

# Killings and Violence in Northern Mozambique within a Context of Religion: Muslim and Christian (2017–2018)

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## Abstract

The killings and beheadings of people in northern Mozambique continue to pose a serious challenge to Christians, Muslims and the economy in the region. From October 2017, over 200 people have been killed by an Islamic terrorist group, which many know as “Mozambican Al Shabaab”; possibly linked to the original terrorist organisation. The growing violent actions result from various conditions both in Tanzania and in northern Mozambique. By addressing these conditions, this article highlights the role played by religion related to the violence in northern Mozambique. It deals with the historical background of the growing violence and explores who is behind the Mozambican Islamic extremists. Additionally, the article also studies the violence as directly affecting Christian populations, as well as Muslims who do not support the Mozambican Al Shabaab activities. The main questions are: What are the characteristics of the people of northern Mozambique? Who is behind the killings? Why are they doing it? And, what is the impact of this violence on Christianity in the region?

**Keywords:** Contemporary Christianity; persecuted Christians; violence; culture of fear; religious extremists; al Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jamo; Ansar al-Sunna; Al Shabaab



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## Introduction

This article<sup>1</sup> addresses the characteristics of the people of northern Mozambique; the natural resources and the illicit international trade routes; and the growing presence of Islamic terrorists in the region. The article also studies who is behind the Mozambican Al Shabaab; the growth of a culture of fear; and the impact of the Islamic extremist violence on Christian and Muslim populations residing in the region.

The article concludes that even if religion is an intrinsic motivation for the violence in northern Mozambique, illicit gain of wealth and power is a fundamental element behind the killings and violence. The new-found gas wealth, as well as other commodities in this geographical area, has had an impact on the Muslim/Christian communities who are targeted by Islamic extremists, whose acts of violence spread terror in the region.

There are two fundamental aspects addressed in this article. One is the historical background of recent violence in northern Mozambique culminating in terrorist acts perpetrated since October 2017. The other aspect is a study on who is behind the Mozambican Al Shabaab, the rise of a culture of fear, and its consequence for Christians in northern Mozambique.

We commence with a historical background of the recent violence in northern Mozambique,

### Historical Background of Recent Violence in Northern Mozambique (2017–2018)

We initiate this section by locating the Cabo Delgado Province on the Mozambican map, as shown below in figure 1. Cabo Delgado is situated on the northern tip of the country, south of bordering Tanzania and on the coastline of the Indian Ocean. The neighbouring Mozambican provinces are Niassa and Nampula.

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1 This article stems from the author's recent visit to the affected region (August 1–6, 2018) in response to the calls of afflicted and persecuted people.



Figure 1: Locating the Cabo Delgado Province on the Mozambican map

Source: Mozambican 2007 Census<sup>2</sup>

The population of the Province of Cabo Delgado is about 1 605 649 (Club of Mozambique 2007). This number increased from 1 287 814 in 1997, which indicates a population growth of about 2.5% per year ([N-a] 2015, 62).<sup>3</sup>

The population of Cabo Delgado Province is composed of tribes such as the Makonde, the Macua, and the Mwandji.<sup>4</sup> However, according to Chichava (2008, 7),<sup>5</sup> “In the post-colonial period, Frelimo defined discrimination based on colour, tribe or religion as one of its priority combats.” The slogans were “Down with racism, tribalism, regionalism, divisionism” and so forth. Despite the pressure from the state to suppress tribalism and regionalism, this study of the historical framework to the roots of recent violence in northern Mozambique will demonstrate that the ethnicity in the region is still yielding a great deal of social control. Therefore, there are three important aspects to be considered

2 Original text in Portuguese: “Aa população da Província de Cabo Delgado é de cerca de 1.605.649 (Club of Mozambique, 2007). Este número aumentou de 1.287.814 em 1997, o que indica um crescimento da população de cerca de 2,5% ao ano.”

3 Note: All translations in this article were done by the author.

4 See: <http://majaliwa.tripod.com/cabod.htm>. Accessed December 22, 2018.

5 Original text in Portuguese: “No período pós-colonial, a Frelimo definiu a discriminação com base na cor, tribo ou religião como um dos seus combates prioritários. As palavras de ordem eram abaixo o racismo, o tribalismo, o regionalismo, o divisionismo, etc.”

in this first topic, which are: the characteristics of the people of northern Mozambique; the illicit international trade routes; and the growing presence of Islamic extremists.

The following section reviews the brave characteristics of the tribes of northern Mozambique.

### **The Brave Characteristics of the People of Northern Mozambique**

Although the Makonde tend to be more Roman Catholic, some are Muslim, and they live in northern Mozambique but also southern Tanzania. They are a brave people who, in 1961, initiated the fight for the independence of Mozambique (Funada-Classen 2012, 221). They fiercely resisted the Portuguese presence (Regalia 2017, 7). According to Funada-Classen (2012, 222), since that time of resistance the Makonde Mozambican elders “had an extensive network and links with the Makonde in Tanganyika [Tanzania, and] the[ir] bond was strong enough to be used for exchanging political information.” The province of Cabo Delgado has long been a region-sensitive trigger to political violence because its populations have an independent spirit. Additionally, they interact easily with their tribal brothers in Tanzania. However, the immense wealth of natural resources discovered in the last two decades, as well as the illicit international trade routes, altered the social balance, which will be studied next.

### **The Natural Resources and Illicit International Trade Routes that Altered Social Balance**

Related to natural wealth, there is a connection involving the three northern Mozambican provinces of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa, which are controlled by various routes of illicit trades using networks that benefit from the deep-water ports and the small airports in the region. Natural gas, oil, tanzanite, rubies, as well as illicit international trade routes involving drugs, timber, and ivory have attracted many people to the region. Therefore, Haysom (2018, 6) informs:

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 has experienced game-related trafficking, particularly of ivory, which deals are taking place, for instance, at the China Mall in Pemba (Haysom 2018, 10). Timber is also being trafficked, coming from Mozambican forests, including those in the Niassa Game Reserve. According to Haysom (2018, 8), “[The] timber resources [were sent via] the Pemba port, which was also a major hub for ivory export.” Haysom (2018, 6) explains:

The networks that profit from different illicit trades in the north are largely distinct, but they sometimes involve more than one trade. ... It is not a situation where one group has strong territorial control; this is not even the case with the state.

According to Haysom (2018, 6), “Illicit economy underpins instability in northern Mozambique, and, in particular [it] appear[s] to have fed into the rise of the Al Shabaab group.” That is, “Illicit trade ... driven [by] corruption ... has created both grievance and opportunity for the local community—a set of conditions crucial to understand the [Mozambican] Al Shabaab phenomenon.” Unfortunately, “the alleged members of this mafia ... [have] their links to the ruling party and control of key port infrastructure ...” (Haysom 2018, 7). Adding to the problem, the judicial system does not always fulfil its function, as Haysom (2018, 7–8) points out: “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.” The natural resources discovered in Cabo Delgado became a curse instead of a blessing to the local populations. For example, Nhamirre (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.

Giz (2018, 14) indicates that a “special type of mining is Montepuez Ruby Mining Lda (MRM) in Montepuez, Cabo Delgado Province because mining for ruby and Corundum is done in grand industrial scale here.” In addition, graphite is also mined in the region (Giz 2018, 13) by a Dutch-German company, as well as nickel, according to Giz (2018, 15). Then, Anadarko operates in deep waters and the ENI/Exxon operates offshore projects exploring natural gas (Giz 2018, 18). Many of these natural resources are channelled via illicit routes involving migrants from countries such as “Tanzania, Mali, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Somalia, Nigeria, Cameroon and Burundi ... [these migrants] are involved primarily in small-scale drug trafficking ... and the smuggling of precious stones such as gold, rubies, garnets, tourmalines and emeralds and small amounts of timber and wildlife” (Haysom 2018, 10–11). According to Haysom (2018, 11), “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 poaching has spread from Niassa to Tanzania and heroin is carried to South Africa and other places (Haysom 2018, 11). In addition, there is also human trafficking: “Mozambique lies in the path of a human-smuggling (and sometimes trafficking) route from the Horn of Africa to South Africa” (Haysom 2018, 11).

Haysom (2018, 12) explains: “Migrants fleeing from recruitment by Al-Shabaab (the Somali group), famine and poverty, but it is possible that these networks also laid the basis for ex-fighters to establish links with local communities—particularly in Mocimboa da Praia and Palma.” 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 foster” (Haysom 2018, 13–14). The state has

participated via corrupted officials such as migration officers, police, border guards, and customs officials, as well as politicians (Haysom 2018, 13–14). The levels of corruption at border posts are very high. Despite the apparent 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). Additionally, “Illicit trades are 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 led to the increasing presence of Islamist extremists, as explored in the next section.

### **The Growing Presence of Islamic Extremists**

The growing presence of Islamic extremists in the Cabo Delgado province may be linked to recent discoveries of natural resources as well as other reasons. According to Hopkinson (2018, 1), the first extremist group to get established in northern Mozambique was the “Al Sunnah wa Jama’ah (ASWJ) terrorist, [which is a] threat for Mozambique and Tanzania.”<sup>6</sup> Hopkinson (2018, 1) explains:

Following Aboud Rogo Mohammed’s death in 2012, ASWJ followers moved south to the Kibiti District of Tanzania in 2015 and created drug smuggling networks to fund fighters and ammunition for terrorist operations. Successful counter-terrorism raids by Tanzanian authorities in August 2017 ... led to ... disrupt the ASWJ terrorist cells in Tanzania. After this, they moved operations from Kibiti to Mozambique where they have continued attacks.

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6 Executive summary by Hopkinson (2018, 1): No foreign workers or gas works have been targeted by ASWJ and previous attacks in 2018 have been focused indiscriminately on villages. ASWJ has conducted most of its attacks on civilians, as a strategy to silence opposition and gain a greater foothold over Cabo Delgado. ASWJ use kidnapping and extortion tactics to raise funding for their criminal operations but this has only been identified on Cabo Delgado locals. A movement towards kidnappings of gas workers and attacks on gas plants is unlikely but would indicate that the group will focus its terrorism on damaging business operations. Two gas companies have suspended work in Cabo Delgado due to the threat of ASWJ for workers. If the group begins to kidnap gas workers and causes subsequent delays to production, it is likely that Mozambique will fail to meet its LNG production start date of 2022. The Mozambican government is in talks with a private security consortium to deliver protection services for gas workers. It is unclear how the government would finance this proposal and whether this consortium will have any significant impact on the growth of ASWJ. ASWJ is primarily concerned with criminal enterprises such as timber, rubies and narcotics trafficking, which it uses to bribe corrupt officials and pay the criminal leadership. Currently there is a low threat of ASWJ attacks for Tanzania. A likely indicator for the threat level to increase will be that border police begin to seize weapons and arrest fighters crossing into Tanzania.

Since then, there has been a rise of an “Extremist phenomenon ... [involving] recruitment and funding” (Haysom 2018, 16). That is, there is “A movement that 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 leaders of the Mozambican Al Shabaab in the region 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 invest those loans as they wished, such as in fishing boats, small shops to sell food or consumer goods, car repair shops, vendors of building materials, or illegal mining. According to Haysom (2018, 17), the Mozambican Al Shabaab<sup>7</sup> extremist Islamic group is characterised by an appealing way to recruit young men and find a way to exploit them thereafter.<sup>8</sup>

The Mozambican Islamic extremist is linked to the Al Shabaab in Tanzania, from “the Pwani region (close to but not including Dar es Salaam) and the adjacent Tanga region, which abuts the Kenyan border” (Haysom 2018, 18). Therefore, the entire region from Kenya to northern Mozambique is in a process to be controlled by Al Shabaab (Haysom 2018, 22). The movement is “referred to with a generic term—*waloke wa Kiislamu* (born-again Muslims)” (Haysom 2018, 19), and some alleged reasons for their violence include the hate for Christians.

The next section presents a brief discussion on who is behind the Mozambican Al Shabaab; the rise of a culture of fear, and its consequence for Christians in northern Mozambique.

## Who is behind the Mozambican Al Shabaab?

It is important to discuss who is behind the Mozambican Al Shabaab. We also look at the rise of a culture of fear, as well as its consequence for Christians in the region.

Jasmine Opperman posed a question that is pertinent for our study: “Has Al Shabaab Officially announced itself in Mozambique?” (Opperman 2018, 1). According to Opperman (2018,1), “On 11 October 2018, an article published in *Shahada News* gave

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7 The Mozambican Al Shabaab has the following characteristics: “Almost all of them had been members of Al Sunnah sect, which they had abandoned in 2014 to join the new Al Shabaab sect. None of the men had been schooled beyond the eighth grade, with the exception of Insa Sumail, whose home town is Nanga, who had completed the tenth 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 trades (with Tanzania and Malawi) and interregional trades (with many doing business across Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces and even in Maputo).”

8 When the call came, one of things that was required of recruits was that they sell the new assets they had acquired, presumably to fund the attacks that began in October. In the week before the Mocímboa firefight, young men across the towns of Cabo Delgado sold their stock, stores and houses and left their homes to travel to Mocímboa da Praia.

way to speculations that Al Shabaab has officially associated the group with the current violence in northern Mozambique, attributed to cells being referred to as ‘Shabaab’.” Yet, Mozambican Al Shabaab is different from other Islamic terrorist groups bearing the same name. 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 commonality between the cells cannot be discarded, but the lack of precise information implies that a motivation for attacks remains speculative.

On both sides of the border, the police are active to resolve the problem of violence. A Tanzanian news report ([N-a] 2017, 1) informed: “On 8 August 2018, [Inspector General of Police] IGP Siro, during his visit to Zanzibar Island, stated in a press conference that ‘Most Mozambican killers are coming from us’.” The Mozambican police are also on the ground and “Mozambican authorities claim to already have arrested suspected 470 Shabaab fighters, of which 52 were Tanzanian (11%) and three were Ugandan (0.6%)” (Opperman 2018, 3). However, the activities of the Mozambican Al Shabaab have already resulted in many people being killed. Its terrorist activities have resulted in three specific threats to Cabo Delgado: “Stigmatisation; word by mouth accounts on attacks; and, an ever-growing schism between the local population and the Mozambique Government” (Opperman 2018, 1).

With regards to *stigmatisation*, the armed forces for the defence of Mozambique (FADM) are contacting “Local religious leaders ... [and] regularly targeting and harassing Muslim members. [In addition,] Muslims have expressed concerns about unwarranted prosecution in Cabo Delgado” (Opperman 2018, 1). According to Opperman (2018, 1), because people are suspicious and do not trust the police, they tend to isolate themselves under “self-survival instinct.” That is, “Finger pointing and fear within communities inevitably lead to increased aggressive behaviour” (Opperman 2018, 1). While dealing with the situation, the Mozambican police base their action on religion, family connections and nationality rather than facts that may lead to convictions in the courts.

Clearly the Mozambique Government currently lacks such a capacity or is blinded by the importance of “fact talking” as a centrifugal part of its current counter actions in Cabo Delgado. Communities left to their own devices will have a low level of tolerance to those viewed as outsiders, be it culprits, NGOs of Humanitarian organization. (Opperman 2018, 2)

### Consequences for Christians in Northern Mozambique (2017–2018)

The 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 it is not possible for the populations to deal with these situations as they tend to go into



unpredictable diverse directions. This is so because the communities are not properly informed about their reality. In addition, Opperman (2018, 2) argues:

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. This results in the proliferation of unverified or fake information which has a tendency to inflate attacks, beheadings and casualties.

Related to this lack of detailed and verified information is the use by the population of the “word of mouth news.” It may seem strange that the national and international news agencies are almost silent on the killings in northern Mozambique, but they are affected by *Decree No 40/2018, of 23 July 2018*, which makes their activity extremely expensive. That is, “The regulations mean that media freedom in Mozambique will become an expensive commodity, resulting in reporting being more controlled and not necessarily a shared and survival stream to those who need it the most: the people of Cape Delgado” (Opperman 2018, 2). *Decree No 40/2018, of 23 July 2018* (Decreto Lei 40/2018 de 23 de Julho de 2018) poses another problem to the affected people in the region: “The relatively little reporting and coverage of the current hostilities in regional and international media is ... responsible for the lukewarm response to the crisis by the regional and international community at large” (Opperman 2018, 2).

Opperman (2018, 3) is of the opinion that “The Mozambican government does not want much international focus on the current instability for fear of scaring off potential investors.” However, the reality resulting from stigmatisation and the lack of detailed verified information are forcing an ever-growing schism between the local population and the Mozambique Government. The populations mistrust the FADM’s use of unwarranted force. Therefore, Opperman (2018, 3) warns:

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 this space is occupied by traditional leaders, and they find in al-Shabaab an opportunity to be realised.”

Responding to the speculations raised by *Shahada News*<sup>9</sup> on October 11, 2018, the news article associated Al Shabaab to the current violence in Mozambique, as Opperman (2018, 7) highlights, “Al Shabaab 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.” The discussion on who is behind the Mozambican Al Shabaab builds the stage towards the following debate on the background of violence, giving rise to a culture of fear in modern Mozambique, to be addressed next.

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9 See: <http://shahadanews.com>.

## Violence in Northern Mozambique is giving Rise to a Culture of Fear

The above-mentioned violence in the northern region of Mozambique adds to the general rise of “a culture of fear” as labelled by Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Maputo (AHK).<sup>10</sup> According to the AHK (04.04.2018) report, “Amnesty International (AI) recently said that abductions and attacks on political analysts in Mozambique reveal the emergence of a society that does not respect freedom of thought and warn of the emergence of a ‘culture of fear’.” The northern area is intrinsically attached to witchcraft from ancient days to the actual independent Mozambique. As Machele (2018) points out:

The history of mutual relationship between the villagers of Mwangaza, in Mociambo da Praia district, Cabo Delgado province, in northern Mozambique ... [is] pushed into the intricate world of witchcraft. ... Almost all admit ... that “some people turn themselves into lions.” They ... [are] evoking an ancient institution that characterised Mozambican territory before colonisation ...

According to Machele (2018, 285):

[In] rural Mozambique [there are] ... regional differences in terms of local conceptions of supernatural powers. In northern Mozambique, people are haunted by the “invisible world,” while in central and southern Mozambique the active spiritual forces are the deceased spirits that one can dominate or use them for one’s own benefit.

Interestingly, this type of localised perception in northern Mozambique witchcraft pertains to apply particularly to men, as described by Machele (2018, 285): “In northern Mozambique, where some residents are accused of becoming lions tend to be men. Local stories and evidence from primary and secondary sources highlight the figure of a man who has the power to turn himself into a lion or to use these animals to harm people for his own benefit.” Those accused of practising witchcraft by using the lion, as well as those who have been attacked by the lion, tend to abandon their villages forever, which is called the “exit strategy” (Machele 2018, 285). Sadly, however, “Suicide is another sinister strategy adopted by some people accused of witchcraft. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Mozambique had by 2016 an average of 17.3 suicides per 100 000 inhabitants, the highest rate in the continent” (Machele 2018, 293). This historical background related to witchcraft is important to be mentioned in the context of this article because witchcraft is intrinsically related to the violence in northern Mozambique. That is:

In ... northern Cabo Delgado ... the “occult idioms” [are associated] with wide political and economic transformations. ... Violence ... in Cabo Delgado province [is related to] a deep mistrust of the post-socialist FRELIMO elites, highlighting their propensity to

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10 Southern African-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

second the rapacity of international vampires and let the district slip into chaos in order to feed on the blood and meat of its subject. (Machele 2018, 286)

According to Mavhinga (2018, 1), since October 2017, there has been a “wave of violence in Cabo Delgado ... [and the] attacks on villages continued sporadically.” As Oladipo (2018, 1) points out, “There have been at least 50 suspected Islamist attacks” in Cabo Delgado linked to Islamic extremist from Tanzania. Oladipo (2018, 1) states: “Police in Tanzania have arrested 104 militants it accuses of planning to set up bases in neighbouring Mozambique. ... Tanzania police say they made the arrests during recent security operations in the south and east of the country. They say the suspects admitted they were going to Mozambique to join radical camps.” Oladipo (2018, 1) further reports that “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.”

A TRT World report by Durmaz (2018, 1) published on December 7, 2018, informs: “The group first appeared after a raid that killed two policemen. Since then, 283 people, 143 of those are civilians, have been killed in the insurgency, according to a local report.” Although the number may vary according to different sources, Oladipo (2018, 1) states that “ninety people have been killed in the violence and more than 1 000 families displaced.”

The response by the government has been swift, having deployed armed forces to maintain order in the area. According to Oladipo (2018, 1), “Mozambique’s government says it will be firm in dealing with those behind the attacks, in an area near some of the world’s largest untapped natural gas reserves.” The culture of fear initiated by the Islamic extremist violence is having its negative impact, particularly on Christian populations residing in the region, which is addressed below.

## The Impact of the Islamic Extremist Violence on Christian Populations Residing in the Region

Many of those killed or displaced are Christian. In an interview (Da Silva (1) 2018), Pastor Élio Martins<sup>11</sup> stated that Christian communities are directly affected by the violence brought by Islamic extremists. For instance, Martins showed an MP4 video, which was recorded on June 24, 2018, depicting 10 young men who were beheaded that Sunday morning. In the video, we see local people joining the heads of those killed to their bodies in a grotesque, horrible scene. Blood is spilt on the ground under a huge tree alongside the road. According to Martins (Da Silva (1) 2018), his church members and pastors have been directly affected and many have run for their lives hiding with their families in the forests. Their entire villages have been burnt to the ground and the livelihood slaughtered, including cats and dogs. The pictures pastors and church members showed to the author, are horrific.

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11 Not his real name; for his personal security, his family’s security and that of his church’s members.

In a seminar conducted on August 5, 2018, we spoke to several pastors whose members have been affected by the violence and killings. Surprisingly, all of them showed the courage to continue their evangelistic work and plant new churches. They said: “If we die, we die for Christ.” In another interview with Sandra Oliveira<sup>12</sup> (Da Silva (2) 2018) a local church member who recently visited Palma, said many Christian people were afraid at first. However, many of them have returned to rebuild their homes. Both persons interviewed said Christians, in general, are engaging in fervent prayers and encouraged to speak out about their faith in Jesus and establishing new churches under the trees.

Cabo Delgado province is “religiously diverse” (Pabst 2018, 2) of which most Makonde are Roman Catholic, according to Mark Pabst, senior correspondent to *Oil Security*. According to Pabst (2018, 2), “Despite international links, it appears Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama has deep roots in ethnic and religious tensions that are specific to Cabo Delgado.” Pabst (2018, 2) explains: “Some of the main ethnic groups are divided along religious lines. The Makonde are mainly Christian, and the group ranks among the most prosperous and influential in the region. It counts several army generals and Mozambique’s President Filipe Nyusi among its members.” Proportionally, over half of Cabo Delgado’s population is Muslim; the rest being Roman Catholic and of other Christian denominations. Among 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).

As Pabst (2018, 2) informs, “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.” Additionally, the government responded with what President Nyusi himself described as a “ruthless” campaign that has included hundreds of arrests (Pabst 2018, 2). Consequently, Pabst (2018, 2) is of the opinion 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) to hide in the forests or across the border into Tanzania. According to Pabst (2018, 2), these “attacks appear to have some sympathy, if not outright support, from a portion of the local population.” That is, the “government’s heavy-handed response could even increase sympathy for the militants among certain groups” (Pabst 2018, 2). Pabst (2018, 2) states that “the country’s newfound gas wealth has the potential to either improve the situation or make it worse.” According to Pabst, “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).

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12 This is not her real name for her own security.

## Conclusion

The main questions posed at the beginning of this article were answered, starting by addressing what the characteristics of the people of northern Mozambique are. That is, since ancient times, tribes inhabiting the region tend to be independent in thought and action, with a tendency to embrace dark witchcraft involved with supernatural powers, differently from the rest of the country's tribes who engage with ancestral worship. However, they accommodate other religions, such as Islam and Christianity. Due to the reality posed by the wealth of natural resources, as well as the illicit trade routes, the Mozambican Al Shabaab has developed its violent actions, perpetrated against Christians and Muslims who do not support their terrorist activities.

Although the purpose for the killings is not very clear, there are basically two reasons for the killings and violence in northern Mozambique: The *first* is the acquisition of easy wealth to fund their ideals; and the *second* is to gain increasing control over the entire area to eventually impose Sharia law in the region. The article concludes that even if religion is an intrinsic motivation for the violence in northern Mozambique, illicit gain of wealth and power are fundamental elements behind the killings and violence. Consequently, there has been a negative impact on Christianity in the region; however, Christians persevere in their worship and Christian service.

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## Interviews

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