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Drivers of Conflict: How the Extraction of Natural Resources affects Civil War Outbreak: A Case Study of Mozambique

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Drivers of Conflict: How the Extraction of Natural Resources affects

Civil War Outbreak

A Case Study of Mozambique



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1. Introduction:

The history of Mozambique is constellated by periods of conflict and rebellion. Notoriously, the 15-year-long civil war of 1977-1992 has profoundly affected the nation's development and political reality. Despite great efforts to rebuild a peaceful country and reconcile different views, a new chapter of violence started in 2017 in the Northern province of Cabo Delgado, where conflict escalated into civil war over three years. This ongoing strife is impacting the stability of the country and its development project, causing a humanitarian crisis that has led the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to declare over 750.000 people as internally displaced (IOM, 2021). I explain that at the center of this war is an intricate web of socioeconomic factors, political marginalization, bad governance, and the impact of natural resource extraction. The current civil war, centered in Cabo Delgado, is more complicated and multifaceted than the late 20th-century one. The unique features of the area make the situation hard to control, and its causes hard to define. A large presence of minerals and a great amount of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) reserves are characteristic of the area. Furthermore, the province is extremely poor, and the majority of the population is ethnically distinct from the governing majority. On top of that, there has been a rise of radical Islamist groups, further complicating the scenario and making viable efforts toward stability harder to imagine (Hanlon, 2021).

Various strands of literature have highlighted that natural resource wealth leads to bad socio-economic outcomes (Van Der Ploeg, 2011). More specifically, civil war literature has identified a relationship between natural resources and civil war onset, notably with Ross's interpretation of the Natural Resource Curse, positing that natural resource richness can trigger various mechanisms that may lead to insurgency and war (Ross, 2003). It is within this framework that this thesis employs theory-testing process tracing methodology to unfold and explain the

mechanism connecting the extraction of natural resources and civil war in the case of Mozambique. The application of the chosen methodology allows to identify and isolate causal mechanisms and analyze key events and actors of the insurgency.

The paper begins by conceptualizing and defining the outbreak of civil war and the extraction of natural resources. The following section reviews the existing literature on the role played by natural resources towards civil war outbreak and the mechanisms connecting them. Subsequently, a theoretical framework describing step by step the expected development of the mechanism is derived from the literature. After that, the methodology and the sources are explained and justified. Finally, the features of the case are described and analyzed, and their points of convergence and divergence from the theoretical expectations discussed. Lastly, the conclusion section introduces implications and limitations of the paper.

2. Conceptualization

2.1 - Civil War Outbreak

To study the outbreak of civil war, also called onset, it is necessary to first define the phenomena. Debates surrounding the conceptualization and operationalization of civil war have been extensively trying to provide a final explanation for what constitutes a civil war outbreak. This has not yet been agreed upon, and the lack of consensus among scholars is an important issue as it leads their results, especially in quantitative research, to lack coherence (Sambanis, 2004).

Sambanis (2004) invites the use of a threshold between 500 and 1000 yearly battle-related deaths to define a year of conflict as a civil war. Still, he employs a different definition for the years included in its outbreak. Early war years in which the deaths range between 100 and 500 will be considered part of civil war onset, as long as 1000 deaths in total are counted in the first 3 years. This threshold should be favored, as it allows to include years of conflict in which the violence was already there, but still on the rise. Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that strictly applying arbitrary thresholds can lead to mistakes, such as certain cases being dropped despite meeting all the requirements to be considered a civil war. Therefore, it is better to maintain a certain degree of flexibility.

The debate on civil war conceptualization is far more extensive than mentioned here, and I suggest reading Sambanis (2004) for a complete overview. Nonetheless, the details are focused on quantitative aspects, for instance how civil wars should be coded in large datasets, how to account for possible mistakes in the data, and further specific debates related to classification and coding for comparison. I deem this interesting, yet irrelevant to the purpose of this paper, which only requires the minimal level of conceptualization to show that the events discussed fall under the definition of civil war outbreak.

2.2 - Natural Resources Extraction

It is key to understand what natural resource extraction means in the social sciences, in order to properly identify the role this practice plays in the here studied phenomenon. The term has not been thoroughly defined and debated in the literature, as its meaning has often been assumed. The concept is generally agnostic about what resources are being extracted, and by whom. This would leave open the possibility of adopting a broad encyclopedic definition such as “any

biological, mineral, or aesthetic asset afforded by nature without human intervention that can be used for some form of benefit, whether material (economic) or immaterial.” (Britannica, 2024).

We can assume that the literature of the social sciences, specifically in the context of politics, refers to natural resources that are systematically taken out of nature for material benefit such as oil, gas, various minerals, wood and timber, wild food stocks, and so forth. Based on this brief discussion, I propose, for the sake of clarity, to define natural resource extraction as “the systematic activity, carried out by humans, of exploiting biological or mineral natural assets afforded by nature, for purposes of material and economic benefit”.

3. Literature review:

This review will introduce the main points and debates of existing research on the role played by natural resources towards civil war outbreak. Afterwards, a summary of the main theoretical mechanisms that explain how natural resources lead to civil war onset is presented. Collier and Hoeffler’s (2004) greed and grievance mechanisms, Ross’s (2004) hypothesized causal mechanisms, and further ones existing in the literature are overviewed.

3.1 - Natural Resources and Civil War Outbreaks: The Curse

The literature on civil wars is large and complex, and often hard to make sense of. In an attempt to do so, it can be generally divided among studies of the causes of onset, the nature and impact, and the termination of such conflicts (Newman & DeRouen, 2014). Explanations of civil war outbreaks, among which falls this paper, vary a lot in their claims. This is because, at the individual level, true motivation cannot be independently observed; It is difficult to determine

whether the many underlying causes hypothesized in the literature are the real motivation that moves rebels. One cannot see with certainty whether insurgents think of private gains, common gains, or nothing at all when they choose to fight (Hoeffler, 2012, pp. 181-182). Despite such difficulty in drawing inferences, research has analyzed the role of many causes for the onset of civil wars, which are not explored here as this research is mechanism-focused and such discussion would be unrelated.

Among many variables, natural resources have been identified to play a relevant role across various sources in the literature. The role played by natural resources seems to be so negative that Ross (2003) mentions it as a Curse in the title of his research. He finds that they affect multiple aspects of civil war, as they can function as a trigger for civil war, but can also cause them to last longer, serving as fuel that finances conflict (Ross, 2003, p. 17). Although, across the literature, natural resources have been found to affect the outbreak of civil strife, they should not be considered its only cause, and there is much debate regarding which other variables interact with them. Bad governance, poverty, ethnic tensions, and religious grievances are important features that have been found to work together with it, interacting to cause civil war (Ross, 2003, p. 19). This result should not be claimed as definitive, as other researchers find culture-related variables such as religious fractionalization and ethnic polarisation to be insignificant toward civil war outbreak (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004, p. 588; Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 75). Such lack of coherence exemplifies the large amount of disagreement that exists in the field, and calls for new work to overview this literature, systematically identifying its recurrent disagreements and explaining where they might arise from. An overview of conceptual and operational issues that can affect the findings across the study field of civil wars has been

provided by Sambanis (2004), an important reading to make sense of how controversial findings might surge.

Despite the large degree of controversy, part of which mentioned above, natural resources have often been considered to play a role in civil war outbreak. Various types of natural resources have been analyzed to identify their effects on civil war onset, and among them, oil, gems, and natural gas are found to play an important role (Ross, 2003, p. 17). Specifically, the magnitude of natural resource exports in relation to the GDP was found to explain civil war outbreak (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002, p.16; 2004, p. 580). Overall, albeit not working as a cause by themselves, natural resources are said to be related to the outbreak of civil wars, specifically in the form of oil, gems, and LNG. It is important to acknowledge that the relationship between natural resources and civil strife is not simple and one-sided: as natural resources can affect the outbreak of civil conflict, civil wars can affect natural resource production, lowering it significantly (Mitchell, 2012, p. 219).

3.2 - Greed and Grievances

The research on natural resources evolves in multiple directions, with various authors attempting to identify the steps through which they cause civil war outbreaks. This proliferation of literature has led to the hypothesis of many mechanisms explaining the relationship between natural resources and civil war. This led to the situation being defined as an “embarrassment of mechanisms” (Humphreys, 2005, p. 510). Among the most relevant mechanisms explaining the onset of civil war is Collier and Hoeffler’s (2004) theory which explains it as a possible outcome of either grievances or greed. To simplify, the two hypotheses can respectively be described as follows: in the first case, insurgency erupts when injustices are powerful enough to motivate

people to employ violence as a mean of protest; in the second case, rebellion is just a mean to achieve profit from the opportunities that arise during war.

Both the ideas of grievances and greed can be and have been applied to natural resources. Grievances can be resource-related, for instance through damage inflicted on the environment that locals use to sustain themselves, because of the withholding of the revenue deriving from extraction by “rentier states”, or even due to the expropriation of local land to construct extraction sites (Basedau & Lay, 2009, p. 774; Ross, 2004, p. 41). Once the grievances surpass a certain threshold, the population may employ violence as a mean of protest. From such a stage, retaliation from the opposite side becomes an important factor, which could lead to the generation of more serious grievances, for instance, related to arbitrary killings (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Greed can also be resource-related; this explanation revolves around the opportunity for rebellion rather than the motivation for it, and extortion of natural resources can work as such for rebel groups, financing their fighting (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). This has been the case with copper mines, diamond fields, and even timber, across multiple continents (Klare, 2001, pp. 50-52). Further analysis of the specific effect of oil on civil war outbreak shows that only its onshore production is significant to it. Hence, location of oil production affects mechanisms, as it has to be located somewhere that physically affects insurgents, whether giving opportunities or causing grievances (Lujala, 2010, p. 24).

3.3 - Ross's Mechanisms

Ross (2004) provides four hypotheses concerning the connection of natural resources with the onset of civil wars, which explicitly rely on Collier and Hoeffler's research, and tests their validity across thirteen cases. This is perhaps the best summary of the mechanisms that have

been hypothesized in the literature, and most other ones are just declinations and variations of those. The first one is the so-called “looting” mechanism, which claims that natural resources provide a unique opportunity for insurgents, allowing them to profit from extracting them, stealing them, or extorting money from the ones who do. Groups who have such opportunity are, according to this mechanism, more likely to insurg and commence a civil war. The second one is the “grievance” mechanism, suggesting that natural resource extraction causes multiple negative consequences for the locals, such as expropriation of land, damage to the environment, lack of job opportunities, and more. Those grievances can, according to this mechanism, lead to civil war. The third hypothesis posits that resource wealth can give residents an incentive to develop a separatist claim. This mechanism is evident in the case of Aceh, in Indonesia, where grievances have interacted with the construction of extraction facilities; the discontent about the environmental disruption, the forced moving of families, and the low benefits for locals grew so strong that it motivated the local population to make separatist claims, aiming to take control of the resources and receive benefits from them directly (Ross, 2005). The last of Ross’s theorized mechanism is related to findings by Fearon and Laitin (2003), and it claims that oil weakens states and their bureaucratic capacity, hence increasing the chances of civil war.

It is important to point out that in Ross’s thirteen cases, no complete evidence is found of either the “looting” or “grievance” mechanisms explaining civil war outbreak. This may be due to the case selection of the author, or some missing steps in his theorized mechanisms. The “most-likely” case selection method he employs is not justified extensively and is limited to a period of ten years. Nonetheless, Ross claims that it allows him to draw inferences for the validity of mechanisms in the subcategories of separatist and non-separatist conflict.

Additionally, it is evident that grievances are not irrelevant and can contribute to the rise of

separatist conflicts and low-level ones. If a more complete mechanism were to be theorized, one could posit that low-level conflicts can escalate to higher-level ones and full wars, and their cause would remain the same, grievances.

3.4 - Further Mechanisms

The above-mentioned mechanisms can be regarded as the most significant ones, but there are more that deserve to be mentioned. The “greedy outsider mechanism”, for instance, posits that third parties may be incentivized by natural resource richness to foster civil conflict. This can happen because of corporations or neighboring states' interests in regionally concentrated resources (Humphreys, 2005, p. 511). The “sparse networks mechanism”, instead, is a liberal-theory based argument that claims that natural resource dependent economies have weak manufacturing and internal trade. The presence of trade, according to liberal theory, limits the possibility of conflict, as making war with your trade partner is a self-damaging act. Although this theory is mostly applied to international war, it can be applied to domestic conflict as well, as trade networks are present also within a country, and could limit the incentives of domestic constituencies to make war with one another (Humphreys, 2005, p. 513).

4. Theoretical framework

This section will synthesize existing literature to organize a theoretical framework to be tested in the upcoming case study. By drawing on existing theories, I will identify the process I expect to be in place relating natural resources to civil war outbreak. The mechanism will be described meticulously in its multiple steps, and their relation to each other will be addressed. Subsequently, the analysis section will assess whether those hypothetical steps match the events of the Cabo Delgado insurgency and the Mozambican civil war, confirming or debunking the pathway connecting the two variables.

4.1 - The Prerequisites of the Curse

The Natural Resource Curse claims that resource-abundant countries, rich namely in oil, LNG, and minerals, end up experiencing negative consequences politically, socially, and economically (Ross, 2003; Van Der Ploeg, 2011). This is counterintuitive to the expectation that resource wealth should bring widespread benefits to society. However, multiple factors have to combine for those negative consequences to arise, such as economic disparities, governance issues, and existing societal tensions such as oppression along ethnic lines. Essentially, one can posit that such conditions are prerequisites for natural resource abundance to harm a country and lead it toward the outbreak of civil war. Hence, for an explanation of the various steps of the mechanism through which natural resource extraction causes civil war to be successful, those features are necessary.

4.2 - Consequences at the Government Level

One of the most relevant consequences following natural resource extraction is, as pointed out by Ross (2003), the development or worsening of corruption among the ranks of government.

States, especially developing ones, have limits on how much money they manage responsibly, and revenues from oil and similar resources often push them beyond such limits. Furthermore, the abundance of revenues tends to get absorbed in corruption nets and re-invested in security, which serves to keep safe the rents of the elites and silence democratic demands and protests (Ross, 2001). Therefore, one can expect to see natural resource extraction be related to corruption at the governmental level, benefits for elite networks, and an overall increase in interest and investments in security and defense.

4.3 - Consequences for Local Populations

The consequences of natural resource extraction affect local populations, causing them grievances which increase existing tensions. Mechanisms causing grievances are typical of contexts in which extraction requires the construction of large location-specific sites, as in the case of oil and gas basins and mineral deposits. The case of Aceh, Indonesia, shows how extraction sites bear negative consequences for the local population, which loses its land, faces pollution issues, and sees outsiders coming to work in the new facilities (Ross, 2005). Similarly, in Papua New Guinea in 1989, there was an insurgency due to pollution-related grievances that both the government and the responsible company refused to pay for (Lujala, 2010, p.17 on Le Billon, 2003). The sum of those issues can cause a feeling of discontent leading to the general idea that the extraction of natural resources is not beneficial to locals. Therefore, this perception that the costs are higher than the benefits, can lead the local population to develop grievances against such practice and who benefits from it in their stead. We can expect, in cases of gas, oil, and mineral-related natural resource extraction, that the environmental disruption, the forced moving of communities, the arrival of a new workforce, and the perception of insufficient benefits, increase grievances among the regional population. Such grievances may lead to the

development of civil war, as insurgents will emerge from the population and be able to obtain support and recruit them to their side, as theorized by Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and hypothesized by Ross (2004, p. 41).

4.4 - Repression and Abuses of Human Rights

Once grievances have been established due to natural resource extraction, there is one more aspect that plays an important role in the puzzle: repression by security forces and abuses of Human Rights. Even if existing grievances are sufficient for part of the population to start employing a low degree of violence, this does not explain civil war as an outcome. At this stage, a key factor leading to the escalation of violence resides in the behavior of the security forces. Disproportionate retaliation such as using violence to deny the right to protest, arbitrarily killing civilians, and abuses of power, lead to more serious grievances (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). It is intuitive that, if one's family, friends, or even acquaintances become victims of violence, individuals will develop further motivation to join rebellion and employ violence back. This process can be pictured as a spiral of violence of which the outcome is, ultimately, war.

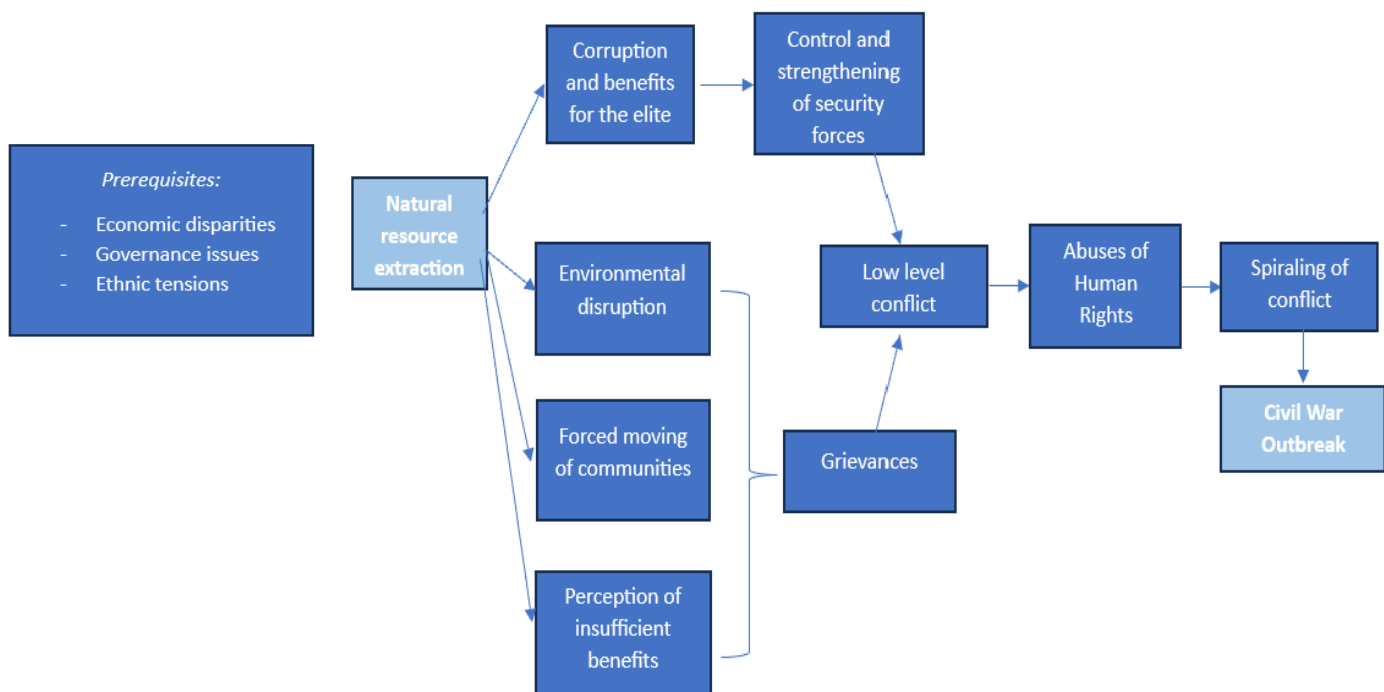


Figure 1. Summary of the theorized mechanism.

In the case of Mozambique, the expectation is to see natural resource extraction affect two different levels of society: the one of the government, and the one of local communities: In the first one, the gains from natural resources are expected to be secured by the elite. As mentioned above, such a large influx of wealth and benefits is too much to be properly managed by the government and its beneficiaries legally and transparently. Therefore, corruption related to natural resource rents is expected to develop at the higher levels of society, specifically among the governmental and business elites linked to the extraction projects. This development should generate dissent among the ones that do not benefit from it, namely other elite members and the local populations. The rentiers will then start to fear the loss of their benefits, hence trying to protect their interests. In order to quiet the existing discontent and protect their gains, the elites

will make employ security forces. To ensure their profits, they will strengthen them and make sure they are on their side to defend their interest through actions such as the silencing of protesters and the defense of companies of interest.

In the second level, the local communities, multiple factors are expected to create grievances. Those factors are expected to be environmental disruption, situations in which communities are forced to move to build extraction-related projects, and the broader feeling that they are not being compensated enough and their wealth is being “taken” from them. The expectation is that those factors will cause frustration and unhappiness among the locals, who will voice their concerns about the projects, demand involvement, and overall denounce the ongoing mistreatment. The development of popular discontent will facilitate the emergence of insurgency groups who, in turn, exploit local grievances to gather support by promising change and improvement.

The growth of an insurgent group due to the above-mentioned events, rallying around natural resource extraction-related grievances, is expected to lead them to clash with authorities. The security forces represent the government and the elites that are targeted by the insurgents, hence they are expected to be targeted by them or to react strongly in case the insurgents try to attack the extraction sites directly. The expectation is that these conflicts will be of a relatively small scale, but that the death of members of the insurgent group and the retaliation by security forces on the local population will cause further discontent and grievance in the population, reinforcing the above mentioned mechanism and enlarging the ranks of the rebel group. This mechanism becomes a spiral of grievances and conflict, which reinforces itself until becoming a fully-fledged civil war, with large involvement on both sides and a significant number of deaths.

5. Methods and methodology

To study the mechanism connecting the extraction of natural resources and the outbreak of civil war, a theory-testing process tracing on the case of the ongoing Mozambican civil war will be conducted. The aim is to verify the steps through which the extraction of natural resources leads to the outbreak of civil wars. As Beach and Pedersen (2013, pp. 14-15) explain, theory testing process-tracing consists of conceptualizing a theoretical mechanism connecting two variables based on the existing literature. The theorized mechanism gets tested against case study evidence. To do so, empirical evidence is collected to show whether the development of events matches the expected mechanism. This methodology also allows us to confirm to what degree the mechanism is present, and if the case develops inconsistently with it.

This type of analysis has been chosen due to its unique potential for identifying whether a causal mechanism is present in a case. It allows us to take causal claims, such as the one that the richness of natural resources causes outbreaks of civil war, and unbox them to look directly at the mechanism defining this relation (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 11). This fine-grained and detailed mechanism-oriented approach gives case-specific results and cannot be easily generalized. Even if this would disturb many researchers of comparative politics, it remains a relevant type of inquiry, as science is not solely about generalizing rules and laws (Chandra, 2006, p. 7).

5.1 - Research Design

This paper employs a single case-study design, which allows us to go in-depth and verify the relationship between the various theorized steps. This makes it the most suitable choice for the study of the mechanism relating natural resources to civil war outbreak. The possibility of

employing multiple case studies exists, but is not ideal for this research, as many unique situational factors would get lost for the sake of comparison. Choosing a single case-study design, it is possible to employ its main strengths: the capacity to allow for detailed analysis of events; and the high level of internal validity. Nonetheless, single case studies have a strong limitation: generalization from them is limited, and it is hard to apply a case-study methodology consistently, which makes it complicated to generalize findings even if the same hypothesis is tested repeatedly (Halperin & Health, 2020, p. 237).

5.2 - Case Selection

There are various reasons for the choice of Mozambique as a case. Firstly and most importantly, the variables that function as cause and effect of the mechanism are both present, an essential feature for the study of the mechanism relating them to be possible. Natural resource extraction is characteristic of the Northern area of the Country. Total, Eni, Exxon, and more multinational corporations (MNCs) have been involved both on and offshore in the exploitation of LNG (Rawoot & Ribeiro, 2022; Landini & Roelf, 2023). The British Gemfields Group has been largely involved in the North-eastern Montepuez ruby mine (Gemfields Group, n.d.). Hence, the cause of the mechanism, natural resource extraction, is present. Furthermore, civil conflict, the theorized effect, is also present. Schulhofer and Sambanis (2024) have estimated that the conflict reached sufficient magnitude to be fully defined as a civil war in 2020. But, by using Sambanis's (2004) conceptualization of outbreak, the cumulative deaths across three years allow us to consider the outbreak of conflict, which led up to the civil war, as starting with the

attacks of October 2017¹. The presence of the theorized cause and effect renders viable inquiry into the mechanism connecting them.

Furthermore, due to its recency, the case has not been thoroughly studied and discussed yet. As it shows significant humanitarian consequences, namely the displacement of over half a million people, it is important to understand what led to them (IOM, 2021). Alongside the humanitarian aspect, the geographical location of Mozambique matters. It has been argued that Africa is a meaningful region to study as its natural resource richness and the presence of bad governance, poverty, and ethnic tensions make the continent prone to developing civil wars (Ross, 2003; Collier and Hoeffler, 2001). There are multiple examples in which the extraction of natural resources has led to conflicts and civil wars in the African continent, namely in Sierra Leone, the DRC, Nigeria, Angola, and Sudan (Poncian and Kigodi, 2015). This analysis of the case of Mozambique aims to verify whether it falls under those cases and unpack the mechanism leading to the civil war outbreak.

5.3 - Sources

To verify the presence of the theorized mechanism in the Mozambican civil war, a mixture of sources will be employed as evidence in the analysis. As there is little literature on the topic, and generally limited information on the conflict, both news and academic sources will be used to shed light on the chain of events. The newspaper articles will come from international and local news providers. A variety of different ones will be used to avoid possible bias that they may carry in their individual analyses. The Mozambican newspaper articles that have been utilized

¹ The total number of deaths between the October 2017 and October 2020 is around one-thousand, hence satisfying the criteria set previously.

are a random selection from a complete and comprehensive list compiled by Dr. Corinna Jentszch, ranging from 2017 to 2021. To envision the original dataset I suggest contacting her directly. Lastly, the academic articles employed are, because of the scarcity of research on the topic, the most relevant and credible academic sources that could be found.

6. Analysis

6.1 - Inequality, Governance, and Ethnic Divisions

To begin analyzing the presence of the theorized mechanism connecting natural resource extraction and the outbreak of civil war in Mozambique, it is fundamental to verify whether the necessary prerequisites for the mechanism to develop were present in the region of Cabo Delgado. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, those are pre-existing economic disparities, governance issues, and division along ethnic lines.

The area has been historically characterized by poverty, and has seen a recent increase in inequality (Hanlon, 2021, p. 26-28; IISS, 2021). Even if such evidence cannot function as an explanation for insurgency alone, it shows symptoms of ineffective economic development. The sort of development that is taking place in Cabo Delgado does not improve living standards, and it fuels the social environment making it more conflict-prone (Ntaka, 2023, p. 35). Interestingly, this has happened even though, since the 1990s, the region has been discovered to be rich in natural resources. In fact, LNG, rubies, and even graphite and coal have been responsible for an economic boom (Hanlon, 2021, p. 26). The LNG fields of Cabo Delgado alone have been estimated to contain over 100 trillion cubic feet of gas, more than half of the total amount present in Mozambique. There have been claims that such numbers could turn around the future of the

country, yet there is no evidence that locals have benefitted from them. Actually, the opposite seems to be the truth (Adedokun, 2017, p. 47; IISS, 2021).

Ntaka (2023), instead, has largely pointed out governance issues in Mozambique. Through findings from the African Development Bank, the author has claimed that the governance system is dysfunctional, corrupted, and ineffective. However, coherently with the theoretical framework employed in this research, he argues that governance failure is not the direct cause of insurgency but only a factor contributing to it (Ntaka, 2023, p. 36). Gordon (2015), far before the beginning of the conflict, has employed data from interviews with relevant individuals to point out that “Corruption is endemic within Mozambique from the top to the very bottom of society”. Furthermore, he introduced claims from Erik Charas, entrepreneur and social activist, that the discovery of natural resources has further worsened the moral conditions of the ruling class (p. 4).

Lastly, ethnic divisions are also present in the region, where the Mwani and Makonde groups now cohabit despite their controversial history. The tensions can be traced back to the colonial era, and have continued throughout the war for independence and the civil war between Renamo and Frelimo at the end of the 20th century (International Crisis Group, 2021). Historically, the area now known as Cabo Delgado was occupied by the Mwani ethnic group, with the Makonde migrating there only in the 18th and 19th century (Hanlon, 2021, p. 28). In recent times, this ethnic division has become significant to Mozambican party politics, which have been dominated by the Frelimo party since the end of its civil war with Renamo. The Mwani population claims to have been marginalized and argues that Frelimo favors the Makonde group, which gained control of most businesses and became the oligarchs of Cabo Delgado (Hanlon, 2021, p. 29).

6.2 - Natural Resources, Benefits and Corruption

Now that the necessary background features have been established to be present, the analysis will proceed to identify and define the effects of natural resource extraction on the government and elites of Mozambique. LNG and rubies are the main relevant extractable resource in the region, hence the focus will revolve around them and the profit they create. Regarding the exploitation of LNG, foreign MNCs have been involved, which found an ally in local and governmental elites (Alberdi and Barroso, 2021, p. 243). Notably, the French company Total, the Italian Eni, and the American ExxonMobil have been active in the region² (IISS, 2021). Extraction works in the country started as early as the 1990s when TotalEnergies (now Total) entered the country, while the other two companies only joined in the following decades. More recently, the project of extracting LNG near Palma, in the region of Cabo Delgado, became one of the largest in the world and has received billions of dollars' worth of investments (Alberdi and Barroso, 2021, p. 240). The marginal role played in the LNG project by the Mozambican national gas company called "Empresa Nacional de Hidrocarbonetos", was handled until 2020 by CEO Omar Mitha. He is now openly associated with governmental elites, as he left his post to become an advisor to the President, Filipe Nyusi, and chairman of the Mozambican National Investment Bank (Club of Mozambique, 2020a; Club of Mozambique, 2020b).

Instead, most of the ruby mining has been recently carried out by the Montepuez Ruby Mining Limitada partnership, of which 75% is owned by London-based company Gemfields, and the remaining 25% by local company Mwriti Limitada (Gemfields Group, n.d.). Although this last note seems to be optimistic, showing that local entrepreneurs play a role in the current

² For further information see: <https://www.eni.com/en-IT/actions/global-activities/mozambique.html> <https://totalenergies.com/mozambique> <https://www.exxonmobil.co.mz/about/who-we-are/rovuma-lng>

situation and not only outsiders, the situation appears in a different light after a brief research on the company. In fact, the main partner of Mwriti Limitada is Raimundo Domingos Pachinuapa, the former governor of the Cabo Delgado province and Frelimo general. Furthermore, the Board of Directors of Montepuez Ruby Mining is largely composed of Frelimo-related names (Alberdi and Barroso, 2021, p. 237).

Both of the Mozambican companies involved in the extraction of LNG and rubies have had some relation with Frelimo and the political elite, opening the road for potential influxes of wealth among its circle. The immense profit available from the extraction of natural resources has been evident since the discovery of the first LNG fields and has been increasing with further discoveries throughout the years. While the situation has been argued to be an “unprecedented opportunity to accelerate sustainable and inclusive growth and reduce poverty” (Gordon, 2015, p. 1), concrete results have been struggling to arise. Matter of fact, the prosperity coming from the natural resources has been perceived to be siphoned away by the oligarchs related to the Frelimo party (Hanlon, 2021, p. 26-27). Those claims gain further credibility if one recalls that the Mozambicans covering positions of power in the LNG and rubies business, Omar Mitha and Raimundo Domingos Pachinuapa, are or were closely affiliated with the governmental elite.

6.3 - The Role of the Security Forces

Since the outbreak of conflict with the attacks on the 5th of October 2017, the government has treated the matter as a problem that could be easily solved through domestic police action, considering it nothing more than small acts of destabilization (Savana, 2018a, p. 18). There were claims by Omar Mithá that the situation should not be misinterpreted, as it was under control and the attacks were sporadic and unorganized, arguing that exaggerating things would have negative

consequences for the economy and scare investors (Savana, 2017, p. 10). Later during the conflict, government security forces were witnessed protecting vehicles of the American company Anadarko, despite both parties denying it (Savana, 2018b, p. 21). The elites and government tried to send concrete signals that Cabo Delgado was safe in order to keep the investments active and coming, protecting the influx of wealth in the country. Although this can be considered normal behavior, the arguments about corruption in the previous paragraph support the evidence that handling the matter this way was the elites' way of defending their economic interests.

Furthermore, even when the situation escalated and started getting worse, the authorities chose to employ private contractors such as the Wagner Group and the Dyck Advisory Group (IISS, 2021, p. 1). This choice happened despite arguments that the Wagner group was not prepared to intervene in Mozambique, now supported by evidence of the losses they faced and their abandoning of the contract in 2019 despite the mission not being concluded (Sauer, 2019, p. 12). It has been argued that the deliberate choice of employing privates rather than asking for international help was a strategic decision. An international intervention and humanitarian support would have, perhaps, forced the government and its elites to look into the issues of corruption, justice, and human rights in the area (Hanlon, 2021, p. 33).

Either way, it has been evident that as the government was facing a crisis, its decision was not to address the underlying issues that caused the conflict, but merely to treat it as a matter that police and security forces could solve, and to try to strengthen them via private contracts. The elite's and government's interests never coincided with the ones of the local population, and no intention was shown to address the underlying causes of the conflict. The actions taken aimed instead to protect economic gains derived from natural resource extraction. Such extraction

benefits the elites, arguably corrupts them, and leads them to pull the security forces closer, employing them as a means to defend their interest. When in need of further help, the immediate choice is to find a way to strengthen them while not losing control over them, as would happen in the case of an external intervention.

6.4 - Natural Resources and Local Grievances

At this point, the consequences of natural resource extraction on the local population will be analyzed. First of all, there has been no discussion of the environmental damage caused by the extraction of either LNG or rubies in the area of Cabo Delgado. Even if one considers the possibility that there have been some, which is likely, it has not been mentioned by locals nor argued by analysts to be a source for grievances. On the other hand, the dislocation of communities, the loss of jobs and economic opportunities, and the perception of being robbed of the benefits deriving from the extraction of local resources were all present in the area of conflict.

As pointed out by Hanlon (2021, pp. 28-29), the people of Cabo Delgado have been involved for a long time in the activities of farming, fishing, and small trading. The discovery of natural resources in the area has disrupted their reality and had serious consequences for them, as in Mozambican law mining exploration and exploitation take precedence over their activities. This situation led to the eviction of thousands of local people, while the elites of Frelimo got their hands on most of the mining licenses. Not only this development disrupted the lives of farmers and fishermen, but it also affected the work of *garimpeiros*, the informal extractors of rubies and minerals who worked previous to the development of the official Montepuez Ruby Mining (Alberdi and Barroso, 2021, p. 237). In 2017, before the outbreak of conflict, the police

conducted a tight operation against the *garimpeiros*, employing violence and abusing their rights. The development of the mines has caused widespread discontent among them, leading a police commander to argue that those former “illegal” miners are among the financiers and leaders of the insurgent group (Chicava, 2020). The situation has not been much different regarding LNG, for which numerous resettlements had to happen, such as the one of 730 families in Quitupo village. This specific case has caused the local population not only to have to carry the burden of relocating but even created difficulties for them to access the natural resources they need for survival as a fishing community (Alberdi and Barroso, 2021, p. 240).

It is important to mention that the locals saw the arrival of “foreigners” from different areas of the states as a sign of neglect towards them and a further loss of potential benefits. As mentioned by a local Bishop, the arrival of outsiders as gas workers was perceived as an invasion, and it did not benefit the locals even incidentally, as very few of them ended up buying in local stores or contracting locals for provisions (Hanlon, 2018).

This series of events in Cabo Delgado helped to develop grievances related to the extraction of natural resources and, in some cases, directly pointed at the government and its security forces, such as the expropriations carried out by Frelimo elites and the violence against *garimpeiros*. At this stage, local perceptions worsened, as the population of an extremely poor region was now witnessing the positive effects of natural wealth right in front of their eyes, without them being involved. Hanlon (2021, p. 29) mentions that a survey of the population showed that locals had not favored the government for a long time. On top of that, the perception of being excluded from jobs and the abuses by the security forces all led locals, especially young unemployed men, to support and join the rebellion under the promises of economic opportunity.

The government made declarations related to this topic during the conflict, with the National Defense Minister Atanásio Salvador M'tumuke inviting the local youth to not be blinded by empty and unrealizable promises (Noticias, 2019, p. 8). Nonetheless, he did not propose a solution for them, and did not offer help or address their grievances, hence not achieving much from his declaration. Evidence of the effectiveness of the insurgents strategy can be found in interviews carried out by the Savana newspaper, in which the people of the town of Macomia state that the majority of the insurgents were recruited locally through the promise of money (Nhamire, 2018, p. 4). At this stage, it is evident that the extraction of natural resources in Mozambique has caused grievances among the local population. Those, left unaddressed, have facilitated the recruitment process of the insurgents.

6.5 - Conflict Outbreak, Human Rights Violations, and Escalation

At the current stage of the analysis, the theoretically predicted interaction between the grievances-based insurgent group and the pro-elite security and police forces should be explored. The first recorded rebel attack was on the 5th of October 2017, when the insurgents occupied the town of Mocimboa da Praia. It should be pointed out that in this stage of the conflict, essentially its outbreak, the rebel group targeted institutions such as the central administration building and the police station of Mocimboa da Praia (Matshine and Valoi, 2019, p. 6). This behavior mirrors an important expectation: the grievances that pushed people to join the rebellion are directed toward the interest of the elites, represented by the government and police infrastructures. There was, at this stage, no violence against civilians from the side of the insurgent group.

This first outbreak of violence, which showed a lack of respect and an aggressive position towards the authorities related to the government, caused a strong, disproportionate reaction by

the security forces. The reaction was a show of strength never seen before in the region (Nhantumbo, 2017, p. 3). Civilian killings and human rights violations committed by the security forces led to the escalation of the conflict. Mathsine and Valoi (2019, p. 6) pointed out that, in late 2017, one of the attacks conducted by the government forces in reaction to the earlier events killed over 50 people, among which children and women. The authors also cite Human Rights Watch, which collected evidence of arbitrary detentions and summary executions through its interviews. Furthermore, locals have mentioned that they witnessed arbitrary detentions and that they were forced to change their clothing and facial hair to not be associated with the rebel group by the security forces (Nhantumbo, 2017, p. 3). This environment of fear, leading to an oppressive situation, must have not gone unnoticed; the existing discontent of the locals against the elites and the security forces was proven to have a solid foundation. Eventually, the locals also grew unhappy with the rebel group and decided to fight back by themselves (Mathsine and Valoi, 2019, p. 7). The reaction from both locals and the authorities led the insurgents to change their strategies, rendering them more extreme. Killings of civilians, beheadings, pillaging, and looting became regularly employed tactics in the following years. Such behavior invited further reactions from the side of the security forces. At this point in the chain of events of the Cabo Delgado conflict, the pathway had been set. The loop of violence continued escalating throughout the next years, accumulating sufficient deaths for the events to be fully considered a civil war starting in the year 2020.

6.6 - Summary of Evidence and Main Findings

The findings described above strongly match the previously formulated theoretical expectations. Furthermore, the evidence strongly supports Collier and Hoeffler (2004) theory of grievance, as well as Ross's (2004) "grievance" hypothesis. There is evidence, in the case of the

Mozambican civil war, that extraction of rubies and LNG has triggered a mechanism leading to the outbreak of civil war, closely similar to the hypothesized one.

To begin with, the extraction of natural resources has affected the governmental elites as well as the local populations. Corruption, already present in the country, has worsened due to the extraction of natural resources, as theorized by Ross (2003). Furthermore, wealth has been monopolized by individuals close to the Frelimo party and was not employed for the benefit of the population. While there was evidence of popular discontent, there was none among competing elite members.

The elites have been found to employ security forces to solve problems arising in the area and to protect their economic interest, in line with Ross's (2001) research. On top of that, when in need of assistance, the government chose to employ private contractors such as Wagner and Dyck Advisory Group over the possibility of international intervention, once again ensuring that their interests would stay secure. All of this happened despite the possibility of taking seriously local concerns and addressing the causes of discontent, reaffirming the self-interest of the Mozambican elites.

Two out of three of the theorized causes of grievances among the local population, previously theorized by Ross (2004) and later identified by Ross (2005) in the case of Aceh, were present despite the lack of separatist claims, with environmental disruptions being the exception. Families were forced to move due to the exploitation of natural resources, with many losing their jobs and access to their means of sustenance. Simultaneously, locals perceived to be excluded from the benefits of the economic development related to natural resources. Local grievances

against the already unpopular system grew stronger and worked together with the lack of economic opportunities to give birth to an insurgency and facilitate the recruitment process.

Reflecting the expectation of the grievances directed against the government and elites being the cause of conflict, the first outbreak of violence in Mocimboa da Praia targeted precisely the institutions representing them. Evidence was found that the strong retaliation of the security forces included abuses of Human Rights, fostering further grievances as predicted by Collier and Hoeffler (2004). This led to the development of a climate of tension and fear in the region, rendering the insurgents more extreme. From this point, the conflict kept spiraling, until it escalated into a fully-fledged civil war starting in the year 2020.

It is fundamental to mention that religious explanations for the insurgency have been advanced and that Islamic extremism plays a role in the conflict. For instance, the administrator of Mocimboa da Praia and the Minister of Interior defined the insurgents as composed of Islamic fundamentalists trained abroad (Miramar TV, 2018). This narrative was fostered by the fact that ISIS celebrated an insurgent attack mentioning the group as “Soldiers of the caliphate” (Burke, 2019). Nonetheless, to consider the insurgency as being solely religion-based and having purely religious goals would be an oversimplification. The rebel group was argued to be “more criminal than jihadi” (Brincat, 2020). Furthermore, the extremist religious group was present in the region for many years previous to the conflict, rendering invalid the claim that religiosity caused its outbreak . Overall, religiosity should be considered as a further flag employed by insurgents to rally local support around it rather than the cause of civil war outbreak.

7. Conclusion:

To wrap up, the goal of this research was to test a causal mechanism extracted from the literature which connects the extraction of natural resources to the outbreak of civil war. The evidence from the Mozambican case shows vast support for the presence of the mechanism, with effects on corruption, security forces, and local grievances interacting and causing the outbreak of conflict, which escalation was due to human rights abuses by security forces. This study contributes to the literature on civil wars, confirming the role that natural resource extraction can play as a source of grievances which lead to civil war, in line with Collier and Hoeffler (2004) theory.

Nonetheless, the paper has a major limitation due to its nature as a case study: The positive findings may be due to unique features of the Mozambican case; hence the mechanism cannot be considered universally confirmed. To alleviate such limitation, a comparative analysis with other resource-rich developing countries that experienced civil war would be desirable. Furthermore, comparison with cases in which civil conflict did not break out would be also be beneficial, allowing to identify which variations in the mechanism lead to a different outcome. This would allow policy-makers to draw relevant conclusions about the effective and sustainable governance of natural resources.

The findings also have implications for investors in natural resources: MNCs should be careful about where they locate their investments, check on their local partners and ensure the respect and involvement of local communities. This is in their moral interest as well as their economic one, as violent insurgency can lead to the interruption of extracting activities as it did with Total in Mozambique (Total, 2021).

Even though this research confirms the theorized mechanism as a sufficient explanation for the civil war outbreak, it does not imply that it is the only one that contributed to it. As suggested by Ross (2003): “Natural resources are never the only source of a conflict. Any given conflict is brought about by a complex set of events” (p. 19). Therefore, the attention paid by others to further aspects of the insurgency deserves significant attention, as it only improves the understanding of the case. The account of the facts presented here does not aim to compete with other explanations, but should instead be considered as complementary to them.

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