

A War over People

An Analysis of Mozambique's Civil War

In 1975, Mozambique gained independence from Portugal after being embroiled in a ten-year liberation struggle. Soon thereafter, the newly independent country faced new instability. Mozambique's neighbor Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) sought to ward off liberation movements that benefited from their sanctuary in Mozambique. Rhodesian intelligence forces trained discontented Mozambicans who had fled to Rhodesia in 1974 and formed an armed group, first under the name Mozambican National Resistance, or *Movimento Nacional de Resistência* (MNR), and later under the moniker by which it is known to this day, Renamo.¹ From 1981 onward, Apartheid South Africa also began supporting Renamo to destabilize its neighbors, since Mozambique had become an important sanctuary for the anti-apartheid movement, the African National Congress (ANC).²

After Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 and with South African support, Renamo expanded its activities across the entire country and gained in strength. In the early 1980s, Renamo moved into the central and northern regions and occupied vast areas, thereby threatening a partition of the country between north and south along the Zambezi River valley.³ Popular discontent with Frelimo's restructuring of economic, social, and political relations, in particular in the northern provinces, fueled the ensuing war.

Frelimo and Renamo were only willing to engage in a peace process after the signing of a nonaggression pact, the N'komati Accord, between Mozambique

¹ In English writings about Mozambique at the time of the war, Renamo was often referred to as "MNR." For reasons of simplicity, I will use "Renamo" throughout this book.

² Mozambique borders Tanzania to the North; Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) to the East; and South Africa and Eswatini to the South. See the map of Mozambique in Figure 4.1.

³ Fernando Manuel, "Para compreender o presente," *Tempo (Maputo)* (1993), October 22, 1989, 6.



FIGURE 4.1. Map of provincial boundaries in Mozambique
 Note: Cartography by Sofia Jorge

and South Africa in 1984, the end of Malawi’s assistance to Renamo in 1986, and an apparent military stalemate in 1988–89. Peace negotiations culminated in the signing of the peace accord on October 4, 1992. Overall, it is estimated that the war cost over one million lives and displaced almost five million people of a total population of about thirteen million at the end of the war, both as a consequence of fighting and war-induced famine and disease (Hanlon 1996, 16). The war took a heavy toll on infrastructure, with 60 percent of primary schools and 40 percent of health clinics destroyed in 1992 (Hanlon 1996, 15).

This chapter analyzes the origins and the evolution of the war to provide context for the formation, diffusion, and mobilization of community-initiated militias. I analyze both internal divisions and regional contexts. I put particular emphasis on the relations between the armed actors and the population and the

patterns of violence that – as I explain in more detail in subsequent chapters – influenced community initiatives to form militias.

Throughout the chapter, I make three interrelated, arguments. First, the war was a war over people. The control of the population became an end in itself rather than a means to expand control over territory. Kalyvas (2006) argues that selective violence by armed groups – the incumbent or insurgent – in irregular civil wars deters people from providing intelligence to the other side, which improves security in areas under control. Violence thus serves to strengthen civilian support, which allows for the expansion of territorial control. In the late 1980s in Mozambique, however, during a time characterized by a military stalemate between the conflict parties, Frelimo and Renamo developed a different strategy. As they were unable to significantly expand their control over territory, both sides forcibly resettled the population as a strategy of war to consolidate the areas already under their control. Rather than using selective violence to change people's incentives and deter disloyalty, Frelimo and Renamo chose brute force – population resettlement – to make disloyalty impossible (Zhukov 2015). I explore the evolution of this instrumental relation with civilians and delineate its consequences for the dynamics of war.

Second, both Frelimo and Renamo attempted to consolidate their control over people by involving residents in gathering intelligence and defending the local population, which led to the militarization of society.⁴ Frelimo's counter-insurgency strategy was built on assigning military tasks to state-initiated militias who initially served political purposes. The government also trained civilians for local defense. Renamo enlisted traditional authorities and formed local police forces to ensure collaboration of the people in areas under their control. In developing this argument, I unpack how Frelimo's internal conflicts and domestic politics after independence put domestic and regime security at center stage of the party's political agenda.

Third, although Frelimo's military strategy was built on community defense, it failed to protect the population from insurgent violence. Renamo's military strategy was meant to control the local population rather than protect it from violence. Community residents thus suffered from high levels of indiscriminate and collective violence perpetrated by both sides. Due to the lack of material and ammunition in the central and northern regions, Frelimo and Renamo fought a "war of avoidance," attacking the population in zones under enemy control rather than engaging in direct battle (Legrand 1993, 98). As a consequence, community residents developed their own means of protection, such as peace zones and community-initiated militias to patrol residential areas. I analyze how characteristics of violence helped to form community-initiated militias and show how far these militias relied on preexisting social conventions for the spiritual dimension of the war.

⁴ I develop this argument in more detail in an article on auxiliary armed forces and innovations in security governance in Mozambique's civil war; see Jentzsch (2017).

The first section analyzes the conflicts that evolved within Frelimo before and after independence. These internal struggles created popular discontent, which, in many areas, fueled the war at the local level. The second section assesses the impact of regional factors that gave rise to the formation and expansion of Renamo. The third section examines how Frelimo's counterinsurgent strategy improved or deteriorated the movement's relationship with the population. To control "internal and external enemies" of the state, Frelimo militarized society and Mozambique evolved into a police state. The fourth section reviews the extent to which Frelimo's inadequate response to the threat posed by Renamo led communities to develop their own responses to Renamo. One such response was the formation of the Naparama, the independent militia that later supported Frelimo in its counterinsurgent effort in Zambézia and Nampula provinces. The final section provides a brief overview of the peace process and the legacies of the war.

4.1 ANTICOLONIAL STRUGGLE AND INDEPENDENCE

When Mozambique gained independence from Portugal in 1975, the FRELIMO liberation movement⁵ came to power, and it worked hard to retain that power. As a political movement, and subsequently as a political party, Frelimo recognized the importance of unity (De Bragança and Depelchin 1986). However, internal divisions about goals and strategies evolved, which enabled Rhodesia and Apartheid South Africa to build support for their regional agenda among discontented Mozambicans. From independence onward, the regime treated such "enemies of the revolution" harshly. Frelimo was able to consolidate its power over the long term by slowly creating a police state that made use of violence against those disloyal to its political project (Macamo 2016; Bertelsen 2016). A "politics of punishment" (Machava 2011) emerged that did not distinguish between internal and external security, giving rise to an increasing militarization of the party and society that also influenced Frelimo's counterinsurgency response to Renamo.

4.1.1 The Formation of FRELIMO and the Beginning of the Liberation Struggle

Mozambican historiography – including the way in which Frelimo has told its own story – has often been used for political purposes and is thus contested (Cahen 2008a). For Frelimo, Mozambique's official historiography has served the purpose of promoting and legitimating a unified movement and nation-state. A case in point is the beginning of the liberation struggle. FRELIMO was

⁵ I follow others by capitalizing "FRELIMO" when referring to the liberation movement and using lowercase "Frelimo" when referring to the political party that was established at the movement's Third Congress in 1977. Mozambique History Net, "FRELIMO and the Frelimo Party, 1962–1991, Dossier MZ-0011," 2012. www.mozambiquehistory.net/frelimo_62-63.php.

formed on June 25, 1962 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, with Eduardo Mondlane – who had been educated in the United States and had worked for the United Nations – as the movement’s first president.⁶ The violent liberation struggle began in 1964, with, according to the official history, the infiltration of 300 FRELIMO fighters into Mozambique from Tanzania. On September 25, 1964, FRELIMO attacked the Portuguese administrative post at Chai in the northern region of Cabo Delgado (see map in Figure 4.1 and an overview of major historical events in Table 4.1). Alberto Chipande, Minister of Defense from 1975 to 1994, supposedly fired the first shot (Muiuane 2006, 31–43). Contrary to this official account, factions of movements that were not fully integrated into FRELIMO had already launched small-scale assaults in July and August 1964 in Zambézia (Cahen 1999, 45). These contradictions about the beginning of the liberation struggle hint at Frelimo’s “victorious historiography,” which demonstrates Frelimo’s attempt at a triumphalist, coherent, and conflict-free chronicle of the liberation struggle and its aftermath (De Bragança and Depelchin 1986, 165).

Although the Portuguese government responded to the beginning of the armed struggle with heavily armed troops and a sophisticated network of secret police agents, FRELIMO gained popular support and made quick advances in Cabo Delgado, Niassa, and Tete provinces. The largest Portuguese counter-insurgency campaign – Operation “Gordian Knot” from May to August 1970 – failed due to FRELIMO’s strong support among the peasants from the Makonde, an ethnic group in Cabo Delgado (Hanlon 1984, 35).⁷ When FRELIMO advanced into the central provinces,⁸ the Portuguese responded by

⁶ There were three liberation movements before FRELIMO’s foundation. These were the National Democratic Union of Mozambique (União Democrática Nacional de Moçambique, UDENAMO), the Mozambican African National Union (MANU), and the National African Union of Independent Mozambique (UNAMI). The foundation of FRELIMO replaced all three movements in 1962. However, UDENAMO and MANU were not completely dissolved and provided a forum for those that were expelled from FRELIMO or left FRELIMO at a later stage. Many of these factions were unified into the Revolutionary Committee of Mozambique (Comité Revolucionário de Moçambique, COREMO) in 1965. See Cahen (1999) and Robinson (2006, 78–79). See also Mondlane (1969). For a critical analysis of the complicated early history of FRELIMO, see Marcum, Burke III, and Clough (2017).

⁷ Bowen (2000, 6110) points to how those early analyses of FRELIMO’s history that claim its broad popular support are not based on detailed empirical material. Thus, it is difficult to judge how much voluntary popular support FRELIMO really enjoyed and how much coercion the movement made use of.

⁸ Most of the early anticolonial activity focused on Cabo Delgado and Niassa, since Malawi impeded FRELIMO activity on its territory from 1964 onward, which made raids into Zambézia and Tete more difficult (Hedges 1989). FRELIMO managed to consolidate its power in the north and open another front in Tete province by March 1968 (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 86). In July 1972, FRELIMO moved into the central provinces of Manica and Sofala and in July 1974 (again) into Zambézia (Muiuane 2006, 167, 185). There was some FRELIMO activity in Zambézia in 1964–65, but it stopped after major logistical and political difficulties, and Alberto Mutumula, FRELIMO leader in Lugela in Alta Zambézia, was killed under mysterious circumstances in 1968 (Chichava 2007, 287–301).

TABLE 4.1. Overview of major events in recent Mozambican history

Date	Event
June 25, 1962	Formation of FRELIMO
September 25, 1964	Start of the violent liberation struggle
June 25, 1975	Independence of Mozambique
September 1979	Frelimo kills Renamo leader Matsangaíssa; Afonso Dhlakama becomes Renamo president
1980	Rhodesian independence; South Africa becomes Renamo's main sponsor
March 1982	Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe begin to provide military support to Frelimo
July 1981	Renamo reaches Inhambane
December 1981	Renamo reaches Manica
Late 1982	Renamo offensive in the Limpopo valley
December 1982	The war affects one-third of the country
August 1982	Renamo creates camps in Malawi
August 1982	Renamo crosses the Zambezi River into Zambézia and unites with the Mozambique Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionário de Moçambique, PRM)
Mid-1982	Frelimo offensive northward through Inhambane and southward through Manica and Sofala
Early 1983	Gaza and Maputo become areas of intense Renamo activity and they clash with the Frelimo army
April/May 1983	Renamo reaches Nampula
August 1983	Renamo reaches Niassa
March 16, 1984	N'komati Accords between Mozambique and South Africa
May 1984	Renamo reaches Cabo Delgado
August 1985	Frelimo attacks Renamo headquarters in Gorongosa and captures the "Gorongosa documents," which provide evidence for continued South African support
July/August 1986	Renamo offensive in Zambézia province
October 1986	End of Malawi support for Renamo
October 1986	President Samora Machel dies in an airplane crash over South Africa
Late 1986/early 1987	Frelimo counteroffensive in Zambézia province, supported by 3,000 Tanzanian troops
January 1987	Mozambique adopts IMF-sponsored structural adjustment program (Economic Rehabilitation Program/Programa de Restruturação Econômica, PRE)
December 1988	Tanzanian forces withdraw
March/April 1989	Frelimo regains control of all the district towns in Zambézia province
July 1989	Frelimo's Fifth Congress; Frelimo drops its commitment to Marxism-Leninism

(continued)

TABLE 4.1. (cont.)

Date	Event
July 1989	Frelimo launches a major offensive against Renamo's headquarters in Gorongosa
Early 1990	Frelimo army together with Zimbabwean troops step up pressure in Gorongosa and Sofala
Mid-1990	Frelimo operations resume in Tete, Sofala, Manica, and Zambézia provinces
July 1990	First round of peace negotiations
December 1990	New multiparty constitution takes effect
December 1, 1990	Partial ceasefire signed
June 1991	The Chissano government discovers a coup plot
June 1992	Twelfth and final round of peace negotiations
October 4, 1992	General Peace Agreement signed in Rome, Italy
December 1992– December 1994	United Nations Operation in Mozambique (Operação das Nações Unidas em Moçambique, ONUMOZ)
October 27–29, 1994	Presidential and parliamentary elections

massacring the population. One of the most notorious massacres occurred in December 1972, when elite troops killed 400 people from the village of Wiriamu in Tete province (Hanlon 1984, 36; Dhada 2016).⁹

The anticolonial struggle was not decided on the battlefield but ended following domestic developments in Portugal. Out of concern for Portuguese national debt and the danger of becoming embroiled in wars that could not be won, young army officers in Portugal formed the Armed Forces Movement, which overthrew the Portuguese dictatorship in April 1974 (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 106). The “Carnation Revolution,” as it was later called, accelerated the decolonization process across the Portuguese Empire, including Mozambique (Lloyd-Jones and Pinto 2003). The coup made negotiations possible between the new Portuguese government and FRELIMO, culminating in the signing of the Lusaka Accord on September 7, 1974, granting Mozambique independence nine months later. After the transitional government period, FRELIMO's then president, Samora Moisés Machel, became the first president of independent Mozambique.

4.1.2 Internal Conflict within FRELIMO

During the independence struggle, FRELIMO faced internal conflicts about the goal and strategies of the movement, but debate remains regarding the precise

⁹ Adrian Hastings, “Portuguese Massacre Reported by Priests,” *The Times*, July 10, 1973. This massacre was committed by the elite troops of the Portuguese secret service in Mozambique, the Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado (PIDE), called the *flechas* (arrows) (Hanlon 1984, 36), which received training from Rhodesia in an effort to improve the Portuguese counterinsurgency capabilities (see below). PIDE and the *sipaios* (colonial native police) are still remembered among the population as those who committed the most atrocities during the anticolonial struggle.

divisions. According to the movement itself and some analysts, the main rift was over the final objective – national independence or the socioeconomic restructuring of society. De Bragança and Depelchin (1986) – adopting the official Frelimo party language – call the first goal the “reactionary” line and the second the “revolutionary” line, which implies a class conflict within the movement between a black nationalist bourgeoisie and the revolutionary vanguard.¹⁰ Echoing de Bragança and Depelchin’s comments about Frelimo’s conflict-less “victorious historiography,” Hanlon (1984, 28) remarks that in reality, these two lines were difficult to separate. The more conservative line attracted many supporters and was not as homogenous as Frelimo attempted to portray it in its official history. Cahen (1999, 46n27) argues that rather than a conflict between the bourgeois and the revolutionary class, the divisions within FRELIMO represented a conflict with social and regional dimensions: the “rural modern merchant elite” among the Makonde ethnic group in the north was in conflict with the “urban bureaucratic petty-bourgeois elite of the Frelimo military” among the Shangaan, the *assimilados* (assimilated, Mozambicans with Portuguese privileges), and the *mulattoes* in the southern cities – these were not merchants, but worked in the bureaucracy or other services.¹¹

This internal conflict influenced how the movement defined the enemy, the tactics of armed struggle, and the type of society to be constructed in the “liberated zones” during the armed struggle against the Portuguese (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 86; Frelimo 1978, 4–21; Cahen 2008a). Much of the evolution of FRELIMO’s strategies, however, was a mixture of ideology and pragmatism. In terms of the military strategy, different factions advocated for urban uprisings, short-term insurrection in the countryside, or long-term mobilization of the rural masses. Yet developments inside and outside of Mozambique made the first two options unviable.¹² Thus, long-term guerrilla activity became the major strategy of FRELIMO’s armed struggle (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 88–89; Hanlon 1984, 27).

The evolution of FRELIMO’s goals and strategies led to the marginalization of prominent leaders with alternative visions. The conflict escalated after

¹⁰ For example, in the Central Committee’s report to the Third Congress, the party explains the differences like this: “Within our ranks, people of a capitalist frame of mind openly revealed themselves; and this unleashed a bitter political and ideological struggle inside our organisation. In the first period this took the form of differences of opinion. In reality, these differences masked the fundamental contradiction that we contained: class antagonism” (Frelimo 1978, 6).

¹¹ See also Cahen (2006). It is true that there was an important regional dimension to the conflict within FRELIMO. However, Bowen (2000, 7) demonstrates that the rural modern merchant elite who the Makonde leader N’kavandame represented was not unique to Cabo Delgado. Wealthier peasants in the central and southern provinces had similar interests to become small capitalist farmers.

¹² Urban uprisings had failed in Angola’s capital Luanda in 1961, FRELIMO’s underground network had been crushed in Lourenço Marques (“Maputo” after 1976), and spontaneous short-term insurrection had failed in Tete province.

decisions made at the 1968 Second Congress reflected what FRELIMO termed the “revolutionary line.” Lázaro N’kavandame, the leader of the Makonde in Cabo Delgado, from where many liberation fighters originated, defected to the Portuguese in 1968. He was identified by Frelimo as representing the “reactionary line.” Moreover, Uria Simango, who had hoped to become president at the Second Congress, was expelled from the movement in 1970 after the assassination of FRELIMO leader Eduardo Mondlane in Dar es Salaam in February 1969 (Cabrita 2000, chapter 11; Cahen 2008a).¹³ Those with “revolutionary” visions consolidated their power after Mondlane’s death, but conflicts continued to be suppressed rather than resolved. In 1970, Samora Machel, a representative of the “revolutionary line,” became FRELIMO president and Marcelino dos Santos vice-president.¹⁴

These internal conflicts resurfaced at independence. The Lusaka Accord granted FRELIMO a preferential position in postindependent Mozambique as the “sole and legitimate representative of the Mozambican people.” Immediately after the signing of the accords, about 250 right-wing white settlers took over the radio station and newspaper in Lourenço Marques and sought to declare independence unilaterally (Hall and Young 1997, 45). Uria Simango, who had formed a new political party after returning to Mozambique in 1974, and others called for elections during which FRELIMO would have to compete with opposition parties at independence (Cabrita 2000, 80). However, the turmoil only lasted for a few days. In coordination with the Portuguese, Rhodesians and South Africans, FRELIMO suppressed the revolt, arrested opposition leaders and sent them to reeducation camps in Niassa and Cabo Delgado provinces (Cabrita 2000, 81–84).¹⁵

¹³ The circumstances under which Mondlane died are still not completely resolved. The parcel bomb that killed Mondlane in Dar es Salaam is believed to have been built by PIDE. However, rival FRELIMO leaders were probably involved in the planning of the assassination. Frelimo considered Mondlane’s death as the culmination point of the conflict between the “two lines.” Frelimo later accused Uria Simango of conspiring with the Portuguese secret service in the planning of the assassination (Frelimo 1978, 11–12). See also Cabrita (2000, 59–60) and Hall and Young (1997, 18). Uria Simango was expelled because he failed to openly attack N’kavandame, who was accused of being involved in the assassination, and because he criticized FRELIMO’s internal struggles and socialist direction after Mondlane’s death (Cabrita 2000, 64). Simango addressed the accusations in a pamphlet that he released in November 1969, *Gloomy Situation in FRELIMO*, Dar es Salaam.

¹⁴ Representatives of the “reactionary line” – in particular, the Makonde from Cabo Delgado who had supported the early liberation struggle – backed FRELIMO in the last years of the liberation struggle. However, this was not because they came to share the same ideological views. Rather, the Makonde realized that FRELIMO was winning against the Portuguese (De Bragança and Depelchin 1986, 174). As Cahen (1999, 45) argues, the Makonde’s goal was not necessarily national independence, but a right to the land, and thus they followed whoever would wage the war to achieve this aim.

¹⁵ On the various opposition movements and how they fused with each other or supported each other during the transition period, see Robinson (2006, 92–94). Frelimo executed some of the dissidents, including Uria Simango, Joana Simeão, Mateus Gwendjere, and Lázaro N’kavandame,

4.1.3 Origins and Consequences of Frelimo Policy after Independence

Frelimo's policies that sought to restructure society and the economy after independence are often cited as a source of discontent among the population and support for Renamo.¹⁶ As the "revolutionary" camp came to dominate FRELIMO, the movement officially adopted the objective of a socialist, anti-colonialist, and antifascist revolution and the liberation of *all* of Mozambique (Hanlon 1984, 34).¹⁷ In the "liberated" zones in the northern provinces of Cabo Delgado and Niassa, FRELIMO put these ideas into practice and educated the peasants politically, formed communal villages with collective agriculture, and provided rudimentary education and health services to the villagers (Hanlon 1984, 29). Antiracism, anti-tribalism, and the negation of the very existence of ethnic groups shaped the policies to achieve national unity (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 112–13; Cahen 2000, 168). FRELIMO structures replaced the existing traditional leadership, as the movement considered the *regulados* (chieftaincies), which had been the main pillar of the colonial local administrative system, collaborators of the Portuguese.

The newly introduced economic and social policies right after independence had important consequences for the economy. FRELIMO's antiracist stance implied that it did not seek to alienate the white population. However, the nationalization of education, medicine, law, and funeral services a month after independence led to the flight of many white settlers out of fear for their businesses and personal well-being. Businesses were left behind without functioning equipment or trained managers, which shattered whole economic sectors (Hanlon 1984, 46–49).

To stop the erosion of the economy and promote unity of the Mozambican people, FRELIMO created transitional Dynamizing Groups

without trial in 1983. President Machel was concerned that Renamo's advances in Niassa province would free the dissidents and thus ordered to kill them (Robinson 2006, 164). Portugal, Rhodesia, and South Africa supported FRELIMO in the oppression of opposition movements, as they sought to ensure peace and stability in region. South Africa thus opted for accepting black majority rule in Angola and Mozambique in exchange for the safeguarding of the apartheid regime (Cabrita 2000, 80).

¹⁶ FRELIMO's policies to restructure society evolved during the liberation struggle, but, as indicated above, they became more pronounced after Mondlane's death. This is why many Renamo supporters have portrayed Mondlane as the black nationalist who was betrayed by the subsequent radicalization of the movement and still honor Mondlane as the great Mozambican liberation leader and democrat (Serapião 1985). However, interviews with Mondlane paint a more complicated picture, as he acknowledges the benefits of a socialist restructuring of society after independence. See an interview published by de Bragança and Wallerstein (1982, 121), cited in Robinson (2006, 25n18).

¹⁷ There is considerable debate over how far Frelimo's policies can be considered socialist or not. For two opposite poles of the debate, see Cahen (1993) and Saul (2005). For a critique of the debate between "revisionists" and "Frelimo sympathizers," see Dinerman (2006), the exchange between Cahen (2008b) and Dinerman (2009), and below.

(Grupos Dinamizadores, GD). These groups, consisting of eight to ten people in every village, neighborhood, and workplace, were intended to provide political education and motivation to the population. The GDs were crucial in those regions that had remained untouched by FRELIMO political activity during the liberation struggle (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 106–7). They served as party cells, administrators, local leaders, and providers of public services at the same time: “More than anything else, it was the GDs that introduced Mozambique to Frelimo and to ‘people’s democracy,’ and it was the GDs that kept the country running” (Hanlon 1984, 49).¹⁸ The mass organizations for workers, women, and youth, introduced before and after the party’s Third Congress in 1977, took over many of the GDs’ activities. In the late 1970s, Frelimo eliminated the GDs in the countryside and completely replaced them with the new party structures (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 124).

The party’s Third Congress in 1977 marked Frelimo’s official turn to Marxist-Leninist ideology, which had important implications for how the movement defined its own role vis-à-vis Mozambique’s citizens. At the congress, the party transformed itself from a mass movement into a vanguard party that served as the main body overseeing state and society (Hanlon 1984, 138). The restructuring of the economy included the “socialization of the countryside,” which meant the construction of communal villages, agricultural cooperatives, and the creation of productive state farms from abandoned settler plantations and estates (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 148). Beyond these economic transformations, Frelimo aimed at creating a “new man” to overcome the “viciousness” of colonial society and the capitalist bourgeoisie. In this vein, Frelimo abolished the remnants of the system of traditional leadership and prohibited the exercise of all forms of religion – “obscurantism” in Frelimo’s official language. Cahen (2006) sees in these economic, social, and political transformations the pursuit of an authoritarian modernization project that pursued national unity by creating a “new man” completely separated from African peasant society. Sumich (2013, 100) emphasizes the exclusionary nature of this new conception of citizenship, as only those who joined “the wider collective under Frelimo’s leadership” became “true” citizens. All others were declared “enemies of the people” (Machava 2011). Such “enemies” became targets of campaigns such as *Operação Produção* (Operation Production) and were sent to reeducation camps to ensure that all members of society contributed their labor to the collective good (Machava 2018).

As part of the economic and social policies, the construction of communal villages was Frelimo’s most ambitious and interventionist project

¹⁸ See Cahen (1985) for a critical analysis of Frelimo’s “people’s democracy” and the limits of its implementation.

in rural areas. It gave rise to a scholarly debate on the degree to which its implementation contributed to peasants' alienation from Frelimo and their inclination to support Renamo, mainly because of the contradiction between Frelimo's ambitions and the realities of their implementation. The construction of communal villages reflected the party's various economic, political, and social aims.¹⁹ Communal villages sought to modernize the countryside by resettling the previously dispersed population, thereby improving access to health care and education and increasing productivity by collectively producing cash crops.²⁰ The involvement of peasants in various revolutionary institutions provided spaces for their political indoctrination (Hanlon 1984, 122; Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 152–53). All in all, the organization of all residents into communal villages extended the state's reach into the periphery and made society "legible," similarly to such processes in Tanzania and other countries (Scott 1998). It facilitated close control over citizens to recognize and identify deviant behavior, which proved useful when internal and external security threats increased in the 1980s.

Recognizing the far-reaching interventionist nature of communal villages, many communities did not support building them, or even resisted building them outright. Nampula province saw the construction of a large number of communal villages (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 153). However, as Hanlon (1984, 128) notes, "most villages result[ed] from war and natural disaster and involve[d] a high degree of compulsion." Most villages in Nampula were created when the war reached the province, mostly by the army (Dinerman 2006, 22; Minter 1994). In Cabo Delgado, Niassa, and Tete, Frelimo superimposed the villages on the structure of colonial strategic hamlets and settled refugees from Malawi and Tanzania in these villages (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 153). In Gaza, Frelimo settled victims of the 1977 floods in communal villages (Roesch 1992).

Several reasons explain why support among the population for communal villages was low. Productivity in the new villages was low, which decreased their appeal.²¹ Peasants resisted changing their forms of production in the long

¹⁹ FRELIMO had experimented with communal villages in the "liberated zones" in Cabo Delgado and Niassa.

²⁰ Mozambique is a sparsely populated country. According to the census in 1970, the population density was twenty-six people per square mile/ten people per square kilometer. In 1980, the population density was thirty-nine people per square mile/fifteen people per square kilometer.

²¹ The strategies Frelimo used to create communal villages prioritized housing over farming, and thus the land around the villages was often not well suited for agricultural production (Hanlon 1984, 128). In my interviews, community residents frequently complained about the communal villages' bad quality of agricultural land. In Mecubúri district in Nampula, for example, a clan that had resettled to a communal village surrounded by infertile land moved to a more fertile area after complaints to the district administrator. See interview with community leader (2011-11-17-Lm15), November 17, 2011, Issipe, Mecubúri, Nampula.

term to suit being organized into agricultural cooperatives (Isaacman and Isaacman 1983, 155–56). Moreover, traditional leaders and capitalist farmers rejected resettlement. The communal villages also lacked the necessary technical and financial support, as state farms and urban projects received more government resources than communal villages and peasant farming (Hanlon 1984, 123–24; Hermele 1986). Thus, rather than strengthening the peasant sector, Frelimo's policies alienated the middle peasants and failed to adequately support poor peasants (Bowen 2000; Hanlon 1984).²²

As a consequence, contradictions arose between the ideal of the communal villages and its implementation. The highly idealistic, bureaucratic, and technocratic idea of the communal villages did not correspond with the everyday needs of the people (Cahen 1987, 51). Peasants had to leave their ancestral land and travel too far to reach their individual plots. While it could be argued that the project was driven by good humanist intentions, its implementation chiefly served the state's aim of ensuring social control (Geffray 1990, 35–36). In fact, communal villages became highly organized and vigilante groups and militias helped control the population, which contributed to the goal of forming "true" and compliant citizens (cf. Sumich 2013). Resettlement to the villages was increasingly conducted by force, which further decreased the villages' appeal (Bowen 2000, 15; Minter 1994).

These contradictions prompted a debate among scholars on the degree to which villagization fueled the war on the local level. Most prominent is Christian Geffray's (1990) study of the Erati district in Nampula province, in which he argues that Renamo destroyed villages and sent residents to their previous homes to generate popular support. However, other analysts argue that different policies were more relevant in generating Renamo support. For example, Frelimo's reliance on mechanized state farms rather than family agriculture and the failure to rebuild a trading network for peasants' surplus production created discontent (Fauvet 1990). Still others argue that Renamo's success is largely due to external support from Rhodesia and South Africa (Minter 1994). The following section explores these different arguments in more detail.

4.2 THE FORMATION AND EXPANSION OF RENAMO

There is considerable debate over the origins of the rebel movement Renamo, and in particular over the balance between external influences and internal circumstances that contributed to Renamo's emergence. The historical evidence

²² Moreover, the party made no attempts at mobilizing the important section of the middle peasantry, but rather sidelined them by advising them to hand their means of production to farmers' cooperatives (Bowen 2000, 9). At the same time, however, state support for poor peasants was limited and the cooperatives relied on the means of production and skills of the wealthier peasants.

shows that both were necessary to bring about an armed opposition movement. However, when analyzing Renamo's early history, it becomes clear that external support was more important for the early phases, while internal support was essential for later phases of the war. Significant support from Rhodesia facilitated the formation of Renamo, and Apartheid South Africa ensured the organization's survival beyond Rhodesian independence in 1980. Popular support within Mozambique became crucial in the mid-1980s when Renamo expanded to the northern provinces.

4.2.1 Regional Dynamics and Discontent among Mozambicans Abroad

The formation of Renamo was closely linked to regional political dynamics, in particular to Rhodesian counterinsurgency operations during the country's liberation struggle.²³ During the Mozambican war of independence between 1964 and 1974, FRELIMO-infiltrated areas within Mozambique provided neighboring liberation movements such as ZANLA sanctuary and ground for operations. Upon gaining independence, Mozambique continued supporting ZANLA and imposed sanctions on Rhodesia.²⁴ Renamo's roots lay in the local armed units that Rhodesia had formed and supported within Mozambique to counter the Mozambican support of Zimbabwean rebel activity (Vines 1991, 10).²⁵ The Rhodesian military and intelligence agency began its suppression of opposition activities in Mozambique long before Mozambique's independence.²⁶ In November 1973, the Rhodesian army, in cooperation with the

²³ For an introduction into Renamo's origin, aims, and regional and international support network, see Vines (1991).

²⁴ The Frelimo government closed the borders and denied Rhodesia access to the ports of Beira and Maputo in March 1976 (Vines 1991, 15–16).

²⁵ Robinson (2006, 191–101) points to an important disagreement between the chief of the Rhodesian intelligence service, Ken Flower (1987), and the researcher João Cabrita (2000) regarding the formation of Renamo. This disagreement reflects the major controversy about the history of the war – the extent to which Renamo's formation had domestic roots. In his book, Flower describes the continuity between the first counterinsurgent units formed by Rhodesia and the formation of Renamo. Cabrita, in contrast, argues that the first Renamo leader, André Matsangaíssa, who defected to Rhodesia in 1976, suggested to the Rhodesians to form Renamo. I agree with Robinson (2006, 102) that it is likely that the Rhodesians already had the idea of forming Renamo when Matsangaíssa defected in 1976. As Cahen points out (personal communication), Flower's and Cabrita's views are not entirely contradictory and the fact remains that there was no Mozambican rebel group operating before 1976. See below for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

²⁶ The Rhodesians supported the Portuguese military, advising them on the formation of local counterinsurgent groups. The Rhodesians did not have much confidence in the Portuguese response to FRELIMO's activities. Rhodesia preferred local alternatives to Portuguese troops. Rhodesian authorities began collaborating with the Portuguese to form African scouts in the mid-1960s. In March 1972, the Rhodesian Special Air Service attacked Matimbe, the FRELIMO base near Gungwe mountains, since it assumed that ZANLA was operating out of FRELIMO bases. From 1972 onward, the Rhodesian authorities advised the Portuguese on the creation of

Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization (CIO), formed a special cross-border strike force of about 1,800 men, the Selous Scouts. This group attacked ZANLA camps inside Mozambique shortly thereafter (Minter 1994, 124).²⁷ Rhodesia continued to attack ZANLA camps even after Mozambican independence in 1975.²⁸

Recruiting among exiled Mozambicans, the Rhodesians slowly built an organization that could operate independently against their enemies, so that the government could plausibly deny involvement in Mozambique's internal affairs. Instead of limiting its operations to those against ZANLA, the new organization would direct its attacks against those that *supported* the Zimbabwean liberation movements – the Mozambican government.²⁹ The CIO started a radio program – *Voz da África Livre* (Voice of Free Africa) – in July 1976 in cooperation with exiled Mozambicans.³⁰ The program aimed to reach those who had stayed in Mozambique and were stripped of the right to vote or sent to reeducation camps in northern Mozambique.³¹

Renamo was prepared to conduct its operations more autonomously soon after Mozambican independence. Its first independent operations occurred in December 1978, after the liberation war in Rhodesia had intensified (Robinson

counterinsurgent militias – the *flechas* made up of Africans who would support the security service and inform on FRELIMO activity. The Portuguese created the first *flechas* in Angola, where they were almost entirely composed of ex-combatants from the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, MPLA). However, they did not begin to operate on the ground in Mozambique before 1974 (Coelho 2002, 141, 145–46). The Portuguese also formed all-African counterinsurgent units, the Special Groups (Grupos Especiais, GEs), which mainly operated in central Mozambique. For an overview of African involvement in Portuguese counterinsurgency campaigns in Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau, see Coelho (2002).

²⁷ Ron Reid-Daly (1999), who had founded the Selous Scouts on the model of the Portuguese *flechas*, wrote a memoir about the story behind the formation and operation of the special troops.

²⁸ For an overview of attacks on ZANLA camps, largely conducted by Selous Scouts in 1976, see Robinson (2006, 99–101).

²⁹ For this new organization, the Rhodesian agencies recruited many of those who had emigrated during the transition period to Rhodesia – former PIDE agents, soldiers (among them many Africans) and white Portuguese settlers (Hanlon 1984, 219–20). Among those first recruits were many of Renamo's later leaders. Orlando Cristina, a former PIDE agent who had infiltrated FRELIMO in Dar es Salaam, later became Renamo secretary-general. Renamo's first president from 1977 onward, André Matsangaissa, was a former FRELIMO commander who fled a reeducation camp that he had been sent to for theft. Evo Fernandes, who had PIDE links, became the first European spokesperson in Lisbon.

³⁰ The station had broadcasts in English, Portuguese, Swahili, and local languages. It was run by Orlando Cristina and aimed to imitate ZANLA's anti-Rhodesian radio station Voice of Zimbabwe, which broadcast via the Mozambican radio station Radio Moçambique (Vines 1991, 143n16; Cabrita 2000, 139–43).

³¹ Frelimo called these individuals the “compromised” – all those that had supported the colonial regime voluntarily. President Samora Machel only rehabilitated the “compromised” and returned full rights to them in 1982 (Hanlon 1984, chapter 16).

2006, 105–6).³² By 1979, Renamo operated from within Mozambique, from camps close to the Rhodesian border, and its activities concentrated on Manica and Sofala provinces (Hanlon 1984, 221). Attacks in these first years of Renamo activity included ambushes on civilian buses and army vehicles and attacks on Frelimo positions and other military targets.

However, pressure from the Mozambican army and developments within Rhodesia made Renamo's future uncertain. After the Lancaster House talks on the future of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia had opened in London in September 1979, the Mozambican army started an offensive against Renamo's base on top of the Gorongosa mountain in Sofala province. During this offensive, Renamo leader Matsangaíssa was killed. When the Lancaster House agreement was signed and Zimbabwean elections were set for February 1980, the CIO head for Mozambique asked the remaining Renamo men in Zimbabwe where they wanted to go – to South Africa as exiles or to Mozambique; they all chose Mozambique. Renamo troops within Mozambique were sent to the Sitatonga base in southern Manica. However, the Frelimo army captured the Sitatonga base in late June 1980, killing almost 300 men and capturing 300 more, thus largely destroying the Renamo organization (Hanlon 1984, 221).

Despite Frelimo pressure and the end of Rhodesian support, Renamo initially survived thanks to increased South African support. Following an internal power struggle that killed further Renamo troops and commanders, Afonso Dhlakama became the organization's new president. Dhlakama was a former FRELIMO commander who was ousted from the army at the same time as his predecessor, the recently assassinated Matsangaíssa. Renamo secretary-general Orlando Cristina supported Dhlakama and ensured South African support for Renamo (Hanlon 1984, 222). The South Africans provided training at a camp in the Transvaal and resumed broadcast of the Renamo radio station. South African support via equipment and weapons enabled Renamo to resume activity in most of the sparsely populated areas of Manica and Sofala provinces by 1981 (Hanlon 1984, 225).³³

³² There is no consensus on the exact start date of the war between Frelimo and Renamo. Various civil war datasets use different dates. For example, the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, which is based on the definition of an armed conflict as one with more than twenty-five battle-related deaths per year, defines 1977 as the start date (Gleditsch et al. 2002; Themnér and Wallensteen 2012; Themnér 2012). The Correlates of War Intra-state War Dataset uses a definition of civil war as a threshold of 1,000 battle-related combatant deaths and codes the Mozambican war as starting on October 21, 1979 (Singer and Small 1994). Elbadawi and Sambanis (2002) code 1976 as the start year, and their definition of civil war is based on 1,000 deaths over the duration of the war.

³³ South African involvement in Mozambique had begun much earlier than 1980, going back to October 1977, when South African soldiers supported the Rhodesian counterinsurgency in Gaza province (Robinson 2006, 104). By 1979, South Africa also supported Renamo directly with weapons and supplies, and Renamo had political representations in Johannesburg (Robinson 2006, 113). South Africa had prepared in detail for a more active role in Mozambique and the support of Renamo before the Lancaster House conference. Intelligence reports show how South

4.2.2 Renamo's Expansion across Mozambique

Starting out as a small counterinsurgent force, Renamo grew substantively with South African support.³⁴ Membership within Renamo increased from 76 in September 1977 to more than 900 by the end of 1978 (Cabrita 2000, 149, 154). When South Africa became Renamo's main external supporter in early 1980, the organization had about 2,000 fighters (Robinson 2006, 122), growing to 7,000 in December 1980 and 10,000 in February 1981 (Johnson, Martin, and Nyerere 1986, 19). Cahen (2019, 144) estimates a troop size of 12,300 by the end of 1984.

In the early 1980s, the war spread from the center to the southern and northern regions, affecting approximately one-third of the country by December 1982 (see Table 4.1 for an overview of important events).³⁵ In 1981, Renamo's area of operation was limited to the territory between the Beira corridor to the north and the Save River to the south. In July 1981, a contingent of 300 men crossed into Inhambane province further south (Cabrita 2000, 192–94). By December 1981, another contingent headed by the commander Calisto Meque had advanced to northern Manica province close to Tete province (Cabrita 2000, 199). During the first half of 1982, Renamo reestablished its headquarters in the Gorongosa mountains in northern Sofala, because the Frelimo army had destroyed Renamo's base in Chicarre in southern Manica close to the Zimbabwean border. While a Renamo offensive in the Limpopo valley in the south aiming to cut the capital Maputo off from the rest of the country failed in late 1982,³⁶ the creation of

African agencies made short- and long-term plans to influence the political and economic situation in Mozambique via propaganda, manipulating ethnic divisions, and attacks on logistical infrastructure and economic targets in 1979. In contrast to the Rhodesians, however, the South Africans did not want any operations to be traceable to South Africa. While the Lancaster House talks were ongoing, South Africa discussed a political/economic and a military policy option, of which the military option ultimately prevailed. The political/economic policy option aimed for close economic cooperation so that the states in the region would completely depend on South Africa and not go to war. The military option aimed at economic and political destabilization that would eventually lead to the overthrow of rival governments. See Robinson (2006, 115–17, 119).

³⁴ Renamo was not the only opposition group after independence. There were opposition groups based in Cabo Delgado, Zambézia, and Lisbon, conducting mostly propaganda and low-level military activity. However, none of these groups gained the support and grew in the same manner as Renamo. The most significant of these groups for this study is the Mozambique Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionário de Moçambique, PRM), also known as the *África Livre* movement. It was based in Zambézia and united with Renamo and then later split again from Renamo. See Robinson (2006, 109–10) and Chichava (2007, 401–2).

³⁵ Joseph Hanlon, "Mozambicans Learn to Live with the Silent War," *The Guardian*, December 30, 1982, 5.

³⁶ Robinson (2006, 157), emphasizing South Africa's influence on Renamo activity, suggests that the Limpopo valley offensive failed because South Africa decided not to provide the necessary support to take Maputo. This decision was due to their preference of using

camps in Malawi in August 1982 proved successful for the extension of the northern fronts to Tete and Zambézia provinces (Hanlon 1984, 226).³⁷ However, Mozambican Foreign Minister Joaquim Chissano's successful initiative to end Malawian support to the rebels and the army's capture of the main rebel base in Zambézia curtailed Renamo activity in the north (Hanlon 1984, 226–27).

In response, Renamo started another offensive to move north in early 1983, finally reaching all northern provinces by early 1984. The organization sought to secure supply routes by land, air, and sea.³⁸ Renamo also reactivated the Malawi bases and spread across Zambézia and into Nampula and Niassa provinces. About 350–500 men entered Nampula in April 1983 from the Renamo base near the Namuli mountains in Zambézia province (Cabrita 2000, 218; Do Rosário 2009, 305).³⁹ In August 1983, a contingent of 150 men from the Milange base in Zambézia crossed into Niassa province and established a base there. In May 1984, Renamo reached Cabo Delgado. By mid-1984, the war had reached all ten provinces of Mozambique.

4.2.3 Renamo's Goals and Strategies

Rhodesian and South African support shaped Renamo's goals and strategies from the beginning, albeit in slightly different directions (Hanlon 1984, 227–28). Rhodesia's interest in Renamo tended to focus on the gathering of intelligence on the Zimbabwean liberation movements. Thus, the Rhodesians had to foster a relatively good relationship with the local population and only conducted small-scale attacks. South Africa, in contrast, was more interested in destabilization and the destruction of economic targets. It therefore did not require such close cooperation with the local population.

Renamo as a tool of foreign policy, which implied destabilizing rather than overthrowing the Mozambican government.

³⁷ Renamo's crossing into Zambézia was facilitated by the organization's fusion with the Zambézia-based opposition group, the PRM (Chichava 2007, 405–7). In a letter to the former FRELIMO guerrilla and PRM's leader, Gimo Phiri, Orlando Cristina argued for the unification of the opposition groups to ensure the country's future (Chichava 2007, 405–6). On August 11, 1982, Renamo crossed the Zambezi River near Caia with about 500 men and joined the PRM in Zambézia. Gimo Phiri became vice-president of Renamo. See Chapter 5.

³⁸ For example, Renamo's crossing into Cabo Delgado may also have been influenced by the potential access to a supply route from Saudi Arabia or Oman via the Comoros Islands to northern Mozambique (Robinson 2006, 179). The sweeping across Zambézia after the end of Malawian support in 1986 was also influenced by the need to access the coast and receive South African shipments.

³⁹ Renamo units crossed into Ribaué district and advanced east along the Nacala railway. The first Renamo manifestation in Nampula was in May 1983 in Iapala locality in Ribaué district (Viera Pinto 1984, 1, cited in Dinerman 2001, 51).

Nevertheless, there is ample evidence that Renamo's sponsors and leaders never had a unified view of the ultimate goal of Renamo's activities. They did not expect that Renamo would develop its own independent goals, which also changed over time. Even within the Rhodesian intelligence community, aims varied from intelligence gathering, destabilization, to even considering Renamo as an alternative Mozambican government (Robinson 2006, 108). Similarly, among the South African security forces and the Apartheid government, conflict emerged between different objectives, which came into conflict and shaped the changes in South African security policy toward Mozambique in the 1980s.⁴⁰

Renamo's leadership defined its own goals more distinctly after the group's survival was secured through increased South African support, and after the movement sought closer contacts to the population within Mozambique following Zimbabwe's independence (Cahen 2008b, 164). In 1981, the head of Renamo's external relations, Orlando Cristina, and Renamo's European spokesperson, Evo Fernandes, wrote a *Manifesto and Program of Renamo* (Renamo 1988), which clearly positioned Renamo as a pro-West, anticommunist organization. The devised goals included multiparty democracy, private enterprise, and rule of law (Vines 1991, 77). Orlando Cristina and Renamo's president Afonso Dhlakama also conducted a tour through Europe to win international support and credibility in 1980 and 1981. In mid-1982, a National Council was formed as a representative political body.⁴¹

The implementation of Renamo's objectives on the local level implied a complete reversal of Frelimo's policies. Attacks were targeted at infrastructure and personnel of the Frelimo state: schools and health posts, party secretaries, and members of the GD. Renamo mobilized the people to abandon communal villages and move back to their area of origin. In the surrounding areas of Renamo bases, the rebels reinstated traditional leaders (calling them *mambos* in many areas) to mobilize support from the local population. Within Renamo bases, all types of religion could be practiced without punishment.⁴²

⁴⁰ Robinson (2006) identifies the conflicting positions as the minimalist (economic cooperation and dependence), maximalist (destabilization), and the putschist (government overthrow) position. For an overview of South Africa's foreign policy during the 1980s, see Pfister (2005). For perspectives on the war in Mozambique from a regional standpoint, see, for instance, Davies (1985), Johnson, Martin, and Nyerere (1986, 19), Legum (1988), and Chan (1990).

⁴¹ The council, headed by Afonso Dhlakama and Orlando Cristina, was comprised of twelve men, representing different departments, and later reduced to ten members, one from each region; it was generally considered a weak, basic structure as titles and portfolios changed continuously (Vines 1991, 80–81).

⁴² Frelimo had abandoned the system of traditional authorities right after independence, since it accused traditional leaders of having collaborated with the colonial state. Moreover, Frelimo sought to abandon "obscurantism" in society – all types of religion including traditional religion and traditional healing.

However, Renamo's military activities were at odds with its political ideas, which limited its ability to recruit volunteers. Renamo's first recruits came from the Ndau speakers in Manica and Sofala provinces (Vines 1991).⁴³ The first Renamo leader Matsangaíssa's appeal to traditional symbols granted him the support of the local population.⁴⁴ Later, and in other areas, however, Renamo's increasing use of indiscriminate violence and limited attempts of political education made voluntary recruitment difficult. Renamo's main strategy became the abduction of young men, including many children (Hanlon 1984, 229).⁴⁵ Military units often brought the new recruits to bases far away from their homes, so that flight was not an option. Leaders provided limited political training for those that could read and write and extensive military training for others. Renamo's promises of immediate economic benefits and future positions of power – and in many cases also threat of punishment – convinced the abducted to stay with the armed group (Vines 1991, 95).

Renamo's limited political structure and efforts of mobilization led analysts to conclude that "Renamo was first and foremost a military organization" (Finnegan 1992, 74). While Renamo's political organization was relatively weak, its military organization was strong. The organization had a centralized military hierarchy, which was supported by South Africa's supply of a sophisticated radio network (Vines 1991, 82). Afonso Dhlakama was the commander-in-chief, assisted by a fifteen-member military council composed of three chiefs-of-staff for the northern, central, and southern zones, ten provincial commanders, and Dhlakama's personal staff. Provinces were subdivided into two to three regional commands. One regional command consisted of a

⁴³ In the beginning, many of the higher ranks within Renamo were Ndau speakers, and Renamo soldiers reported that they had to learn Ndau in certain bases, in particular in Gorongosa. The Ndau were known for their "warrior abilities." The predominance of Ndau in Renamo's leadership led to a debate in how far Renamo was an ethnic movement. Some ethnic tensions emerged within the movement – for example, in Zambézia province between the Ndau commander Calisto Meque and the largely non-Ndau rank and file. However, most observers argue that Renamo diversified its leadership over time and ethnic tensions subsided. The early predominance of Ndau resulted from the location in which Rhodesia recruited fighters for its counter-insurgency force. See Vines (1991, 84–85) and Finnegan (1992, 66). For a critique of the view of Renamo as an ethnic or tribalist movement, see Cahen (2000).

⁴⁴ Vines (1991, 74–75) calls the appeal to traditional symbols the "Matsangaíssa myth." To explain Matsangaíssa's death, many people tell the story that the Renamo leader sought the support of a spirit medium (*mhondoro*), which provided him with magical powers that would make him and his followers immune to bullets. When his soldiers did not respect the rules that ensured protection, the Frelimo military managed to kill Matsangaíssa and many members of his group.

⁴⁵ At the time of their abduction, 4,334 Renamo soldiers (19.7 percent of total ex-Renamo fighters) and 3,073 government soldiers were aged between ten and fourteen and can be considered child soldiers (Barnes 1997, 17).

brigade, which consisted of several battalions (about 250 men), companies (100–150 men), platoons (30 men), and sections (10 men).⁴⁶

The construction of Renamo bases reflected the group's centralized military hierarchy. Casa Banana in the Gorongosa district of Sofala province was Renamo's headquarters until the Zimbabwean recapture of the base on August 28, 1985. Bases were situated in deep forests close to a river for water supply, and huts were dispersed under trees. Many control posts limited access to the center of the base where the main commander stayed. There was a clear separation between Renamo soldiers and the population. The civilian population did not have access to the actual base, but lived in concentric circles around it, thus serving as a disguise for the base and as a "human shield" (Vines 1991, 91; Geffray 1990).⁴⁷ In these areas, the population was closely controlled by the locally recruited police force, the *mujeeba*, that was armed with machetes and knives. The *mujeeba* worked closely together with *mambos* to collect food and intelligence for the main base, and at times also went on missions with the armed force (Gersony 1988, 24; Vines 1991, 92–93).

The areas in which Renamo established military bases were part of the organization's "control zones." Control zones were one of three strategic areas that Gersony (1988) identified in a study of the refugee situation and Renamo's human rights violations during the war.⁴⁸ Gersony identified the following strategic areas: tax zones, control zones, and destruction zones. Tax zones were areas in which Renamo soldiers collected food contributions from the population and abducted women to rape them. Control zones were areas in which the population was involved in food production for Renamo soldiers and assisted in the transport of supplies to the bases. In tax and control zones, Renamo did not – or only in a very limited manner – supply any services in exchange for food, goods, and services received. Destruction zones included villages that experienced frequent Renamo attacks until they were completely destroyed and their residents had fled.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ The structure below the regional commanders is not as clear as the higher command and there might have been regional variation (Vines 1991, 81).

⁴⁷ Vines (1991, 92–93) notes that this version of a base is a regional variation of Renamo's bases in the north, and in southern regions, where bases were more mobile, combatants lived further away from the population.

⁴⁸ The "Gersony Report," as it is often referred to, was one of the first studies conducted to estimate the number of deaths caused by the war. The findings of the report, which accused Renamo of large-scale human rights violations, subsequently shaped US policy toward Renamo. While conservative groups had supported Renamo for some years, official US foreign policy toward Mozambique geared in favor of a solution of the conflict after the report's publication. See Vines (1991).

⁴⁹ These zones compare to Kalyvas' (2006) zones of territorial control in the following way: Control zones are areas under full control, tax zones are areas under partial control, and destruction zones are areas in which control is contested. In the latter zone, indiscriminate violence is common.

Renamo thus established relations with the population that were largely characterized by the – calculated – use of force. Abductions, mutilations, and executions were widespread in destruction zones and used for punishment in tax and control zones (Gersony 1988). Frelimo and some reporters characterized Renamo as “armed bandits,” implying the arbitrary, unpolitical nature of their violence. However, Renamo’s use of violence had a clear strategic goal. Renamo sought to communicate the group’s willingness to dominate by “spreading fear” and demonstrating its “power to hurt” (Wilson 1992, 533; Hultman 2009). Renamo’s use of violence had “ritualistic elements which the perpetrators – who in such circumstances see themselves as some kind of brotherhood socially discrete from the victims – believe provides or imputes value or power into the activity” (Wilson 1992, 531). Violence was always witnessed and “survivors released to tell the horrific tale” (Wilson 1992, 532–33). This strategy cemented Renamo’s control (Wilson 1992, 537).

However, many commentators have remarked that the character and purpose of violence varied substantially across Mozambique. Some early analyses of the war emphasized that there was a difference between violence in the northern and violence in the southern regions. Due to the Frelimo strongholds in the south and Renamo’s difficulty at maintaining occupied areas, rebel activity was reportedly more brutal in that region than in the north, where Renamo could count on voluntary supporters among the peasant population (Roesch 1992, 464; Finnegan 1992, 72). Areas in which Renamo had attained a certain level of administrative control or areas of total opposition to Renamo did not see high levels of (ritualistic) violence (Wilson 1992, 534).⁵⁰ In the northern regions where Renamo’s control was less precarious, abduction and forced resettlement of the population to the areas’ surrounding bases were more common than atrocities and homicides.

Nevertheless, due to constraints on the availability of information on violent events during the war, there has not been a comprehensive and systematic analysis of patterns of violence across the entire country. Other analysts therefore criticize the neat distinction between the characterization of violence in the northern and southern regions. Morier-Genoud (2018), for example, shows that in the southern province of Inhambane Renamo could benefit from early popular support, as it tapped into preexisting conflicts within and between communities, which presumably shaped the rebels’ perpetration of violence. Cahen (2019) shows, relying on internal Renamo documents from the central region of Mozambique, that Renamo commanders took great care in treating “their” local population respectfully, even if they did so in an authoritarian manner.

Overall then, Renamo evolved into a well-organized military organization that used violence against civilians strategically to expand its control over the

⁵⁰ This confirms the theoretical expectations of Kalyvas’ (2006) theory.

population. In central and northern regions, however, Renamo relied more on abduction and resettlement than on atrocities to intimidate the population. Renamo's rule based on fear raised the question whether Renamo could ever benefit from genuine popular support, or whether its success would always depend on external resources.

4.2.4 The Relation between External and Domestic Sources of War

Frelimo's internal conflicts and economic policies after independence and Renamo's destructive military strategy, limited political goals, and dependence on external resources generated an intense debate on the origins of Renamo's success among scholars of Southern African politics. In 1989, Gervase Clarence-Smith published a review of recent books on the failure of Frelimo's socialist project and the consequences for the war in Mozambique. The publication of Clarence-Smith's article triggered a lively dispute over the size of Renamo's popular support base.⁵¹ Clarence-Smith (1989) identifies the villagization program as a major source of opposition to Frelimo's rural policies, which Renamo was able to exploit.

In fierce critiques of Clarence-Smith's analysis, published in the same journal, two observers contest the notion that there was any popular support for Renamo. Minter (1989), relying on Gersony (1988), argues that Renamo's exclusive aim was the forceful extraction of resources. Minter's (1994) later published book strengthened the case for a destabilization war pursued by Apartheid South Africa without an apparent domestic base within Mozambique.⁵² Fauvet (1989) claims that there is no correlation between the number of people living in communal villages in a particular province by late 1980 and the subsequent strength of Renamo in that province. Thus, he concludes, the villagization program cannot explain Renamo success in these areas.

In a more nuanced analysis, Roesch (1989) concedes that forced resettlement created disaffection with Frelimo, and Renamo was able to mobilize the support of discontented traditional authorities. However, Roesch maintains that "Frelimo's loss of popular support and the renewed ascendancy of traditional authorities would not, by itself, have precipitated the present level of armed conflict" (Roesch 1989, 20). Disenchantment with Renamo's widespread

⁵¹ The books that Clarence-Smith reviewed included Cahen's *Mozambique. La révolution implosée*, a special issue of the journal *Politique Africaine, Mozambique. Guerre et nationalismes*, and Peter Meyns' edited volume *Agrargesellschaften im portugiesisch-sprachigen Afrika* (Cahen 1987; *Politique Africaine* 1988; Meyns 1988). All three volumes analyze failures of Frelimo's policies for the rural peasant population.

⁵² In his book, Minter (1994) compares the civil wars in Angola and Mozambique, asking the counterfactual question: If the rebel groups had not received external support, would there have been a war in both countries? He comes to the conclusion that a war in Angola would have been more likely than in Mozambique.

destruction and violence and an increased system of force put in place by Renamo signifies that Renamo is “not the counter-revolutionary mass that Clarence-Smith’s review might lead one to believe” (Roesch 1989, 21).

In a defense of the argument that domestic factors fueled the war, Cahen (1989) states that the war transformed itself from a war of aggression into a civil war in the early 1980s. The urban and technocratic character of Frelimo’s policies created dissent that the one-party state had made impossible to voice in a peaceful manner. Cahen acknowledges that without Rhodesian and South African support, opposition to Frelimo would not have expressed itself in the most violent form of resistance – war. However, without Renamo’s popular support, South Africa could not have created the kind of movement it did. Consequently, an end of South African support would not equal an end to the war.

This debate has shaped the historiography of the war in Mozambique in lasting ways.⁵³ For instance, it influenced discussions on the correct characterization of the armed conflict as a “civil war” or “war of aggression/destabilization.”⁵⁴ However, as Cahen (2000, 172) points out, much of the polemic has not been so much about “the nature of the war as with the nature of Renamo.” Thus, he argues, while “peasant revolt” may not be the right label for Renamo, the war could still be called a civil war (Cahen 2000, 173). Whether scholars see the primary origin of the war in external aggression or domestic discontent, they generally agree, however, that domestic conflicts fed into the war.

What then facilitated the continuation of war was more an opposition to the Frelimo government than support for Renamo. The major lesson to be drawn from the evidence presented for the respective arguments is that there was considerable variation in the level of Renamo’s popular support across regions and over time. My argument is thus not about whether internal or external factors were decisive in fueling Renamo violence, but what explains regional variation in the formation and spread of violent actors. Domestic and localized conflicts influenced patterns of support in various areas (Geffray 1990; Lubkemann 2005). Internal factors played a larger role after South Africa took over the sponsorship of Renamo and the rebel movement demanded more political autonomy. This regional and temporal variation implies that local

⁵³ For example, the debate gave rise to a limited number of studies that focused on the internal characteristics of Renamo and its dynamics of violence (Hall 1990; Young 1990; Vines 1991). More recent publications are also shaped by this debate, even though they focus more on the nature and evolution of Frelimo’s political project (Dinerman 2006, 2009; Cahen 2008a).

⁵⁴ This discussion emerged primarily between João Cabrita who advocated for “civil war” as the correct label and Paul Fauvet who argued that “civil war” would not take into account the importance of external aggression. See the discussion on the internet discussion network H-Luso-Africa from November and December 2005 under the thread “Civil war vs. Post-independence conflict,” www.h-net.org/~lusoafrica/. By referring to the Mozambican war as a “civil war” throughout this book, I emphasize the internal dynamics but do not aim to negate external influences.

support for Renamo did not necessarily reflect “genuine” support for the movement’s agenda, but rather an expression of discontent with Frelimo or with local conflicts that people sought to solve through their participation in Renamo (Roesch 1989; Chichava 2007; Do Rosário 2009; Morier-Genoud 2018).

4.3 FRELIMO’S RESPONSE TO RENAMO

Although Frelimo had fought a guerrilla war itself during the liberation struggle, the regime was frequently confounded in its response to the threat posed by Renamo. Frelimo realized the seriousness of the threat when it became clear that Apartheid South Africa was providing major support to Renamo. The regime mobilized external support from neighboring countries and internal support from the people for its various state-initiated vigilante groups and militias to supplement the weak army. However, external support and the militarization of society failed in significantly curbing Renamo’s violence.

4.3.1 War against Internal and External Enemies

Efforts to counter the threat posed by Renamo began in earnest in 1981, framed as a response to the aggression by South Africa.⁵⁵ The Mozambican government garnered regional support for an offensive to the north and south of Mozambique,⁵⁶ and Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe provided military support starting in March 1982 (Robinson 2006, 142).⁵⁷ Renamo escaped southeast through Gaza province to northern Maputo province; Gaza and Maputo became important areas of Renamo activity and clashes with the army in early 1983 (Robinson 2006, 155) (see map in Figure 4.1). However, Renamo also pushed north, reaching Zambézia in 1982 and Nampula in 1983 (Cahen 2018).

Alarmed by increased Renamo activity in early 1983 and its inability to curb the violence, the Mozambican government reached out to South Africa. Frelimo initiated the first of several talks that would lead to the N’komati Accords with South Africa in March 1984.⁵⁸ The main aim of the accord was to end the respective government’s (in-)direct assistance to opposition movements in the

⁵⁵ “Mozambique: Frelimo Draws the Battleline,” *Africa (London)* (116), April 1981, 38–39.

⁵⁶ With this support, Frelimo prepared for a major offensive northward through Inhambane and southward through Manica and Sofala province in mid-1982. Cabrita (2000, 206–10) suggests that Renamo’s expansion into Tete and Zambézia in August 1982 might also have been a strategy to force redeployment of the Frelimo army and lift the pressure off Manica, Sofala, and Inhambane.

⁵⁷ Tanzanian troops helped to protect the border to Zimbabwe in Manica province, and Zimbabwean troops were stationed along the Beira corridor. Mozambican troops also received training from Portugal (Robinson 2006, 143).

⁵⁸ Mozambique and South Africa signed the *Agreement on Non-Aggression and Good Neighbourliness between the Government of the People’s Republic of Mozambique and the*

other country, though Renamo and the ANC were not directly named in the accord.⁵⁹ Samora Machel also tried to convince many of the western states to grant support to the Mozambican government and deny any support to Renamo. While the talks advanced, both the Mozambican and the South African governments continued their respective military activity. Frelimo had major successes against Renamo in southern Mozambique – particularly in Inhambane and Gaza provinces – in late 1983. South Africa prepared a potential end of support for Renamo and stepped up the delivery of military supplies.⁶⁰

Yet the N'komati Accord did not bring peace. Renamo increased the number of attacks, in particular around Maputo and the border to Malawi in Tete, Nampula, and Niassa provinces (Robinson 2006, 177–78). The war continued in all three Mozambican regions.⁶¹ While in 1984 and 1985 Renamo activity focused on the south and north, Frelimo's counterinsurgency campaign prepared a major assault on Renamo's main bases in Gorongosa in the central region of Sofala province.⁶² In August 1985, Frelimo attacked Renamo headquarters in Gorongosa, with support from Zimbabwean paratroopers.⁶³

Frelimo's offensive in central Mozambique led to a fierce response by Renamo and a subsequent intensification of the war in Zambézia province. In mid-1986, Renamo was on the defensive. Though the rebels had recaptured

Republic of South Africa on March 16, 1984. For a reprint of the accord see Armon, Hendrickson, and Vines (1998, 35–37).

⁵⁹ The South Africans agreed to engage in the talks since the destabilization policy in Mozambique and Angola had failed. The South African government realized that they would have to pursue more diplomatic strategies throughout the region (Vines 1991, 20; Robinson 2006, 172).

⁶⁰ The South African defense forces prepared Renamo in such a way as to ensure a long-lasting war of economic destruction and destabilization in order to secure their interests in the region after a nonaggression pact (Robinson 2006, 175–76).

⁶¹ Peace talks between delegations sent by Frelimo and Renamo to Pretoria in South Africa after the N'komati Accord did not result in a ceasefire as planned, as the Renamo delegation pulled out of the talks in October 1984 (Vines 1991, 23). This was probably due to conflicts among the South African elites, during which the “maximalists” – those that supported further destabilization in Mozambique – prevailed over the “minimalists” – those that preferred a settlement and close economic relations to the neighbor states (Robinson 2006, 188–89). Conflicts about the objectives within Renamo and influences of Renamo's international support network, in particular in Portugal, might also have played a role (Vines 1991, 24; Robinson 2006, 190).

⁶² Frelimo was relatively successful in Zambézia, and Sofala and Manica did not see much Renamo activity in the latter half of 1984. In early 1985, Renamo attacked targets in Tete and Nampula province and on the border between Zambézia and Sofala provinces (Robinson 2006, 191, 200).

⁶³ The base at Maringué was captured on August 23, 1985, and the headquarters of Casa Banana on August 28, which resulted in the capture of the “Gorongosa documents” – desk diaries that detailed the headquarter operations and confirmed continued South African support (Robinson 2006, 206, 209). Cahen's collection of internal Renamo documents shows, however, that South African support was sparser than is suggested by the documents Robinson relies on for his analysis (Cahen 2018, 2019).

their main base Casa Banana in February 1986, Zimbabwean troops supporting the Mozambican government retook it a few months later. Frelimo prevailed in Nampula, Manica, Sofala, and the Limpopo valley, and the military put an end to the “virtual siege” of Maputo (Robinson 2006, 213–14, 217). However, support from Malawi and the channeling of South African supplies through Malawi facilitated the start of the Renamo offensive across Zambézia in July and August 1986. When Malawi came under diplomatic pressure from Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania for its support of Renamo, it expelled Renamo troops, which increased rebel activity in Zambézia province after October 1986 (Munslow 1988, 30).

After President Samora Machel’s death in October 1986, the new president Joaquim Chissano stepped up military pressure on Renamo again and tried to win the war. Machel died in an airplane crash on his return from South Africa on October 19, 1986 under mysterious circumstances (Fauvet and Mosse 2003).⁶⁴ The subsequent government offensive under Chissano’s leadership in Zambézia province in late 1986 and early 1987 and the end of Malawian support for Renamo put the rebels on the defensive.⁶⁵ In the south, Renamo perpetrated the infamous Homoine massacre in Inhambane province on July 18, 1987, where more than 400 people died during the attack and the subsequent fighting (Finnegan 1992, 182; Armando 2018; Morier-Genoud 2018).⁶⁶

In sum, although Frelimo’s response to Renamo looked promising in the short term, government advances were not sustainable. Renamo’s two major offensives – in the Limpopo valley in 1982 and across Zambézia in 1986 – led to Frelimo counteroffensives in central Mozambique in 1985 and Zambézia in late 1986 and 1987. However, the Frelimo army was not able to hold all the towns and localities it recaptured from Renamo. The increased level of atrocities in the south and other Renamo operations in the central and northern regions strengthened Renamo’s position. This led to a military stalemate in 1988; the Mozambican government realized that the war could only be ended by a negotiated settlement.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ The circumstances of the plane crash gave rise to many theories that Machel’s death was not an accident. In addition to South Africa, individuals within Frelimo had an interest in Machel’s death after he had announced a restructuring of the army, was in favor of a negotiated settlement and expressed concerns about the economic liberalization of the country. Among those who were most critical of Machel’s policies were nationalist military commanders who benefited from their status in the army, the war economy, and economic liberalization. See Robinson (2006) and Fauvet and Mosse (2003).

⁶⁵ Tanzanian and Zimbabwean troops and Special Forces supported the operations in Zambézia and Sofala provinces.

⁶⁶ “South Africa, Mozambique Renew Ties,” *Facts on File World News Digest*, October 2, 1987.

⁶⁷ Karl Maier, “The Military Mix,” *Africa Report* (July–August), 1988, 56.

4.3.2 Challenges to Frelimo's Counterinsurgency Strategy

In the mid-1980s, it became clear that Frelimo's campaign against the "enemies of the revolution" and the strategy to delegitimize any opposition in independent Mozambique had failed. The government attempted to minimize Renamo's and other opposition groups' threat to domestic stability and denied that internal factors contributed to the unrest (Cahen 2000, 164). It also refused to admit that opposition groups had any support from the population. From the very beginning of armed activity after independence, Frelimo officials referred to the perpetrators as "armed bandits" to downplay their political relevance. In archival documents, government agencies also spoke of "marginals" that were involved in enemy activity.⁶⁸ Frelimo mobilized the whole population to be vigilant about these "marginals" and organized people into state-initiated vigilante groups and militias. When that strategy proved unsuccessful, the army further undermined the government's stance by engaging in human rights violations such as forced recruitment and the forced resettlement of the population.

Although the Mozambican state military grew out of a guerrilla army that fought the independence war, its response to Renamo's guerrilla war was surprisingly inept. The military was not prepared for counterinsurgency. In fact, the army achieved most military successes in the mid- to late 1980s with support from foreign forces. Moreover, the party had severe difficulties in controlling the army. For instance, the chief of staff, Colonel-General Mabote, was accused of being involved in an attempted coup against Samora Machel, and thus was expelled from the country in 1986.⁶⁹ Widespread corruption within the army throughout the war contributed to its ineffectiveness (Robinson 2006, chapter 7).⁷⁰

One of the major difficulties proved to be the mobilization and retention of a motivated and capable fighting force. In 1986, for example, intelligence reports stated that soldiers had low morale and low pay, and there was a lack of

⁶⁸ República Popular de Moçambique, Ministério da Defesa Nacional, Comando do 1º Batalhão de Infantaria Zambézia, Comando Provincial de Milícias Populares de Zambézia, Moçambique, *Transcrição da carta-circular no. 469/SMP/EMG/80*, August 5, 1980 (AGZ, Quelimane).

⁶⁹ Mabote was also accused of being involved in a coup attempt against President Chissano in 1991 at a time when the peace negotiations with Renamo had advanced. "Mozambique: Confusion at Home, Silence Abroad," *Africa Confidential* 32 (14), July 12, 1991, 6.

⁷⁰ During the liberation struggle, party and army were one. This changed with independence, when Frelimo separated the party from the army and formed the Popular Forces for the Liberation of Mozambique (Forças Populares de Libertação de Moçambique, FPLM) on September 25, 1975 (Pachter 1982, 605). With the new constitution in 1990, the armed forces were officially renamed the Mozambican Armed Forces (Forças Armadas de Moçambique, FAM), though both "FPLM" and "FAM" were used interchangeably before. The military force that integrated Frelimo and Renamo's armies in 1994 is called the Armed Forces for the Defense of Mozambique (Forças Armadas de Defesa de Moçambique, FADM).

planning and logistics.⁷¹ Since 1978, Mozambique had had compulsory military service, but many districts reported that youths dodged the draft due to difficult conditions in the army and the lack of food and supplies.⁷² At the point of the intelligence reports, most soldiers were recruited by force. Soldiers abducted youths on their way to school and brought them to training camps far away from their homes (cf. Schafer 2007, 78–79). This operation was known as *operação tira camisa* (operation shirt removal): Soldiers forced new recruits to take off their clothes and shaved their heads so that it would be easy to recognize them when they fled.⁷³ New recruits were thus treated like prisoners. As one former Frelimo combatant told me, “We were recruited like thieves.”⁷⁴ Notably, many of these recruits were under the age of eighteen, which demonstrates that not only Renamo made use of child soldiers.⁷⁵ Due to limited access to supplies and low morale, soldiers frequently attacked relief convoys and pillaged goods. Some army commandos also provided Renamo with supplies and information (Cabrita 2000, 259–60).

The government recognized that the military was inadequately prepared for counterinsurgency, but an effort to restructure the army after Samora Machel’s death in 1986 did not bring the expected, lasting change on the battlefield. The party considered the army’s initial training for conventional warfare and its rapid growth prompted by the fast-changing situation on the ground as the main challenges in its response to Renamo. These factors combined to inhibit proper organization, training, and logistics.⁷⁶ The restructuring was supposed to address these shortcomings, and thus in 1987, Chissano replaced most of the provincial commanders and retired 122 officers, mostly veterans from the liberation struggle.⁷⁷

⁷¹ “Mozambique: In Desperation,” *Africa Confidential* 27 (10), May 7, 1986, 7–8.

⁷² República de Moçambique, Província de Nampula, Administração do Distrito de Mecubúri, *Relatório das actividades do mês Fevereiro/91*, February 28, 1991 (Archive of the Government of Nampula, Provincial Secretariat, Nampula [AGN]).

⁷³ Interview with former Frelimo combatant (2012-03-08-Fm14), Quelimane, Zambézia, March 8, 2012.

⁷⁴ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-22-Nm16), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 22, 2011.

⁷⁵ According to data from nationwide surveys of ex-combatants during the demobilization process conducted by the United Nations Operation in Mozambique (Operação das Nações Unidas em Moçambique, ONUMOZ), 23 percent of Frelimo combatants and 41 percent of Renamo combatants were recruited below the age of eighteen (Barnes 1997, 17; cited in Schafer 2007, 80), or 8 percent and 27 percent, respectively, under the age of sixteen, which has been the legal age of recruitment in Mozambique since 1986 (Cahen 2019).

⁷⁶ “People’s Assembly Reviews 1988,” *Mozambiquefile* (January), 1989, 8.

⁷⁷ Robinson (2006, 269) argues that the reshuffle of the military did not seek to make the military more efficient, but served to curb the influence of pro-negotiation Machel loyalists and black nationalists. Others argue, however, that Chissano continued a reform already initiated by Samora Machel that sought to replace the elder officers with younger ones (Fauvet and Mosse 2003, 177–78).

The restructuring did not prevent Renamo from successfully launching its offensives across the central region of Mozambique. This led Frelimo in the late 1980s to increasingly rely on Special Forces, such as the Russian-trained Red Berets (Boina Vermelha).⁷⁸ In 1987–88, the Red Berets, together with 3,000 Tanzanian troops, supported the government's response to Renamo's offensive in Zambézia province. By March/April 1989, the government had regained control of all the district towns in Zambézia province.⁷⁹ Tanzanian soldiers remained stationed in the towns to defend them. Renamo combatants withdrew from northern Zambézia to Nampula province, where violence along the national highway subsequently increased.

In addition to relying on Special Forces, Frelimo increasingly delegated security tasks to state-initiated militias, but their involvement in the war did not bring peace but further deteriorated security.

4.3.3 Frelimo's System of Territorial Defense

A crucial part of the reorganization of the army after 1986 was the creation of a "system of territorial defense and security," a scheme that gave an important role to state-initiated militias.⁸⁰ This was not an entirely new institution, as it "dates back to a militia that linked peasants and guerrilla fighters in the war for independence" (Pachter 1982, 608).⁸¹ FRELIMO built on citizen involvement in community patrols and intelligence gathering in its liberated zones before independence, and across Mozambique after. People were organized into vigilante groups (grupos vigilantes) and popular militias (milícias populares) – state-initiated militias that had the task to control the movement of the population. The government signaled its commitment to continuing its independence war strategies by appointing provincial military commanders – veterans from the liberation struggle – to provinces where they were from in March 1982.

In its initial conception, the idea of organizing people into militias was foremost a political and ideological instrument of organizing the masses in support of the state, first in light of internal and later in light of external threats. Warning of "internal enemies," President Samora Machel emphasized the importance of delegating security tasks to the population to safeguard the revolution right after independence (Frelimo 1978, 58). After South Africa took over the role of Renamo's main sponsor, Frelimo expanded the militia and vigilante programs to address threats from external enemies – South Africa supporting Renamo (Hanlon 1984, 232). In 1981, President Machel sharpened his rhetoric and called the people to arms to defend the sovereignty of the young nation: "Sharpen your hoes and picks to break the heads of Boers. Prepare

⁷⁸ The Red Berets received eight months of military training as an assault force.

⁷⁹ Karl Maier, "The Battle for Zambézia," *Africa Report* (March–April), 1989, 14.

⁸⁰ "People's Assembly Reviews 1988," *Mozambiquefile* (January), 1989, 8.

⁸¹ Cf. Joseph Hanlon, "Call to Arms in Mozambique," *The Guardian*, September 28, 1982, 7.

yourselves with all types of arms so that no aggressor leaves our country alive.”⁸² The popular militias thus took on the task of military defense, primarily in those provinces and districts close to the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean border (Alexander 1997, 4). The new statute and program of the party Frelimo approved by the party’s Fourth Congress in 1984 formalized this approach and defined the task of the popular militias as supporting the defense and security organs in the defense of territorial integrity against the “internal enemy” and against aggressions by “imperialism’s counter-revolutionary forces.” It also assigns militias the task to ensure public order more generally.⁸³

As a former guerilla movement, Frelimo recognized the importance of the local population for supporting rebels and thus saw in the militia and vigilante program a way to ensure the loyalty of the population. The militarization of society culminated in the late 1980s, when the minister of defense at the time, Alberto Chipande, “argued that the war effort was not merely the FPLM’s [army] responsibility, but that all sectors of economic life, and Mozambican citizens in general should play a full role in defence.”⁸⁴ The minister recalled that during the independence struggle everyone in liberated zones contributed to the victory over Portuguese forces: “Today as well we must give a popular character to our war,” he urged.⁸⁵ These remarks demonstrate that the Mozambican government increasingly saw the war with Renamo as one over people.

Beyond these political-ideological considerations, the training of locals to support the limited number of armed forces served three major, practical purposes: the collection of intelligence, the multiplication of armed forces, and the expansion of control to rural areas. First, the war against the Renamo guerrilla movement necessitated detailed intelligence and close control of the population, which the army and local administration were unable to ensure alone. Organizing community residents with access to local information and a motivation to protect their own neighborhoods seemed a promising way to answer the challenge posed by Renamo (Finnegan 1992, 211). Moreover, in some regions, militias supplemented or even replaced the military. The dire situation of the Frelimo military made army recruitment difficult. Logistical shortcomings caused the army to be severely undersupplied, forcing troops to either grow their own crops or live off the surrounding population.⁸⁶ Lastly, militias extended Frelimo’s meagre military presence to the countryside.

⁸² “Mozambique: Frelimo Draws the Battleline,” *Africa (London)* (116), April 1981, 38.

⁸³ The program was published in “Estatutos e programa do partido Frelimo,” *Tempo (Maputo)* (670), August 14, 1983, 31–34.

⁸⁴ “People’s Assembly Reviews 1988,” *Mozambiquefile* (January), 1989, 8.

⁸⁵ “People’s Assembly Reviews 1988,” *Mozambiquefile* (January), 1989, 8.

⁸⁶ See, for example, República de Moçambique, Província de Nampula, Administração do Distrito de Mecubúri, *Síntese da reunião do Conselho Alargado dos Oficiais do Comando Militar Distrital de Mecubúri*, January 26, 1991 (AGN, Nampula).

The state army concentrated on the district towns and on strategic localities, but most areas outside of the district towns had little, if any, military presence.

Contrary to these expectations, the state-initiated militias did not solve the government's military challenges. The local administration faced major challenges in mobilizing community residents for the state-initiated militias. In the districts under study for this book, militias rarely received uniforms and weapons, and they were typically not paid. Desertion rates were high, the government had to resort to forced recruitment, and the population often complained about militias' ill-treatment of the people they were supposed to protect (Finnegan 1992; Alexander 1997). The decentralization of security became a major problem as the increased supply of weapons to the population contributed to banditry and warlordism (Finnegan 1992, 232).⁸⁷ In 1991, the Minister of the Interior recognized that the distribution of weapons to the population had not been well controlled, and thus many people were in possession of illegal weapons.⁸⁸

As the war became a war over people, both Renamo and Frelimo sought to control the population by forcibly resettling people into areas under their control. Together with the army, state-initiated militias were involved in the forced resettlement of the population, which further diminished people's trust in them. With the help of these militias, Frelimo "recuperated" the people in Renamo-held territories and brought them to government-held areas. These people were settled in accommodation centers, named after people's locale of origin (cf. Igreja 2007, 132) and organized in a manner similar to communal villages. The centers had a central party structure and all activities were closely controlled by state-initiated militias. Again, this strategy was taken from Frelimo's playbook of the independence struggle. Thaler (2012, 552) finds that the most common type of Frelimo violence against civilians during the war of liberation was abduction to assemble people away from Portuguese control and effectively indoctrinate them. Frelimo's strategy of population resettlement was to adopt the Portuguese counterinsurgent strategy of building *aldeamentos* – strategic resettlement villages – to concentrate and closely monitor the population. Forced population resettlement became particularly important for the Frelimo government when the peace process advanced in the late 1980s, as peace implied the holding of multiparty elections that Frelimo needed to win.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Clayton (1999, 153) estimates that the government distributed about 1.5 million AK-47 rifles to the civilian population over the course of the war (in a country of twelve million inhabitants in 1980), though this is just an estimate and it remains unclear what it is based on. As the Soviet Union had replaced the AK-47 with the new, lighter AK-74 at the time of the Mozambican war, a large number of surplus rifles could be shipped to its allies. Clayton speculates that about six million rifles might have been shipped to Mozambique.

⁸⁸ "Distribuição de armas não foi bem controlada reconhece ministro do interior," *Notícias*, May 28, 1991. For a more detailed analysis of militias in Nicoadala district, Zambézia province, see Chapter 7.

⁸⁹ Karl Maier, "The Quiet Revolution," *Africa Report* (November–December), 1990, 41.

However, the introduction of the territorial defense system in 1986–87 only brought temporary success. Renamo consolidated its elite forces in October 1988. The Tanzanian troops that supported the government withdrew in December 1988, which made it difficult for the Frelimo army to hold the newly recaptured towns. The government also faced new challenges in the south. In early 1988, the areas the hardest hit were Gaza and Maputo. Renamo's apparent goal was to cut off Maputo from the hinterland and "create a reputation for Dhlakama as 'Savimbi-style' personality with an organized force,"⁹⁰ referring to Angola's rebel leader Jonas Savimbi.⁹¹

In sum, although Frelimo attempted to learn from its own experiences as a guerrilla movement and built on the close control of the population, its counter-insurgency strategy remained inadequate and poorly executed. The forced recruitment of army soldiers and state-initiated militias together with the forced resettlement of the population into communal villages alienated the population. Territorial gains remained temporary, as Renamo regularly regrouped and staged successful counteroffensives. By 1988, the south was under severe pressure. Frelimo considered the war as having reached a military stalemate and seemed to give up on finding a military solution to the conflict. Attempts at creating economic incentives to end the war through the adoption, in January 1987, of an IMF-sponsored structural adjustment program (Economic Rehabilitation Program/Programa de Reestruturação Econômica, PRE) did not solve, but rather added to, Frelimo's problems.

4.4 COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO THE WAR

The population was disenchanted with Frelimo's response to Renamo. The failure of Frelimo's counterinsurgency strategy and the lack of military support in the rural areas provoked community responses to the war that resulted in many different armed and unarmed forms of defense.

4.4.1 Sources of Resistance

As is usually the case in irregular civil wars, the population was the main supporter of the war, providing food, supplies, and intelligence to the armed organizations on either side, and was thus also the main target for intimidation, exploitation, and violence. Recognizing the population as a crucial resource for

⁹⁰ "Mozambique: Pretoria Has the Key," *Africa Confidential* 29 (5), May 13, 1988, 4.

⁹¹ Based on the experience with Angola, South Africa tried to limit Dhlakama's independent personality and ensure that Renamo remained dependent on South African support. When the leader of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (*União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*, UNITA), Jonas Savimbi, developed an independent profile and was able to receive direct support from the United States, South Africa lost control over him (Robinson 2006, 151).

which they competed, neither side exclusively relied on political indoctrination to convince civilians to support them. They also forcibly recruited combatants and civilian supporters, perpetrated indiscriminate and collective violence against civilians, and forcibly resettled community residents into areas under their control in order to ensure people's loyalty.

Many people came to believe that the war itself was about the population (Cahen, Morier-Genoud, and Do Rosário 2018b).⁹² Civilians frequently shifted identities and opted for supporting the side that provided protection at a particular moment (Bertelsen 2009, 222; Legrand 1993). As a consequence, people found themselves between two forces. Due to quickly shifting loyalties and the risk that civilians could serve as informers to the other side, both Renamo and Frelimo considered control over people as a major objective of their operations. As one Renamo combatant I interviewed put it: "The combat was about the people. To have the majority of the population meant to have more security."⁹³ The goal to control people took on a punitive character and translated into the control of "bodies through herding, coercing, or kidnapping people" (Bertelsen 2009, 222).

Community residents I spoke with saw themselves as the war's main victims who lacked agency. They cited a well-known Swahili and Mozambican proverb, "When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers," comparing themselves to the grass that suffers beneath fighting elephants.⁹⁴ In a similar way, the Mozambican writer Mia Couto, in his novel *Terra Sonâmbula* (*Sleepwalking Land*), characterized the civilian population's situation during the war as one in which the people were the ground for one side, and the carpet for the other: "My son, the bandits' job is to kill. The soldiers' job is to avoid dying. For one side we're the ground, for the other we're the carpet" (Couto 1996, 23). This victim narrative represented civilians as marginalized and without agency. In my conversations, I frequently heard statements like "war is war" or "soldier is soldier," which expressed passive acceptance of the ineluctable violent rules of war.⁹⁵ Civilians saw themselves as defenseless spectators, fleeing from their homes into the bush or the mountains in case of an attack: "We were like the children of the household, we only observed what happened."⁹⁶ Respondents felt they were helpless in the face of violence.

From this victim narrative emerged a second narrative of the need to transform passivity into activity. When recalling the war situation of the mid- to late 1980s, community residents explained that they were getting "tired of war"

⁹² Interview with civilian (2012-05-02-f13), Namarrói, Zambézia, May 2, 2012.

⁹³ Interview with former Renamo combatant (2012-03-08-Rm15), Nicoadala, Zambézia, March 8, 2013.

⁹⁴ Interview with community leader (2011-09-27-Lm4), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 27, 2011.

⁹⁵ Interview with religious leader (2011-09-06-Pm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 6, 2011.

⁹⁶ Interview with civilian (2011-09-14-f1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 14, 2011.

and were looking for ways to end their suffering.⁹⁷ They developed both unarmed and armed strategies to defend themselves against what they felt to be an arbitrary war, and by doing so built on preexisting social conventions. In a society in which traditional religion remained strong despite Frelimo's efforts to eradicate all "obscure" beliefs, traditional healers played a large part in these efforts and initiated a range of protective strategies for both Renamo and Frelimo forces, as well as the civilian population.

Communities' reliance on social conventions needs to be understood in the context of the spiritual dimension of the war. In his fascinating study of "cults and counter-cults of violence," Wilson (1992) analyzes how Renamo enlisted the help of spirit mediums in its bases, creating a "myth of invincibility" that was later countered by the community-initiated militia Naparama. References to the spirit world helped Renamo connect to peasants by making its use of power "meaningful," however horrendous its violence was (Wilson 1992, 535). Several important Renamo commanders in Zambézia province were famous for their spiritual powers, and thus shaped events on the battlefield accordingly. Renamo military commanders even declared a "war of the spirits," which represented the fight against Frelimo's repression of all forms of religion (Roesch 1992).

However, "the 'war of the spirits' was later to turn against Renamo" (Wilson 1992, 548), and Renamo's advantage in the realm of spiritual power came to an end in the mid- to late 1980s. Traditional leaders and healers allied with Renamo at first because, as previously mentioned, Frelimo had prohibited the activity of traditional healers right after independence. However, people who initially supported Renamo became alienated by their violent tactics (Wilson 1992, 548).⁹⁸ In order to protect themselves from the rebels' spiritual power, community residents engaged in similar strategies to counter Renamo's "cult of violence." At the same time, Frelimo adjusted its stance toward tradition, religion, and culture and began tolerating – but not endorsing – traditional healers' activities, hence the proliferation of traditional healers that offered their assistance to communities and individuals within the military.⁹⁹

The Naparama militia belongs to the community initiatives that made use of such conventions for developing armed strategies of protection.

⁹⁷ Interviews with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-14-Nm9), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 14, 2011, and with community leader (2011-09-23-Lm3a), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 23, 2011.

⁹⁸ It is difficult to ascertain how many of such "switches" of traditional healers and spirit mediums actually took place. However, there is a notable increase in the activity of traditional healers for the purpose of defense against Renamo in Zambézia and Nampula provinces in the mid-1980s. See Chapters 5–7 for a more detailed discussion of these aspects of the war in these provinces.

⁹⁹ I explore the relationship between Frelimo and traditional authorities and healers in more detail below.

4.4.2 The Rise of the Naparama¹⁰⁰

In the context of the “war over people” and the spiritual dimension of war, the Naparama, an armed movement led by the traditional healer Manuel António in Zambézia and other healers and community leaders in Nampula, dramatically influenced the dynamics of war in these provinces. No other self-defense mechanisms that had emerged before resulted in anything like the rapid social and military successes Naparama achieved. The first appearance of Naparama was in the border region between Nampula and Zambézia provinces, but it quickly spread across the region. The movement gained control over two-thirds of the northern territory within a short amount of time, becoming “one of the most important military and political factors in contemporary Mozambique” (Wilson 1992, 561).¹⁰¹

Due to the militia’s legendary character, which built on the fierce reputation of its leader and the seemingly “magical” successes against Renamo, it is difficult to ascertain how large the group actually was. News reports from the time estimate that the number of Naparama recruits jumped from 400 in July 1990 to 20,000 in September 1991.¹⁰² António himself claimed to have about 14,000 fighters in May 1991.¹⁰³ After the war, in 1994, news reports spoke of 9,000 Naparama who had assembled in the district of Nicoadala in Zambézia province.¹⁰⁴ However, the journalist Gil Lauriciano, who covered the war in Zambézia extensively, estimates that the group did not have more than 2,000 members.¹⁰⁵ My interviews with former Naparama members indicate that many districts had about 200 Naparama, which only included those in the main district town. As a result, I estimate the size to be about 4,000–6,000 members across both provinces, Zambézia and Nampula.¹⁰⁶ The spiritual roots

¹⁰⁰ This section is just an overview and short introduction to Naparama in Zambézia and Nampula provinces. I conduct a detailed analysis of the formation of the group and its evolution in Chapter 5–7. For a summary of Naparama’s history, organization, and leadership struggles, see Jentzsch (2018b).

¹⁰¹ Although Naparama was important for the war in the central and northern regions, there are few studies focusing on the Naparama militia. Exceptions are the excellent studies by Wilson (1992) and Pereira (1999a). Various ethnographic and journalistic accounts of the war refer to Naparama but do not study the group in depth (Finnegan 1992; Nordstrom 1997; Dinerman 2006).

¹⁰² Karl Maier, “Renamo Flee at Sight of Rag-Tag Army,” *Independent*, July 27, 1990, 12; “Mozambique: Renamo Under Pressure,” *Africa Confidential* 32 (18), September 13, 1991, 4–5.

¹⁰³ Rachel Waterhouse, “Antonio’s Triumph of the Spirits,” *Africa South (Harare)* (May), 1991, 14.

¹⁰⁴ “Naparama Irregulars Start Handing over Weapons to Police,” *Radio Mozambique (Maputo)*, August 5, 1994.

¹⁰⁵ Gil Lauriciano, personal communication, July 2010.

¹⁰⁶ There were also some Naparama in districts in Niassa and Cabo Delgado close to the border to Nampula, but few accounts exist. In 2011, the Naparama leadership claimed to have registered

of Naparama lay in the belief that a potion prepared with roots and leaves would make people, through vaccination, immune to bullets. Naparama's combatants only fought with weapons of cold steel – *armas brancas* (white weapons) – spears, arrows, machetes, and knives. Their behavior was codified with a strict set of rules that, when respected, was believed to maintain the vaccine's effectiveness. The rules referred to the militia members' behavior at home, such as prohibiting certain foods, and to their behavior on the battlefield, such as the rule not to retreat. Deaths during battle were usually attributed to violations of these rules.

Building on the strength it could generate as a “traditional” fighting force, Naparama put major pressure on Renamo in Nampula and Zambézia provinces. In 1988 and 1989, it became clear that the Frelimo government had difficulties holding the areas liberated during the military offensive from late 1986 onward. Naparama filled an important gap, helping to defend camps for the displaced, as well as district towns and surrounding areas, and liberating more areas from Renamo control. This put Renamo under pressure during the advancing peace negotiations. As a consequence of the Naparama offensive in 1990, Dhlakama refused to send his negotiation team to the third round of meetings in September 1990.¹⁰⁷ During Renamo's counteroffensive in 1991, the main goal was to recapture lost territory before signing a peace agreement in the politically important province of Zambézia.¹⁰⁸ This new Renamo offensive led to the killing of Zambézia's Naparama leader, Manuel António, in late 1991.

Naparama's success against Renamo must be understood in the context of the spiritual dimension of war and the militia's frightful appearance in combat. Rumors of Naparama's unusual way of fighting explain much of their (initial) effectiveness in battle. Renamo units often fled when they heard Naparama forces approach, as they had heard about the militia's alleged magical powers. Thus, Naparama rarely engaged in direct confrontation with Renamo combatants. Moreover, Naparama forces approached en masse – singing, in an upright position in one single line, instructed to never retreat.¹⁰⁹ This unusual combat behavior scared Renamo combatants, who came to believe that their own

4,438 former Naparama in four districts: Inhassunge, Nicoadala, Namacurra, and Mopeia (Interview with former Naparama combatants (2011-08-23-Gr-Nm1), Quelimane, Zambézia, August 23, 2011). As a comparison, Renamo was estimated to have about 20,000 combatants and the UN mission to Mozambique ONUMOZ registered 24,649. The actual size of the government army was unknown for a long time but is estimated at about 30,000 and ONUMOZ registered 67,042 (UN Security Council 1994). FRELIMO's liberation army had about 10,000 fighters.

¹⁰⁷ “Mozambique: A Chance for Peace?” *Africa Confidential* 31 (21), October 26, 1990, 7.

¹⁰⁸ “Mozambique: Confusion at Home, Silence Abroad,” *Africa Confidential* 32 (14), July 12, 1991, 7.

¹⁰⁹ I owe this point to the Mozambican journalist Gil Lauriciano who pointed out that when Naparama advanced, they made a lot of noise, which scared the Renamo combatants.

weapons were useless against the traditional force. Lastly, many Renamo combatants were very young and not well trained, so they often missed their targets. This could easily be interpreted as being caused by the power of Naparama's medicine, which was thought to divert bullets fired by Renamo.

In the memory of many community residents I spoke with in the two provinces, the work of Naparama remains positive and significant since the displaced were able to return to their houses and take up work on their fields again. However, some also remark that Naparama contributed to the violence (Wilson 1992, 574; Nordstrom 1997, 94), and this happened in two ways. First, there is archival evidence in government reports of individual Naparama, or even units, who went rogue.¹¹⁰ Naparama became involved in violence against civilians, looting goods and also deliberately killing civilians they suspected of working with Renamo, in particular during operations that sought to recuperate people to government-held areas. Second, Naparama became the main target for Renamo counter-operations, increasing the number of attacks after Renamo's initial retreat.

The movement seemed to disappear as rapidly as it had emerged. As a consequence of the Renamo counteroffensive and António's death, Naparama's activities slowed down in 1992 and ended with the peace accord. The group disbanded when the peace accord was signed. However, in Inhassunge, former Naparama were accused of being involved in the pillage of warehouses and atrocities against the population, and in Nicoadala, former Naparama fighters protested being left out of the demobilization process and demanded the same benefits that Renamo soldiers were to receive.¹¹¹ Although violent protest quickly subsided, Naparama in the Nicoadala district continued to organize themselves, and they demand recognition for their wartime contribution to this day. In the other areas of the two provinces, however, Naparama groups dissolved completely, though the memory of their activities is still strong.

4.4.3 A Threat to Frelimo's Scientific Socialism?

Although the Frelimo government was at first skeptical of the emerging Naparama movement, it soon tolerated and at times even supported the militia. The community initiatives that emerged as a response to Renamo's violence

¹¹⁰ See, for example, República Popular de Moçambique, Província da Zambézia, Administração do Distrito de Pebane, *Boletim Informativo do mês de Novembro/90*, December 2, 1990 (AGZ, Quelimane).

¹¹¹ "Mutinying Troops in Quelimane Threaten to Shell City, Seize Airport," *Radio Mozambique (Maputo)*, August 3, 1994; República de Moçambique, Província de Zambézia, Direcção Provincial de Apoio e Controlo, *Comportamento e actuação dos elementos das armas brancas (Naparamas) nos distritos de Nicoadala e Inhassunge*, February 22, 1993 (AGZ, Quelimane).

challenged one of the major foundations of the postindependent self-proclaimed socialist state:

Both Mungoi¹¹² and [Manuel] António [and his peasant army Naparama] championed traditional African power and culture, and threw political will back onto people, their communities, and the chiefly traditions that governed these – as threatening to the scientific-Marxist government of Frelimo as it was to the Renamo rebels. (Nordstrom 1997, 150)

Frelimo's toleration of Naparama's activities could be explained by the party's slow abandonment of socialist ideology and the resulting "softening" of Frelimo's stance toward traditional power in the late 1980s (cf. Thaler 2012). However, on the local level, Naparama was not threatening because of its use of traditional sources of power *per se*, but because of the potential challenge it presented to government authority.¹¹³ In fact, when local Frelimo officials were convinced that Naparama forces were loyal to the government and could support its war effort and maybe even upset the military stalemate, they supported Naparama's recruitment efforts. This occurred particularly in areas in which the local government did not have a good relationship with the local army contingent due to the army's abuses of the population and disrespect for government officials, and where strong community support for Naparama existed.¹¹⁴

Frelimo's uneasiness toward community initiatives to achieve peace is best exemplified by its response to the peace zone of the spirit of Mungoi. The peace zone emerged in southern Mozambique in Gaza province when a traditional healer convinced Renamo not to attack the village. Provincial and district party elites were weary of the new phenomenon, as it showed considerable defiance to government authority by forcing the military to enter the village unarmed (Maier 1998, 61–62). Moreover, Frelimo officials were highly suspicious and attributed the peace zone's success to Mungoi's collaboration with Renamo, and after a meeting with party officials at the seat of the district capital, the local Frelimo commander sought to kill the person that claimed it had personified the spirit (Maier 1998, 63). However, instead of strengthening Renamo, Mungoi weakened the rebel group. In June 1989, twenty-seven Renamo combatants surrendered to Mungoi. When a local critical journalist reported about these incidents, the intelligence service arrested and interrogated him, and then put him in jail for several months (Maier 1998, 65).

¹¹² The spirit of Mungoi created a peace zone in southern Mozambique, which Renamo promised not to attack. I provide more details on this peace zone below and in Chapter 5.

¹¹³ One could even argue that Frelimo embraced the "spiritual war" on the local level by developing relationships with traditional healers to protect its force. See Wilson (1992).

¹¹⁴ As was the case, for example, in an administrative post in Pebane (Zambézia). República Popular de Moçambique, Província da Zambézia, Administração do Distrito de Pebane, Direcção Provincial de Apoio e Controlo Zambézia, Quelimane, *Síntese da visita do 1º Secretário e Administrador do districto ao Posto Administrativo de Mulela*, November 29, 1990 (AGZ, Quelimane).

As with Mungoi, many Frelimo officials were deeply skeptical about the emergence of Naparama. Observing events in war-torn Angola, where two insurgent movements were fighting against the government, government and party officials feared that Naparama would evolve into a second insurgent force. Moreover, the local administration was concerned that Naparama would make financial and material demands or seek compensation during the war or afterwards. Before António could work in Mocuba district, for example, he had to promise the local administration that his goal was not money or political power, but only the protection of the population.¹¹⁵

To some extent, the decision to tolerate Naparama and even cooperate with the militia in certain districts was based on pragmatic calculations to further local power interests, not a change in the official party ideology. Similar to the local party structure's attitude toward traditional authorities, its handling of traditional healing practices showed remarkable continuity throughout the postindependence period. As Dinerman (2006) argues, Frelimo's policy of detribalization had been compromised due to the limited capacity of the state and the "reciprocal assimilation" of traditional and local government elites. In Namapa, the district in which Dinerman primarily conducted her field research, the state's divergence between official and actual policy demonstrated

the proclivity of the state and party representatives to conveniently overlook the role of official institutions in reproducing obscurantist practices – and even, as in this case, facilitating their geographic spread – while, at one and the same time, capitalizing on the consequences of these past actions to further ruling political interests in the present. (Dinerman 2006, 22)

This pragmatic stance is further confirmed by the fact that Frelimo officials on the provincial and national level never officially acknowledged the cooperation with Naparama in certain districts, although the party abandoned all references to Marxism-Leninism at its party congress in 1989 and changed its attitude toward traditional authorities and healers in the early 1990s. Due to this strict denial of Frelimo–Naparama cooperation on the national level, Naparama was not considered a party in the conflict during the peace negotiations between Frelimo and Renamo, and the militia members were therefore not able to benefit from demobilization programs.¹¹⁶

4.5 THE SLOW PATH TO PEACE

After Mozambique and South Africa had signed the N'komati Accord in March 1984, increased attempts were made for a solution to the conflict between Frelimo and Renamo. When negotiations for a ceasefire failed in October

¹¹⁵ Interview with former Naparama leader (2012-06-06-Nm46), Lugela, Zambézia, June 6, 2012.

¹¹⁶ I analyze the various relationships that evolved between Frelimo and Naparama on the district-level in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

1984, President Machel granted the Mozambican Christian Council (Conselho Cristão de Moçambique, CCM) permission to start a secret dialogue with Renamo. In 1988, the CCM announced the creation of a Commission for Peace and Reconciliation, consisting of representatives of the CCM and the Catholic Church (Vines 1991).¹¹⁷

The peace process made major advances toward a negotiated settlement in 1989. First, Mozambique improved its relationship with South Africa. Frelimo also developed a plan of twelve principles for peace, in which it outlined the necessary principles for negotiations.¹¹⁸ Renamo accepted Frelimo's initiative for dialogue at its first congress in June 1989 in Gorongosa (Vines 1991, 122).¹¹⁹ At the Fifth Frelimo Congress in July 1989, the Frelimo leadership received a mandate from the delegates to seek a negotiated solution. Chissano agreed to direct consultations with Renamo and named Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Daniel arap Moi of Kenya as mediators. The congress also marked an "ideological turnaround," as the party dropped its commitment to Marxism-Leninism.¹²⁰ The new multiparty constitution was approved in November 1990 and took effect the following December.

However, the peace process was constantly jeopardized by the military actions of both parties. In July 1989, Frelimo launched a major offensive against Renamo headquarters in Gorongosa, during which Renamo president Dhlakama was almost captured. In early 1990, the army together with Zimbabwean troops stepped up pressure in Gorongosa and Sofala. In mid-1990, operations resumed in Tete, Sofala, Manica, and Zambézia provinces, which forced Renamo president Dhlakama to move his headquarters north to Ila de Inhângoma between the Zambezi and Shire Rivers. In Zambézia, Frelimo (with support from Naparama) regained control over hundreds of thousands of people after five years of Renamo dominance, pursuing a scorched earth policy by burning huts and bombing villages.¹²¹

Military action became intertwined with developments at the negotiation table. The first round of peace negotiations, hosted by the Catholic Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome, took place in July 1990. Anticipating the talks and a ceasefire that would immobilize forces, Renamo withdrew units in June from the north and sent them south to Gorongosa (Robinson 2006, 318). The army offensives in the Fall of 1990 in Sofala, Manica, Tete, and Zambézia provinces

¹¹⁷ Frelimo's attempt to gain power over Renamo by approving an amnesty law in late 1987 did not succeed. Between 1988 and 1990, more men joined Renamo than officially surrendered to the government (about 4,000) (Gerhard Liesegang, "Der Bürgerkrieg in Mosambik ca. 1980–1992. Abläufe und struktureller Wandel des Landes," Unpublished manuscript, Maputo, 1995, cited in Seibert 2003, 266).

¹¹⁸ See a reproduction of the plan in Vines (1991, appendix 3).

¹¹⁹ "Mozambique: Renamo Congress Bids for Peace," *Africa Confidential* 30 (14), July 7, 1989, 1–2.

¹²⁰ Karl Maier, "A Program for Peace," *Africa Report* (September–October), 1989, 56.

¹²¹ "Mozambique: The Kenyan Obstacle," *Africa Confidential* 31 (11), June 1, 1990, 4–5.

sought to bring as much of the population as possible under Frelimo control, as the Rome talks set multiparty elections for 1991.¹²²

A partial ceasefire signed on December 1, 1990 by Frelimo and Renamo did not bring peace any closer. The agreement limited the activities of Zimbabwean troops to the Beira and Limpopo corridors. In exchange, Renamo was to refrain from attacks against targets in the corridors (Vines 1991, 130). The agreement also allowed the International Red Cross access to both sides and required both Renamo and Frelimo to end the forceful resettlement of the population. Yet mutual accusations of a violation of the terms of the ceasefire created further aggression. Renewed Renamo attacks in Sofala and Manica in February signaled that Renamo was filling the vacuum created by the withdrawal of Zimbabwean troops to the corridors.¹²³ Apparently, Renamo's strategy aimed at slowing down the peace process to extract more concessions from Frelimo during the negotiations, such as government portfolios.¹²⁴ In anticipation of elections, Renamo also sought to gain the upper hand on the battlefield, as the rebels tried to mobilize the people and recapture lost territory in Zambézia and Gorongosa (Meldrum 1991, 65).¹²⁵

Though Frelimo was able to strike major successes in 1990 and early 1991 in Zambézia and Nampula due to Naparama activities, the situation deteriorated in late 1991. In June 1991, the Chissano government discovered that party leaders and marginalized army generals who were discontent with Chissano's program of reform and negotiation with Renamo were plotting a coup.¹²⁶ Later that year, Renamo launched an offensive against Naparama in Zambézia. The situation also deteriorated in Nampula, Niassa, Inhambane, Gaza, and Maputo.

The peace negotiations continued in 1992, reaching their twelfth and final round in June 1992. With international pressure on Renamo, the General Peace Agreement was signed on October 4, 1992. The United Nations approved a peacekeeping mission to ensure the ceasefire and sent 8,000 troops to Mozambique on ONUMOZ (Boutros-Ghali 1995). Renamo and Frelimo troops began to assemble in demobilization centers in early 1993, but formal demobilization did not start until March 1994.¹²⁷ Elections were held October 27–29, 1994. Frelimo won the parliamentary elections with a narrow margin. In the presidential elections, Chissano achieved 53 percent of the vote and

¹²² Karl Maier, "The Quiet Revolution," *Africa Report* (November–December), 1990, 41.

¹²³ "Mozambique: Setback to Peace," *Africa Confidential* 32 (4), February 22, 1991, 4.

¹²⁴ "Mozambique: Renamo Takes the War Path," *Africa Confidential* 32 (6), March 22, 1991, 1–3.

¹²⁵ "Mozambique: Renamo Takes the War Path," *Africa Confidential* 32 (6), March 22, 1991, 1–3; Andrew Meldrum, "Railway of Refuge," *Africa Report* (May–June), 1991, 65.

¹²⁶ "Mozambique: Confusion at Home, Silence Abroad," *Africa Confidential* 32 (14), July 12, 1991, 6–7.

¹²⁷ On the process and meaning of reintegration for Renamo veterans since the war's end in Maringue, the important center of Renamo activity in Sofala province, see Wiegink (2020).

Dhlakama 33 percent (Mazula 1997). Observers considered the elections free and fair, but Renamo alleged fraud and threatened to boycott parliamentary sessions.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter analyzes the origins and evolution of the war in Mozambique, the relevant actors involved, and their relation to the population. Throughout the chapter, I made three major arguments. First, both actors sought control over people rather than territory. When Frelimo or Renamo (re-)occupied district towns and rural areas, residents fled as they were fearful of being accused of having supported the other side and killed. This led Renamo and Frelimo to forcibly resettle the population into areas under their control, as they lived off what people produced and sought to control the movement of the population. Second, the focus of the war on the population led to a militarization of society, as Frelimo and Renamo enlisted civilians to control each other. Frelimo did so through state-initiated militias; Renamo built on the support of mambos and mujeeba. Third, the focus on the people for intimidation and violence provoked the emergence of community defense initiatives, such as Naparama. The spiritual dimension of war explains why community-initiated militias using social conventions such as Naparama could have the effect it did on the dynamics of war.

Overall, the chapter demonstrates that the debate on the balance between external and internal sources of the conflict becomes less central to our understanding of the war when local dynamics and fluid loyalties are taken into account (cf. Cahen, Morier-Genoud, and Do Rosário 2018b). As discussed above, the label “civil war” for Mozambique’s war is contested among scholars of Mozambique and Mozambicans due to diverging views on whether Renamo could rely on a social base within Mozambique. In southern Mozambique – Frelimo’s stronghold – people speak of the war as one of “destabilization” due to South Africa’s apparent aim to destabilize, but not overthrow the Frelimo government. In central and northern Mozambique, people refer to the “sixteen-year war.” Respondents often spoke of a “war between brothers” to demarcate the difference between the liberation struggle and the war that ensued after independence.

Taking into account local dynamics shows that Frelimo’s conflictual history and policies to restructure society and economy alienated important sections of the population and made them more amenable to support Renamo. However, instead of genuinely supporting the rebels’ goals, peasants collaborated with Renamo to solve local conflicts or improve their position in local politics (cf. Lubkemann 2005; Morier-Genoud 2018). Moreover, popular support waned when Renamo combatants increased their use of indiscriminate violence. The same was true for Frelimo. Popular support did not necessarily reflect an affirmation of Frelimo policies, and support diminished when

Frelimo was unable to effectively counter Renamo's violence. As a consequence, the local population quickly supported a new armed movement initially independent of Renamo and Frelimo that promised an end to the violence.

The following chapters analyze the causal processes of Naparama's formation and diffusion in detail, first, by exploring the trajectory of the Naparama movement as a whole in Zambézia and Nampula provinces over time; second, by comparing the diffusion of Naparama forces to two adjacent districts in Zambézia province; and lastly, by identifying the mechanisms that made the mobilization of militia members such a successful process.