat to the provincial capital Pemba, the conflict has received more attention from the international media.

In an attempt to explain the conflict, several hypotheses have emerged. Focusing on the internal aspects of the conflict, poverty and frustration of social expectations related to the exploitation of natural resources were considered, especially among local youth, consolidating an extractivist economy, unrelated to the local economic fabric and little generating employment. On the other hand, the historical ethnolinguistic conflicts in the region were highlighted, especially between the coastal and inland peoples. Other approaches emphasized the international dimensions of the conflict, namely the relationship with terrorist cells in East Africa; or the confluence of various economic interests in the Mozambique Channel, related not only to the control of an energy corridor, but also to illegal drug, timber and ivory routes.

In this contribution to the Security Series João Feijó reflects on the internal aspects that are at the root of the military tensions in the Northeast of Cabo Delgado, related to phenomena of poverty and socio-economic asymmetry, but also to the reconfiguration of power relations between ethnolinguistic groups.

He argues that the study shows that there is widespread poverty in Cabo Delgado province, across all ethnolinguistic groups, despite slightly better housing conditions and access to certain consumer goods in urban centers and the Maconde plateau.

The arrival in power of a Maconde President coincided with a greater affirmation of the State in the control of natural resources (namely precious stones, but also timber and ivory) interrupting local economic circuits. The situation reinforced speeches of victimisation and denunciation of the State's capture process by specific ethnic groups. This situation has reemerged historical resentments of the coastal populations, skilfully capitalised on by radical Islamic groups, who have found there an important social base of support. However, the high social differentiation that exists between Maconde society itself, the presence of young Macondes among insurgent groups and the extension of their action to areas of the high plateau obliges us to express our reservations about the importance of ethnicity in explaining conflicts.

Widely disintegrated from the rest of the national territory, for decades, the extreme North of Mozambique registered low levels of public investment, high rates of poverty and illiteracy. However, as of the new millennium, Cabo Delgado has received greater attention due to the growing interest in natural resources, namely timber and ivory, precious stones and, more recently, natural gas. Capital-intensive investment does not generate employment and has few links with the local economic fabric. The few opportunities for skilled employment are mostly absorbed from

outside, so investments have little impact on reducing local poverty, generating inequalities and land conflicts.

From the end of 2017, the Northeast of the province became a stage of violent conflict. A group of armed insurgents, mainly composed of local youths, with links to Tanzania and Kenya, unleashed a series of attacks in areas of the coast with a higher Islamic concentration. In the following years, the conflict became more violent, spreading to the South and interior of the province. At the May 2020 Summit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) the Mozambican President admitted the seriousness of the problem by using, for the first time, the concept of 'terrorism' for the attacks in Cabo Delgado.

If the thesis of external aggression by radical Islamic groups has gained strength within the government, as well as economic groups associated with the security industry, other approaches have emphasized the socio-economic contradictions that exist in the province,

marked by poverty, inequality and contradictions between rival ethnic groups. The reconfigurations of power relations in the province will have led to feelings of (self)exclusion, skilfully capitalised on by local and national leaders.

This article intends to reflect around the level of poverty and inequality existing among the various ethno-linguistic groups of the province, trying to gauge the extent to which they may be at the root of the current conflict. In this sense, 94 individuals were interviewed in the districts of Palma, Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia, Muidumbe and Montepuez (macuas, macondes, muânis and mácués), trying to understand what representations they build on the different ethno-linguistic groups in the province, in terms of access to business, employment and income, as well as State support. Throughout the text, an attempt is made to understand the socio-economic factors that can lead to the adherence (direct or indirect) of local populations to violent groups.

## ETHNOLINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND POWER

The concept of ethnicity is generally used to define groups with common linguistic characteristics, sharing the same religious beliefs, shared history, and common customs. However, the concept of ethnicity is much more complex for several reasons. Firstly, because of migratory experiences, intercultural contacts and marriages, these cultural characteristics have historically been changing, increasing diversity within groups themselves. Far from assuming an essentialist dimension, identities are often complex and contradictory, including elements from different cultures.

On the other hand, ethnic identities are strategic concepts, self-presented by individuals according to the advantages they hope to obtain, but also politically manipulated according to the disputes of interests of the different ruling elites. This is why ethnic identities are, above all, constructed in opposition to another, generally understood as a threat, especially in periods of greater competition for access to resources of power. Awareness of belonging to the same group is not a natural but socially constructed aspect, (re)transformed over time by specific political-economic dynamics, often manipulated by competing elites.

### Main ethnolinguistic groups of Cabo Delgado

Despite the existence of numerous ethnolinguistic groups, Cabo Delgado province is generally associated with the presence of three majority groups, namely *macuas*, *macondes* and *muanis*. *Emakhuwa* is the mother tongue of 67.1% of the province's population (in the 2007 census), and this ethnolinguistic group is the largest in

Cabo Delgado<sup>1</sup>. Comprising numerous subgroups, the large Macua-Lomué group predominates in Northern Zambezia, Nampula province, Central and Southern Cabo Delgado and Eastern Niassa. It is a heterogeneous group, mostly associated with the Islamic religion in the coastal areas, but with strong Christian penetration in the hinterland. The Macua group is traditionally associated with the matrilineal lineage, although it has undergone profound changes in recent periods (Osório, 2006; Casimiro, 2008).

Secondly, *Shimakonde* appeared in the 2007 census as the mother tongue of 20% of the population of Cabo Delgado, concentrated on the Mueda plateau (extending through south-eastern Tanzania), and with a notable presence on the northern coast of Cabo Delgado, and in centres of military presence such as Montepuez, Pemba, Nampula or Maputo. This is a mostly Christian group (even though, through mixed marriages, there are Maconde women converted to Islam, particularly on the coast), whose main economic activity is agriculture, complemented by livestock.

Thirdly, and representing 5.9% of the province's population, the Mwani (kimuani speaking) group that predominates along the Cabo Delgado coast north of Pemba, from the Ibo to the Rovuma river, as well as on the various islands of the Quirimbas archipelago. Mostly Islamic, it is a group strongly dedicated to fishing (which combines with small subsistence food agriculture), as well as commercial activities.

The 2007 census referred to Portuguese as the mother tongue of 3.4% of the population. Kiswahili emerges as the mother tongue of 1.1% of those surveyed, being a group strongly

<sup>1</sup> We refer to the population who, in the census, presented Emakhuwa as their mother tongue

composed of Tanzanian citizens, concentrated on the Maconde plateau and the Northern coast of Cabo Delgado. Although not mentioned in the census, in Palma, Quionga and along the Rovuma river the ethnolinguistic Makwe group still stands out, with an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 individuals appearing in 1993. Mostly Islamic, all men appear to speak Kiswahili, and most women understand it. Most also speak Shimakonde (Garcia (2005: 68).

**To avoid essentialist conclusions, four aspects should be highlighted:**

1. these language groups have local variations, more or less understood among themselves, but are generally grouped in the same language family.
2. the use of a mother tongue and identification with its ethnolinguistic group do not invalidate the fact that a large part of the population speaks other languages, such language skills being a factor in socio-economic integration in intercultural settings.
3. multiple migratory movements - spontaneous or forced (during slavery and compulsory labour regime, the formation of colonial settlements and communal villages, experiments in re-education camps or in Production Operation) - and inter-group marriages tended to complex identity belonging, although they continued to be exacerbated in contexts of greater competition for access to scarce power resources.
4. the existence of ethnolinguistic specificities does not invalidate the existence of great economic and cultural diversity within each of these groups. For example, while it is true that Islam represents an important aspect in the formation of the identities of coastal pop-

ulations, the emergence of different currents of Islam, resulting from internal disputes for power (Bonate, 2007), does not cease to generate discourses of alterity within the respective groups. In the same way, the Maconde population constituted a fragmented group, in political or socio-economic terms, with distinctions being made between the Makonde of the plateau or from the plain or between clans.

For these reasons, the ethnolinguistic groups in question should not be understood in a watertight way, but in a dynamic way, in constant transformation, full of miscegenation's or crossbreeding's, with often contradictory traits, as is characteristic of any identity.

## Reconfiguration of power relations in Cabo Delgado

Over the last two centuries, Cabo Delgado province has seen a number of political and economic transformations, which have translated into reconfigurations of power relations in the region.

### a. Colonial era

During colonial era, the increased need for labour for plantations on the Indian islands has led to profound changes in northern Mozambique. The demand for labour has triggered an increase in the slave trade, with caravans forming to capture adult men and women, particularly in the inland areas. The Swahili populations of the coast found in the slave trade (particularly with the outside, namely with Arabs and Portuguese) a lucrative business opportunity, combined with navigation, fishing and some agriculture and handicraft (Capela e Medeiros, 1987: 112). The dominance of Swahili, used on the coast as a lingua franca

(Rocha, 1999: 32; Liesegang, 1999 37-38), was an important economic advantage for the coastal peoples in their trade relations with the Indian Ocean.

The intensification of slave captures generated broad migratory movements, during which several populations of the Rovuma basin took refuge in the Maconde plateau, where they established independent and fortified settlements, with low population concentration (Dias, 1964: 59-61). In the plateau, dispersed groups carried out attacks to capture slaves and later commercialization, and to obtain weapons and gunpowder, for protection and increase of power (Dias, 1964: 79; West, 2004: 26-27). In the late 1950s, Jorge Dias (1964: 79) noted that the Macondes looked down on the Macuas, *“as a people they never feared and which served as pasture for their raids and incursions to catch slaves”*, women and prestige. In this process, the group became known for their aggressiveness, becoming disparagingly called Mavia, meaning a nervous or violent person, particularly when provoked (Dias, 1964: 65; West, 2004: 25; Israel, 2006: 116).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the discovery of gold in Transvaal and the transfer of the administrative capital to Lourenço Marques, much of the public investment started to be concentrated in the extreme South of Mozambique, leading to the stagnation or decay of socio-economic groups in the Centre and North of the colony. The establishment of the colonial administration diminished the political power of the afro-Islamic leadership, and some were transformed into agents of colonization (Rocha, 1999: 30).

Since the 1940s, the implementation of colonial economic projects has had a profound impact on the populations of Northern Mozambique.

The construction of administrative headquarters, roads, railways and rail and port cities was only possible at the cost of compulsory labour practices (*chibalo*), which involved tens of thousands of Africans. At the same time, compulsory cotton crops were imposed, with profound socio-economic implications for local populations (Isaacman, 1992 and Hedges, 1999). These phenomena triggered migratory movements to Tanganyika, facilitated by ethnolinguistic proximity and better working conditions in English farms, as well as access to consumer goods (Dias, 1964). In the neighbouring country the populations had contact with the independence movement of Julius Nyerere and in the diaspora a group of macondes formed MANU, with the aim of improving the conditions of the residents of Cabo Delgado (Hedges, 1999: 249).

The implementation of the concordat between the Portuguese State and the Catholic Church, the imposition of Catholicism in official education and the proliferation of catholic missions in rural areas and the mistrust of Islam have triggered feelings of discrimination among Muslim populations. The historical pre-colonial relations of Islamic populations with other regions of the Indian Ocean made them aware of the political changes in the region. For this reason, Islamic leaders in northern Mozambique (essentially macuas and muanis) were viewed with clear distrust by colonial authorities. Tanzania’s independence process doubled the Portuguese secret service’s attention to Islamic religious leaders, with close contact with the neighbouring country, as well as to the proliferation of mosques and madrasahs, which made the population potentially exposed to independentist ideals (Alpers, 1999: 171). Colonial administrators imposed limitations on the creation of madrasahs or Islamic education, ordered the closure of mosques or the burning of Islamic symbols, among other arbitrary acts (Macagno, 2006: 186). Several Islamic leaders ended

up arrested by the Portuguese political police PIDE and imprisoned in prisons in Pemba or Ibo, where some ended up dying (Alpers, 1999: 175; Macagno, 2006: 184). Institutional discrimination against Muslims became evident at the level of official education, where Islam was disparaged. Alongside Protestantism, communism and African nationalism, Islamism was seen as one of the threats to the Portuguese presence in Africa (Alpers, 1999: 163).

The imposition of circulation passes “*guias de marcha*” or compulsory work on Fridays, preventing people from going to mosques and interrupting secular traditions, generated discontent among Islamic populations, leading many individuals to join the independence movements that emerged in exile (Macagno, 2006: 183-187; Bonate, 2013: 59). However, although there was an important support base of Muslim macuas living in Zanzibar, many showed resistance to joining the MANU, considered as a group mainly of macondes and Catholics (Macagno, 2006: 191; Bonate, 2013: 61). Within the independence groups (MANU and later FRELIMO), Islam represented a polarizing element of divergence, with no lack of criticism of the leaders of FRELIMO, considered to be assimilated, from the South, Christians and with an anti-Islamic attitude (Cahen, 2000). The great concern of many macuas refugees in Zanzibar was that independence would mean the exercise of their Muslimity (Macagno, 2006: 192).

The foundation of FRELIMO and the beginning of the liberation struggle triggered colonial strategies of *rapprochement* and *cooptation* of Islamic leaderships, seeking to integrate them into an idea of a multiracial and multireligious Portuguese nation, in an attempt to avoid their support for the liberation movement.

In order to prevent contact between the Macua population and Frelimo, several colonial villages

were formed South of the Messalo river, where an important part of the Macua population was concentrated, exposing it to colonial propaganda. In this context, a large part of Frelimo’s actions was concentrated in the Makonde plateau, taking advantage of its proximity to Tanzania, the Makonde people’s warrior tradition and their familiarity with the ideals of independence and freedom from the neighbouring country.

#### **b. From post-independence up today**

The massive involvement of the Maconde population with FRELIMO has made this ethnolinguistic group one of the great beneficiaries of the national liberation struggle. This collective experience has profoundly transformed the maconde society, at the level of the unification of different subgroups and the formation of a national consciousness (under the leadership of FRELIMO); at the level of its patterns of residence (from separate and dispersed settlements to modernist projects in communal villages); and at the level of increased opportunities for education, military training and internationalization, opening the horizons of individuals (Israel, 2006: 117). From a group confined to the plateau or refugee in Tanzania, with national independence, the macondes emerge in the hierarchy of power, prestige and political and social recognition, both socio-geographical (occupying noble and military districts in the country’s major cities) and economic (gaining access to important positions in the defense and security sectors). In cultural terms, we saw the valorisation of their sculptures and masks, highlighted as symbols of anti-colonial struggle, as well as the maintenance of their initiation rites, despite the official discourse of condemnation of what was called *tribalism* or *obscurantism*.

During the revolutionary enthusiasm, anti-religious discourses and practices proliferated

which energised narratives about Frelimo's negative relationship with the Catholic Church (which played an important role in supporting the colonial regime), but also with Muslims. The resentment of the populations towards anti-religious policies was skilfully capitalised on by Renamo, which sought to build a social base of support, including among Islamic groups. Following the intensification of the military conflict with Renamo, and as part of a new diplomatic policy of good coexistence in the early 1980s, the government came closer to the various religious organizations. In this process, Abubacar Ismail Mashirá, president of the recently formed Islamic Council of Mozambique, with a unifying and politically controlling concern for the Muslim populations, presented to Samora his difficulties in relations with the brotherhoods in the North of Mozambique, as a result of the tolerance they enjoyed during the colonial government. Skilfully adapting his discourse to Frelimo's<sup>2</sup> unifying and nationalistic strategies, Abubacar ensured more favourable conditions for the teaching of Islam in Mozambique (ensuring better conditions for young Mozambicans to study in Arab countries, obtaining visas for foreign teachers or building mosques) while strengthening the power of the Islamic Council of Mozambique in a context of religious divisions (Macagno, 2006: 218).

In this scenario, there is a process of political re-composition within the Islamic communities of Mozambique, where the brotherhoods of the North and their traditional chiefs have lost legitimacy in relation to the new urban leaderships, which are now presented as in the vanguard of the Islamic community in Mozambique (Macagno, 2006: 221; Bonate, 2007: 143), forming an alliance between the State and the Muslim leaders of urban groups in the country.

The reality is that Islam has been a disputed space for political actors in confrontation. During the

16-year war, the attacks in the lowlands of the southeast Plateau were mainly carried out by Macua individuals from Renamo, coming from the South of the province, generating violent retaliation by maconde militias (Adam, 1993: 69; Israel, 2006: 108-109). Similarly, the results of the general elections from 1994 to 2009 show a persistent, though decreasing, support from the populations of the Northern coast of Mozambique (mostly Mwani and precisely where the main brotherhoods are located) to Renamo. Although Frelimo has increased the percentage of votes in the coastal areas, the reality is that the good election results of the opposition in administrative posts such as Olumbi, and Palma Sede and Quionga (Palma district); Mbau (Mocímboa da Praia district), Muchojo (Macomia district), Bilibiza, Mahate and Quissanga Sede (Quissanga district) contrast with the resounding victories of Frelimo in the maconde plateau, mostly catholic, namely in the districts of Mueda, Muidumbe and Nangade.

In reality, the electoral periods are moments of tension between macondes and muanis, with the district of Muidumbe, mostly Maconde, famous for acts of violence committed against Renamo supporters (Israel, 2006: 108-110), with reports of expulsion of mwanis populations from the lower areas of the district. In September 2005, the town of Mocímboa da Praia was the scene of violent demonstrations, resulting in at least 12 deaths and 30 arrests, all of which were supporters of Renamo (Mbanze, 20.11.2006). Interviews, conducted by Habibe et al. (2019) to young muanis, reveal feelings of exclusion from power resources (jobs, income, and subsidies)

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**2** In his meeting with the President of Mozambique and adopting a Samorian language, Abubacar Ismail Mashirá quoted the prophet Mohammed, according to whom "to love the homeland is part of the belief", thus gaining the confidence of Samora Machel.

that limit their possibilities of consumption and social reproduction, to the benefit of the maconde populations.

In October 2019, during the campaign for the VI presidential elections, dressed in a turban and cofió, in a 4x4 vehicle, Ossufo Momade the Renamo candidate was followed by an *“army of young people, adults and children”* who sang, in the local language, *“Frelimo is the one who brought the Al-Shabab”*. Another chorus, *“which lasted about thirty minutes as they walked along the streets of the village [of Mocímboa da Praia] and with Ossufo Momade waving,”* was the following: *“Don’t be fooled, Frelimo is the one cutting throat and testicles to sell abroad”* (Mozambique Channel, 09.10.2019: 2). This episode triggered the return of the candidate Filipe Nyusi to Mocímboa da Praia, where he organized a rally in reaction to the previous one. These two episodes reveal the overlaps of political issues on local ethnolinguistic tensions.

While it is true that the extensive involvement of the macondes with Frelimo and the resulting socio-political benefits have resulted in the incorporation of loyalty to the party into the very identity of a generation of macondes (Israel, 2006: 123), there are new positions among the younger in relation to the ruling party. Faced with the contrast between a mythical Frelimo and the countless daily difficulties, many young people today openly express their dissatisfaction with the lack of employment opportunities or access to education, as well as deficiencies in the health system. In Muidumbe, during the 2019 elections, youth caravans were observed wearing Renamo or MDM T-shirts (a scenario unthinkable in previous elections), despite threats to their families to suspend the pension of a former combatant.

## SOCIO-SPATIAL AND ETHNO-LINGUISTIC INEQUALITIES

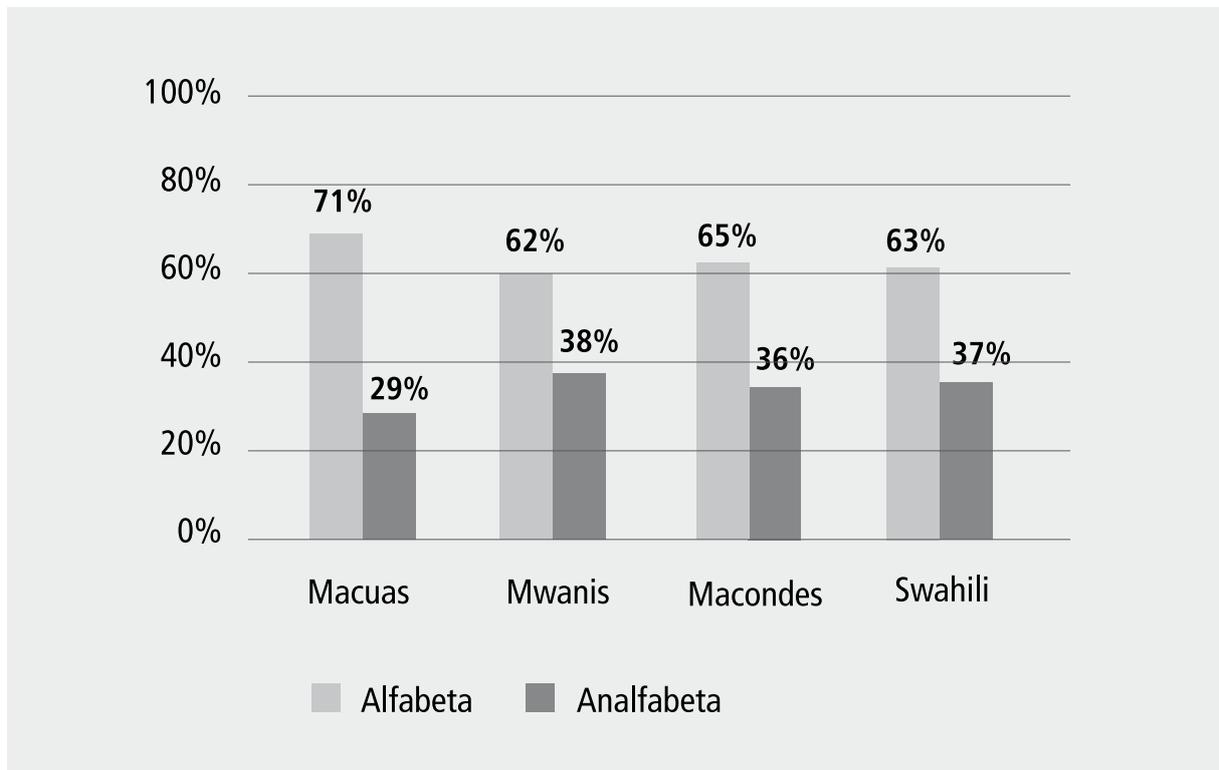
A widely shared representation in Northern Mozambique, especially among the mwani population (Bonatte, 2002, Santos, 2010), relates to the existence of different ethnolinguistic opportunities for access to wealth, which take the form of ethnic inequalities and challenge the socio-political integration of the territory or the construction of a national identity. The data from the 2017 Census provide us with information on a set of development and well-being indicators - such as access to education, housing conditions, energy, financial inclusion, or consumer goods - both in geographical and ethnolinguistic terms.

### Disparities in access to education

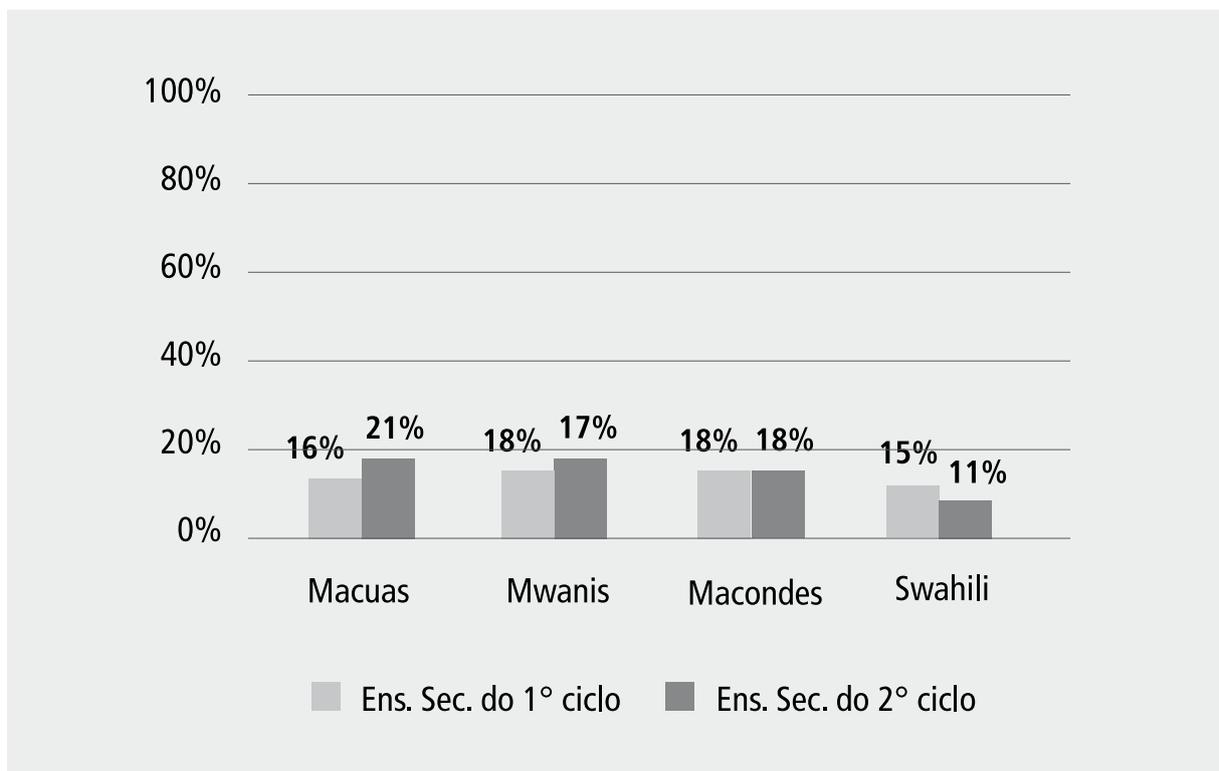
Like the entire Northern region of Mozambique, Cabo Delgado province contrasts with the south of the country for its higher illiteracy rate. Within the province there is a greater homogeneity, although the most integrated areas in urban areas (around the municipalities of Montepuez, Mueda and Mocímboa da Praia), where illiteracy rates are less than 40%, contrast with the Southwest region of the province or the district of Palma, where illiteracy rates exceed 70%.

Analysing access to education by ethnolinguistic group, no significant differences can be observed. The percentage of literate population is higher between macuas (71%) and macondes (65%) and slightly lower between Swahilis (63%) and muanis (62%) but does not show major differences. The homogeneity is also striking when we compare the population that completed secondary education by ethnolinguistic group, with no relevant variations between macuas (21%), macondes (18%) and muanis (17%).

**Chart 1: Illiteracy rate by ethnolinguistic group (2017)**



**Chart 2: Share of population completing secondary education by ethnolinguistic group (2017)**



## Disparities in housing condition

In terms of housing conditions, no significant socio-geographical asymmetries were found, particularly in terms of sanitation, construction materials used or access to energy. In fact, the results reveal significant problems of access to sanitation throughout the province, with more than 70% of the population (especially in areas far from urban centres) have no latrine or have unimproved latrine. This is a reality that affects all ethnolinguistic groups, with greater emphasis on the population with Swahili as their mother tongue (73%), followed by maconde (63%), muani (62%) and macua (53%).

In terms of materials used for roofing (an important indicator used), there is a contrast between certain areas of the maconde plateau, as well as urban areas (Mocímboa da Praia, Ibo, Pemba and Montepuez), with the South of the province and some coastal areas. However, an analysis based on the respondents' mother tongue relativises any direct relationship between the ethnolinguistic group and housing characteristics: 70% of the macuas have conventional material coverage of the house, against only 62% of the macondes and 55% of the mwanis. The results reveal strong inequalities between the ethnolinguistic groups themselves, according to lineages, ease of access to natural resources (land, schooling levels, among other factors).

## Ownership of durable goods

Regarding the possession of durable goods and considering the possession of a mobile phone, it can be seen that the coast and North of the province (with mobile phone penetration rates above 30%), stand out slightly from the central and Southern areas of Cabo Delgado, where the possession of a mobile phone decreases below 20%.

Similarly, in urban areas (Pemba, Mueda and Montepuez municipalities), as well as Quionga (in the North of Palma district), the mobile phone ownership rate exceeds 40%. Analysing this dimension of well-being by ethnolinguistic group, a strong homogeneity can be observed, with all groups showing values between 30% and 34%.

Analysing the percentage of the population with access to a bank account, there are widespread levels of financial exclusion at all administrative posts in the province and in all ethnolinguistic groups. The level of banking is slightly higher only in urban areas, which are more integrated into the markets, particularly in the municipalities of Pemba and Montepuez.

## Access to former combatant pensions

The greatest disparity identified in the province relates to the level of access to former combatant pensions. Analysing the distribution by district of the number of former combatant's pensioners, joining those of the national liberation struggle, sovereignty and survival pension, it can be seen that the beneficiaries are particularly concentrated in the North of Cabo Delgado, with special incidence in the macondes plateau - namely in the district of Mueda (with 4. 112 beneficiaries), in Muidumbe (with 3,264 beneficiaries) and Nangade - or in districts with a strong maconde presence (Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia and Pemba). This reality contrasts with the extreme South of the province, where the level of beneficiaries is comparatively residual. These results reveal a strong concentration of certain State subsidies in the throne of specific ethnolinguistic groups (namely macondes), boosting the emergence of discourses of self-exclusion by the populations of the coast and the South of the province (mostly Islamic, muanis and macuas).

## SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS IN THE NORTHEAST OF CABO DELGADO

People's speeches about others reflect their social representations of reality, which express not only their value systems but also their fears, expectations, and experiences of relationship with others. Many of these social representations are passed down from generation to generation, taking on a more lasting character rooted in their beliefs. In line with Bourdieu (1979), the way in which individuals classify others is an optimal mechanism for understanding their own life paths, access to power resources, expectations, and forms of relationship. In this sense, the analysis of the discourses of the various ethnolinguistic groups in Cabo Delgado contains countless pieces of information on how social inequalities are understood in the province. In this sense it is important to analyse how the different individuals represent the distribution of power resources in the province, namely in terms of access to business and income, training, and jobs, as well as State support.

### Access to businesses

When it comes to business access opportunities, all ethnolinguistic groups are generally represented positively, although not all are equally represented. In fact, most speeches tend to emphasize, spontaneously, the privileged character of foreign citizens, of the most diverse nationalities: of the 242 references to business access facilities, about half (122) referred to foreign citizens. The overwhelming majority (99%) of references to access to foreign business in Cabo Delgado precisely emphasize their success. Speeches do not fail to mention the existence of secondary

opportunities taken up by nationals, often in imitation of foreign nationals. According to the interviewees, over the last decade there have been important changes in Cabo Delgado, from which all socio-linguistic groups have been taking opportunities, albeit with different levels of success. Speeches about foreigners refer to citizens of the African continent (Tanzanians, Nigerians and Somalis), at the level of setting up small shops for food products, utensils, electronic products or car parts, transport businesses or buying and selling precious stones), and Asians (particularly Chinese involved in the timber business, or Thais involved in the precious stones trade), and also citizens of European origin (in the context of gas or tourism projects). From foreigners, they are considered to have decisive advantages, related to international contacts, access to capital, knowledge, experience, and initiative, which gives them a decisive advantage, at least in comparison with domestic citizens.

The Muani Group has been associated by all the groups with fishing activities, buying, and selling or transporting goods. Although changes have been noted, the group is considered to be heir to the Arab commercial tradition on the coast, with close contacts with Tanzania, early school leaving and dedication to income-generating activities, leading to the development of commercial skills from an early age.

- *"In my opinion, the Mwanis know how to do business; they have been selling fish, buckets and more for a long time; they know how to do good business. (...) As I see it, they understand business more because they live with foreigners, such as Tanzanians or even Indians; that is where they learn and take advantage of it; that is the reason why they know how to do business. (...) This is a long time ago, even Mwani understands business well"* (Macua de Montepuez, 27 years old).

- *“But those who began to be rich, to know money, are the muanis because, when the whites came, they were together; that’s where they began to know business; so we have come to take advantage of it in recent times”* (Macua of Macomia).
- *“the muanis have better deals because they can make trips looking for goods. For example, a Muani who lives in Mocímboa, he manages to come to Montepuez to buy his goods (broth, pasta, rice) and when he comes, he also brings with him dried fish, octopus, capulanas from Tanzania to sell here”* (Macua de Montepuez).

The Maconde population was the group least associated with commercial activities, particularly in coastal districts, where their participation in trade is comparatively negligible. This phenomenon appears justified by two factors. On the one hand, it is claimed that they had a later contact with the colonial capitalist system, due to their isolation on the plateau, which would have conditioned the development of financial skills. On the other hand, especially in coastal areas, speeches stress that the Macondes are accommodating themselves to State subsidies, wasting the pensions of former combatants in hedonistic consumption, especially in alcoholic beverages, taking away their initiative to invest in commercial activities. Already, in the highland area, in speeches mostly from the Macondes, a change of mentality and greater investment by the population in profitable businesses, often by imitation of Tanzanian merchants, are beginning to be mentioned. On the other hand, the Maconde highlight their success in the production of cash crops, particularly sesame, and the capacity of pensioners in the liberation struggle to hire salaried workers:

- *“The maconde, when he has money, wants*

*to eat well, dress better, and the business he does doesn’t grow”* (Mocímboa da Praia, muani, male)

- *“I don’t know, because our friends have been very close to the whites in the past. Then we do not know, but I see that we, macondes, are very behind in business; our friends are ahead in terms of business”* (Muidumbe, maconde, male, 67 years old).
- *“They [macondes] have long been used to doing business, growing sesame, carving, and selling in neighbouring Tanzania. For example, we have grown sesame so far, and the young people are doing business, and the older ones too, and we have managed to build houses covered with zinc sheets.* (Maconde, Muidumbe, Female).

## Access to training and employment

Throughout the new millennium, and with greater incidence from 2010, the province of Cabo Delgado has become an important stage for investment, initially in the tourism and forestry sectors, and later in the extractive industry, with numerous prospecting projects in the areas of oil and gas, and precious stones, among other minerals. The business and employment opportunities attracted thousands of migrants from various African countries and Maputo. In recent years, the press (Portuguese VoA, 16.01.2018) and reports from non-governmental organizations (Sekelekani, 26.10.2018) have noted a perception of external threat among local youth, claiming that the opportunities mainly benefit those from the “South”, or “Maputo”, and “foreigners”. Despite the increase in investment in the region, the conviction that little has been done for the local population, mostly Muslim, stands out in the coastal areas.

In May 2018, more than a hundred young people crowded into the main town of Palma district, protesting against the alleged blockade of job opportunities in the construction works being carried out, claiming that such opportunities were taken advantage of by individuals from the South, even though about 53% of the workforce hired by the construction company was native to the region (Sekelekani, 26.10.2018: 9). Groups of young people were involved in attempts to halt the construction of social infrastructure, especially the construction of the future resettlement village, in protest against alleged layoffs and illegal wage cuts, as well as wage discrimination for not having training, given the absence of schools and universities. In the heat of the animosities, attacks were registered on white construction supervisors. Some strikers said they no longer wanted work, nor resettlement, but only their land back and beaches (Sekelekani, 26.10.2018: 8).

An analysis of the speeches of the interviewees shows a strong association of the best employment opportunities to foreigners or individuals from the South, known as *Maputecos*, a term used locally to roughly designate the entire Mozambican population from the South of the Save. Among the groups in Cabo Delgado, macuas and macondes are seen as the most successful in accessing training and employment, in contrast to muanis and mácués, mostly considered as excluded from the labour market.

In their speeches about foreigners, the interviewees were unanimous in stressing their privileged access to jobs and training. Foreigners are said to hold the best jobs, but also to benefit from the best salaries that are highly disproportionate to those of the locals, who are, moreover, referred to subordinate positions. The proliferation of foreign workers is noted in various areas of activity, from large oil and gas related

projects to small businesses related to milling and product sales containers:

- *“If we compare, who has a good salary? the foreigner has the best comparing the others; the salary he receives is for more than two, three, four employees being macuas macondes, etc. Foreigners receive well, even doing the same job as others”* (Macua de Montepuez, taxi driver, 22 years old).
- *“You can go to the company and ask, how many workers are there?, there are 20 workers, out of the 20 workers, if you go to find out how many are from outside, they will say there are 15 and 5 local ones. Many are from outside and few are local; most are the ones who only receive orders, they are individuals who receive orders from those from outside”*. (Maconde de Mocimboa da Praia, unemployed, 30 years old).

Of the few times they are mentioned, Maputenses (in fact, all individuals from the South of the Save) are also considered privileged in access to employment. The concentration of the administrative machinery of the State, the headquarters of the multinationals and the non-governmental agencies in the capital of the country is seen as a decisive advantage for the population of Maputo in the recruitment and selection process, making it over-represented in the leadership positions of organizations in Cabo Delgado:

- *“If a vacancy is offered here, in Muidumbe, you will find people who come from the South or the Centre of the country applying for vacancies here; that is because the bosses are individuals who come from the South. I can give you an example: the day before yesterday we did a job and we thought we had an employment, and when we noticed, we saw that most of the docu-*

*ments submitted there were from people coming from the South; this led us to think that those leaders or we, the owners of the land, are not considered”* (Maconde de Muidumbe, 46 years old).

Conversely, speeches about muanis and mácués highlight their condition of exclusion from jobs. This representation is widely shared by all groups, but it has been more incisive in the self-representation of these ethnolinguistic groups. Particularly in the district of Mocímboa da Praia, the access to employment is structuring a notorious tension between muanis and macondes:

- *“If you’re in the municipality, you’ll find more macuas; if you’re in Águas or Electricidade de Moçambique (Water and Electricity Utility) if there’s a muani you should be a servant”* (Muani from Mocímboa da Praia, male).
- *“The mwani always has to be a servant and the maconde chief”* (Muani from Mocímboa da Praia).

The professional exclusion of muanis and mácués from the employment market is explained by four phenomena: Firstly, the long tradition of investing in religious education to the detriment of official education, resulting in a skills shortage that compromises employability. Among the mácuas, the frequency of premature marriages, responsible for early school leaving, stands out. Secondly, and related to the previous one, the Muani fishing tradition, as well as its orientation towards small businesses, activities associated with a rapid economic return, discourage investment in education or in salaried work. This feeling of professional independence underpins what has been called Muani irreverence, which leads them to refuse a job that involves subordination to an employer. Especially on the part of macondes, muanis are often represented as conflicting and

unreliable. Finally, political justifications are given, claiming that jobs in the State sector are conditioned by partisan loyalties. Strongly connoted with the opposition, many Muanis feel excluded from access to employment:

- *“This, since the colonial period, has existed, the Mwanis and the Mácués; for them, working was not the best choice; they woke up in the morning and went out to sea to fish, so that when they returned with 4 fish, they would attract people around them; this is the kind of work that they had seen as best; now, to be working for 30 days, they felt a lot of delay, that’s it. And another thing that made the muanis and mácués stay behind is because they put the school like haramo in their heads; if you go to school, you will eat pork”* (Maconde de Mocímboa da Praia, male).
- *“in us there is a problem, we don’t accept to be given orders; to go out to a shop, to ask for a job, we don’t want to”* (Muani de Mocímboa da Praia, female).
- *“The poorest... we usually see this group who hate us macondes; they are seen as the poorest because they lose knowledge; then, they follow naughty things”* (Maconde de Muidumbe, male, 75 years old)
- *“There are Muanis who work in government, but you only get a job when you join the party. For example, there is a teacher, called Chembone, he joined Frelimo; there is also Sama, he joined Frelimo, but they are Muanis”* (Muani de Mocímboa da Praia, male, 65 years old).

## Access to State support

Access to state support means the benefit of public funds related to pensions (such as former combatants), subsidies, extensionist information, outright loans, or housing.

According to the speeches of the interviewees, unequal access to these public resources is an extremely sensitive issue. For the voices in question, the distribution of these resources does not benefit the different groups equally, with two population groups standing out in this respect: foreigners and the Maconde population. This is a position that is practically consensual among all the interviewees, regardless of the group of origin, including the Maconde themselves.

The privileged situation of foreign citizens is justified by the alleged public support they obtain in the implementation of their business or the exploitation of natural resources in Mozambique.

The Maconde population is strongly associated with obtaining state benefits. The strong involvement of this group in the national liberation struggle, as military and as civilians in support of the guerrillas, has resulted in a clear over-representation of the Maconde population among the beneficiaries of former combatant subsidies. Among the Macondes, the merit of this support tends to be naturally highlighted, justifying it by the broad participation of this group in the national liberation struggle, suffering war wounds, at the expense of youth and schooling. Although less frequently, this attribution of subsidies to Maconde individuals is justified by their capacity for financial management:

- *“The government sat down and thought and said: these people did good work, if we left the settlers, so far there would be no development. Since we fought with them,*

*then the government said: let’s help these people, because we made them lag behind, they couldn’t study (...) so they thought they would help us with the pensions”* (Maconde from Muidumbe, female).

- *[Those who receive more support from the government] are the Macondes: because they worked a lot during the colonial war. The handicapped are given help by the handicap they have”* (Maconde from Muidumbe, female, peasant, 40 years old).

Between Muanis and Macuas, the speeches emphasize the disproportionate and exaggerated concentration of public support (allocation of pensions, subsidies, tractors, land, scholarships, or vacancies in educational establishments) to Macondes to the detriment of other populations. The most critical voices highlight the allegedly prepotent and abusive nature of the seizure of resources in Cabo Delgado, fomenting a culture of dependency among the macondes, which does not orient them towards work, but towards consumerist displays. The speeches often refer to the politicization of this process, resulting from the close relationship of this ethnolinguistic group with Frelimo, with which it is confused and inherently with the Government of Mozambique. The reports reveal that this process is not without its involvement in the phenomena of opportunism and bribery practices:

- *“They think it’s all theirs because the party is theirs. The Frelimo Party is in power, since it is in power and it is, they who have kept Frelimo since Frelimo existed. A Muani secretary has never been appointed here in Mocimboa. They do this for no one in, and since they know that it is the party that has the power to pressure the government, (...) they will never hand over their party to anyone. One day you’ll get here, and you’ll find*

*all the Muanis dead*” (Muani from Mocímboa da Praia, 29 years old).

- *“It’s the Macondes who have subsidy support that they use to buy cars outside the country, that they use to study, in the universities here in Cabo Delgado, macondes children of the former combatants are accepted”* (Macua from Montepuez, male, 12<sup>th</sup> grade, domestic servant, 33 years old).
- *“Now, start counting villages, here in Cabo Delgado, the house covered with zinc sheet is from maconde, macua always his house is stick and grass, but maconde builds with grass, the roof is from zinc sheet; that means he gets a pension”* (Macua from Mocímboa da Praia, male, 58 years old).

In the Northern districts of Cabo Delgado, the process of granting a pension to a former combatant (of national liberation or of the defence of sovereignty and democracy) is submitted and processed through the National Liberation Fighters Association (ACLIN). Born within Frelimo, the ACLIN maintains an umbilical relationship with the party, with the ability to influence party decisions and actively engage in electoral campaigns. Because of their active role during the liberation struggle, the most prominent members of the ACLIN are invariably macondes. In this context, in the Northern districts of Cabo Delgado, the ACLIN is confused with the Frelimo party, and with the Macondes themselves, contributing to the politicization and ethnicisation of access to former combatant pensions.

Conversely, macuas and muanis constitute the groups most connoted with the exclusion of public benefits. These are discourses conveyed, above all, by the people themselves, revealing strong feelings of social exclusion. These discourses have essentially two dimensions. On

the one hand, they affirm their participation in the anti-colonial struggle, not recognized by the state. The discourses claim a tendency to reinterpret history based on the interests of macondes dominant groups and for their benefit. From this perspective, the Macondes tend to attribute to themselves the monopoly of anti-colonial resistance, which they capitalize on to obtain public subsidies:

- *“To say that they set free, we do not deny; but they did not set free alone. They did not release alone”* (Muani from Mocímboa da Praia, male, peasant).
- *“In the offices, as if they were the ones who stay, they are them; so the money goes to their relatives, that is my ethnicity and the macuas are always poor”* (Macua from Mocímboa da Praia, female, 57 years old).

Secondly, and particularly in the district of Mocímboa da Praia - a district where Renamo is very popular and where elections tend to be more contested - the exclusion of access to the former combatant subsidy is justified by political aspects. The speeches claim that the exclusion derives from the fact that the subsidies are granted according to criteria of partisan trust. Tendentiously associated with Renamo, many Muanis, therefore, consider themselves excluded from public funds. The voices emphasize a feeling of abandonment by the State, allegedly captured by Macondes and the Frelimo party. Structured in a dichotomous and simplistic way, some speeches imagine the existence of a plot constituted by Macondes to dominate Muanis:

- *“to offer something does not exist, in the pensions of the combatants nobody will sign us up, because we, to have access to the pensions of the combatants, it is a serious problem. All you have to do is be*

*Muani, they demand you a party card and that is why I said that we work and if we don't work, the government won't support us. We don't have someone to defend us, since we don't have someone in the government"* (Muani from Mocímboa da Praia).

- *"There are [those] who achieve something, but they squeeze us, because in the government of Frelimo, son of Muani, they don't give him space, they don't give him space to do something that will serve him in the future"* (Muani from Mocímboa da Praia, male, 65).
- *"I myself am organising documents to receive a combatant's pension, but they won't let me submit because I am from Renamo"* (Muani from Mocímboa da Praia, male, peasant).
- *"We don't receive pensions because we are from the Renamo party, we don't receive them; I was born here, I am a native here, in Mocímboa, but I don't receive them"* (Muani from Mocímboa da Praia, female).

## A SOCIAL SUPPORT BASE?

The existing literature (Habibe et al., 2019) and interviews conducted with residents of Mocímboa da Praia show that among the social base for recruitment to the Al-Shabab group (as it is locally known) there was a strong presence of local Muani youth from Mocímboa da Praia or neighbouring districts. As shown in the map of attacks in Cabo Delgado province, compiled by Zitamar News, during the first year of the conflict, the attacks were concentrated mainly in coastal areas of the districts of Mocímboa da Praia, Palma (Olumbe) and Macomia (Mucojo and Quiterajo), predominantly Islamic and Muani areas. During this period, the group showed difficulties in carrying out attacks on the plateau of the province (mostly Christian and Maconde). From the end of 2018, the group shows greater capacity for action in inland areas, particularly in Pundandar (Palma administrative post), and in the district of Nangade.

During the first half of 2020, there was an intensification of insurgent attacks, occupying for several days district headquarters such as Mocímboa da Praia, Muidumbe, Quissanga and Macomia.

Initially, the insurgent group was mostly composed of Tanzanian and Mozambican individuals from the coast, but more recently, Maconde individuals have also been identified among the respective ranks. Reports of individuals, who were held in armed insurgent camps or eyewitnesses of attacks in Mocímboa da Praia and Muidumbe refer to the existence of armed insurgents speaking to each other in Maconde. In Muidumbe district there are reports of adherence of local Christian youth to violent movements.



## CONCLUSION

Although Cabo Delgado is known for the historical coexistence of various ethnolinguistic groups, it is also characterized by long-lasting tensions between populations. Population discourses highlight the existence of inequalities in access to power resources, and these differences are often interpreted by reference to ethnic assumptions, albeit with geographical variations.

In the far North of the province, in the areas where the gas industry is being implemented, the tension is focused not only on access to jobs and income, but also on access to benefits and compensation resulting from major projects. In the first case, the speeches reveal feelings of discrimination and disadvantage towards foreign citizens or those from the South of the country (known as Maputecos), considered to be privileged in the access to the best jobs to the detriment of the people of the province. In the second case, and resident in the gas exploration areas, the Mácué population tends to be represented as the great beneficiary of the resettlement and compensation processes, particularly the respective community leaders, who assert themselves as gatekeepers between the outside and the local population. In this particular case, the speeches of self-exclusion are mostly made by macondes, compared to the mácué group, understood as “originating” from the district, with access to the largest lands and the possibility of putting them on the market.

In the district of *Mocimboa da Praia*, and in some areas of Macomia and Palma, particularly in places where macondes, muanis and macuas coexist, speeches tend to emphasize the privilege of the former in access to State subsidies. The discourses of Muanis, but also of Macuas, tend to emphasize the politicized character of the

allocation of State pensions and subsidies, over concentrated among Maconde elements, locally confused with the Frelimo party. Economic inequalities are not only confused in the discourse with political differences, but also with religious differences, opposing, on the one hand, a group of Macondes (Christians and members of Frelimo) and, on the other, Muanis and Macuas populations of the coast, mostly Islamic and tendentially of the opposition.

In addition to emphasizing the inequalities between macuas and macondes (particularly in access to State subsidies), in Montepuez, a district strongly marked by the dynamics of artisanal mining, speeches tend to highlight the inequalities between Mozambicans and foreigners (African and from other continents) in the process of controlling ruby exploitation.

Although the Maconde plateau stands out slightly from the rest of the province in some welfare indicators (such as zinc sheet roofing or mobile phone access), the data from the 2017 census do not show the existence of an ethnolinguistic group that stands out clearly from the rest due to its socio-economic conditions. The exception is access to public resources (particularly former combatant pensions), largely concentrated in areas with the largest Maconde population. On the other hand, a relatively restricted group of Maconde families, but sociably visible, demonstrates a great capacity for political influence (both at central and provincial level) in the most varied aspects of the reality of Cabo Delgado, holding a strong power of influence right down to the locality level, thus obtaining better access to natural resources (particularly wood or precious stones, among others).

In this situation, speeches tend to emerge, according to which access to public resources is ethnically and politically conditioned, favouring

maconde groups, mostly Christian and Frelimo Party sympathisers. This phenomenon tends to generate feelings of envy, repulsion and victimisation on the part of individuals from other language groups, mainly Muanis but also Macuas.

The arrival in power of President Filipe Nyusi coincided with a new government stance, more incisive in the supervision and control of natural resources, namely through the repression of illegal miners in Montepuez, Wood Trunk Operation or the burning of ivory, to the detriment of extensive local networks, which operated outside the law. The brutal action of State forces in the protection of private economic interests participated by prominent Maconde individuals (namely Montepuez Ruby Mining) was locally understood, in various circles, as an opportunity for this ethnolinguistic group to appropriate State resources for its own benefit, to the detriment of the other groups in the province.

If the efforts to build a Mozambicanity were based on the idea of national and multi-secular resistance to colonial exploitation, the reality is that the economic disintegration of the territory (observable through greater socio-economic proximity to Tanzania) and the unequal access to State resources among ethnolinguistic groups contradict an inclusive discourse of anti-colonial national resistance, aggravating social tensions. This situation resurfaces historical tensions between coastal and inland populations, often confused as Muanis and Macondes, but also as Islamic and Christian, and sometimes as Frelimo and Renamo. Inequalities in access to public resources are an obstacle to the construction of national unity.

On the other hand, the corruption and nepotism that develop around the State, the consequent fragility of public services, the feeling of democratic

fragility and absence of freedom of expression, or the difficulties of access to justice, increase the feeling of marginalisation of groups on the coast, making them comparatively more vulnerable to joining movements with strong identity, populist and messianic discourses. The reality is that it was precisely among Islamic coastal populations, in areas of historical resentment, that radical Islamic movements found their bases of recruitment for violent and radical purposes.

It should be noted that the manipulation of these local contradictions for political purposes, depending on the interests of the groups being confronted, is not a recent practice. The colonial State has skilfully exploited the historical contradictions between the people of the coast and the plateau, and the religious question has fuelled contradictions within Frelimo itself. In the post-independence period, Renamo skilfully exploited the dissatisfaction of Muslims on the coast with Frelimo's deeply secular posture, and even under Samora Machel's government, the Islamic Council of Mozambique did not fail to achieve a strategic rapprochement with Frelimo. After the General Peace Agreement, the different political parties remained aware of the importance of an alliance with Islam, as indeed with other religious congregations. The attempts to co-opt these religious movements never assumed a unidirectional sense, the various congregations having invested in strategic alliances with the power (Macagno, 2006: 227; Morier-Genoud (2010).

Despite the presence of tensions and ethnic conflicts, any simplistic understanding of conflict in Cabo Delgado based on the existence of a pole of ethno-religious contradiction: between Muanis and Macondes or between Islamists and Christians should be avoided. If it is true that it was among the Muani population of the coast that an important social basis for recruitment was found, it is important to attend to other aspects

that make that situation particularly complex:

**In the first place**, far from being a phenomenon of aggression against individuals from other ethno-religious groups, the young insurgent's revolt within Islamic groups, therefore in the context of divisions and internal power disputes within Islam.

**Secondly**, reports on the ground reveal the existence of a growing number of young Macondes among the ranks of rebel groups.

**Thirdly**, the maconde group itself is historically rather fragmented. While it is true that thousands of Maconde families have privileged access to a number of State funds, existing data shows that this group constitutes a minority, with thousands of Maconde excluded from such access. In Muidumbe, during the election campaign for the 2019 legislative elections, there was a greater involvement of young people in caravans of opposition parties, a scenario that would have been unthinkable some 10 years ago. These elements illustrate the existence of a strong social hierarchy within this ethnolinguistic group.

In this scenario, it is necessary to deepen the understanding of the existing socio-economic

tensions in the North of the country, not only in the northeast of Cabo Delgado, but also in similar socio-economic areas, marked by a long history of disintegration and feelings of socio-economic discrimination, namely in the Northern coastal strip, up to the north of Zambezia, as well as several areas of Niassa.

Special attention should be paid to the social situation of a youth on waithood. In places of high investment in natural resources and the creation of high social expectations, the existence of numbers of young people who are more educated, but without socio-economic integration, moreover, in an emerging consumer society, makes them particularly vulnerable to illegal or violent activities, or capturable by radical populist discourses.

In the long term, a purely military solution to the insurgency will not solve problems of disintegration and socio-economic inequality in the North of the country. Meeting expectations for employment, quality public services and real improvements in the lives of young people are part of the range of sustainable anti-insurgency interventions, which also include the revision of narratives of anti-colonial resistance and political inclusion of different ethnolinguistic groups.

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### About the FES Africa Peace and Security Series

The lack of security is one of the key impediments to development and democracy in Africa. The existence of protracted violent conflicts as well as a lack of accountability of the security sector in many countries are challenging cooperation in the field of security policy. The emerging African Peace and Security Architecture provides the institutional framework to promote peace and security.

As a political foundation committed to the values of social democracy, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) aims at strengthening the interface between democracy and security policy. FES therefore facilitates political dialogue on security threats and their national, regional and continental responses. The FES Africa Peace and Security Series aims to contribute to this dialogue by making relevant analysis widely accessible. The series is being published by the FES Africa Security Policy Network.

### About this study

Since late 2017, Cabo Delgado province in the extreme North of Mozambique has become a stage for violent armed conflict. While in the first months the conflict resulted in isolated insurgent actions and was confined to the coastal areas, from 2020 onwards there was an alarming intensification of violence, the occupation of four district headquarters and the spread of attacks to the South and interior of the province. To explain the insurgency, several hypotheses emerged. Some focusing on internal factors, namely socio-economic tensions, and others on external aspects, such as the relationship with terrorist cells in East Africa or with the geopolitical control of the Mozambique Channel, as an important energy and drug trafficking corridor.

In this contribution to the Security Series João Feijó emphasizes the importance of socio-economic asymmetries to explain the military tensions in Cabo Delgado. The author argues that inequality of access to jobs, income, benefits and compensation contradicts a discourse of economic integration and national unity. The recent reconfiguration of power relations between ethnolinguistic groups and the greater affirmation of the State in control of natural resources reinforces historical divisions and the alienation of young people on waithood. A change of the course will decide the success of the fight against insurgency.

