

The Power of a Vaccine

The Process of Community-Initiated Militia Formation

In March 1992, the local Mecubúri district government in Nampula province stated in their monthly report that education targets could not be met because students preferred joining Naparama to going to school: “The majority of schools in the district did not comply with the goals for the fourth and fifth grade due to the fact that many students enlisted in the organization of Naparama.”¹ As in other districts, the newly formed community-initiated militia units attracted a large number of followers, even a couple of years after their initial formation in the Mecubúri district in 1990.

By contrast, state-initiated militias had difficulty mobilizing militia members and suffered from a high desertion rate, as the local administration of Namarrói stated in a report from 1989:

The key problem has always been the disorganization [of the popular militia] due to the lack of a capable and efficient command, linked to the problem of the lack of weapons; [militia members] often desert and abandon [the militia], for various reasons.²

How can the differences between these militias’ appeal be explained? How does the mobilization process of community-initiated militias differ from that of the mobilization for state-initiated militias?

While Chapter 6 analyzed the group-level process of how armed organizations and repertoires of violent collective action spread, this chapter focuses on the links between group characteristics and the individual-level process of

¹ The fourth and fifth grades correspond to the age group of youths between ten and fourteen years of age. República de Moçambique, Província de Nampula, Distrito de Mecubúri, *Relatório referente ao mês de Fevereiro de 1992*, March 3, 1992 (AGN, Nampula).

² República Popular de Moçambique, Província da Zambézia, Administração do Distrito de Namarrói, *Informação do Governo Distrital sobre as actividades realizados referentes aos meses de Janeiro a Setembro 1989*, October 2, 1989 (AGZ, Quelimane).

joining a militia. Once a community adopts a new form of violent collective action and a new institution is established, how does the institution grow and attract new followers?

The conditions and mechanisms of *initial* diffusion identified in Chapter 6 point to the importance of mobilization's social context. Communities learned that forming militias would help protect them from insurgent violence because they considered their situation sufficiently similar to that of a neighboring community. This implies that the security context and the social context of the two communities were similar; forming militias resonated with the receiving community. I further draw on the significance of the social context in this chapter to explore the process of militia mobilization.

I suggest one causal path of militia mobilization: the militia's innovative use of social conventions that invoke collective meaning with community residents, which increases participants' sense of agency and shapes their willingness to join the militia.³ Naparama's reinterpretation of preexisting rites and rituals – the initiation with a bullet-proof vaccine – gave ordinary men (and women) the power to engage Renamo combatants and prevail over them.⁴ The alleged power of the vaccine convinced many to join the newly formed militia, as a former Naparama combatant from Nicoadala declared: “[I joined] because of the suffering, [because] I wanted the war to be over. I heard that [when people were vaccinated], they were not hit by bullets, that's why I joined.”⁵

I compare Naparama's mobilization success to the less effective mobilization of state-initiated popular militias (*milícias populares*), using interview and archival evidence from the Nicoadala district in Zambézia province (see map in Figure 7.1), one of the main districts of Naparama activity. To explore these mechanisms further in a different context, I use interview and archival evidence from Murrupula district in Nampula province, one of the main districts of Naparama activity in the province north to Zambézia (see map in Figure 6.3). In both cases, I focus on the mobilization of combatants, not on the mobilization of collaborators, from among the local population.⁶

This chapter proceeds as follows. I first lay out the empirical puzzle of militia mobilization during Mozambique's civil war and provide some historical

³ As I explain Chapter 6, learning did not lead to sustained diffusion in the Namarrói district because the institutional context – elite conflicts – prevented the militia from being integrated into the local security apparatus. This chapter focuses on the mobilization processes once this institutionalization of the militia is complete.

⁴ Interview with local government representative (2011-09-23-Gm4), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 23, 2011.

⁵ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-14-Nm10), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 14, 2011.

⁶ I exclude the mobilization of collaborators from this analysis, as the processes of mobilizing combatants and collaborators are different. Many civilians provided Naparama with food, but only those with “courage” joined the Naparama militias as combatants. Thus, there are different thresholds for joining as a collaborator or as a combatant.

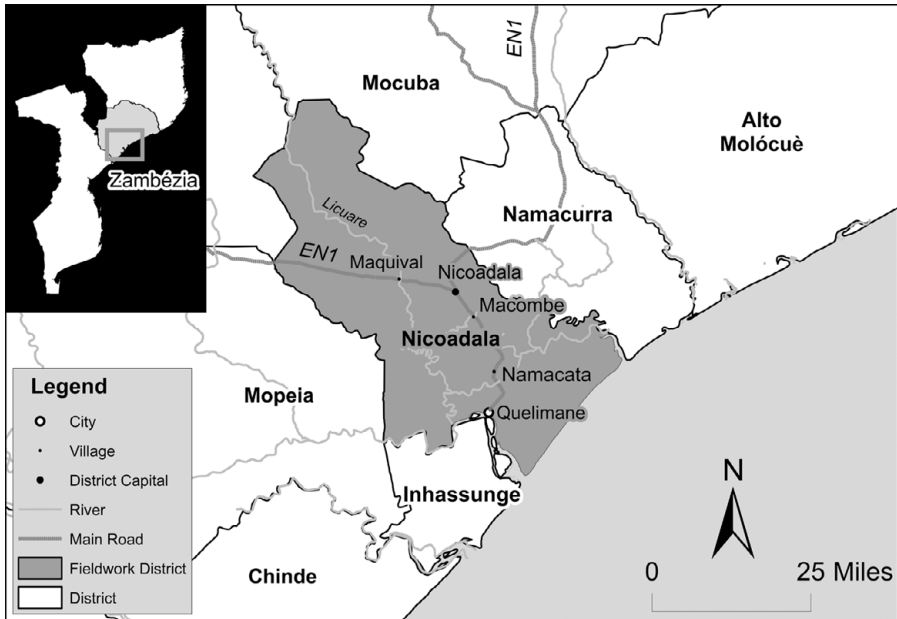


FIGURE 7.1. Map of Nicoadala in Zambézia province

Note: Cartography by Sofia Jorge

background to the war's dynamics in Zambézia and Nampula provinces. I then review the theory of militia mobilization that I introduced in Chapter 2, which frames my analysis of the militia mobilization process. In the second section, I evaluate the different mechanisms by tracing the mobilization process of the community-initiated militia and comparing it to the less successful mobilization process of the state-initiated militia in the Nicoadala district. The final section inquires whether these mechanisms operated in the Murrupula district of Nampula province to explore whether the argument holds in a different context.

7.1 THE PUZZLE OF STATE-INITIATED VERSUS COMMUNITY-INITIATED MILITIA MOBILIZATION

Pro-government militias were not an uncommon sight in wartime Mozambique. Beginning in the early 1980s, Frelimo relied on state-initiated militias as a counterinsurgency instrument for maintaining territorial control and pursuing state-building during the unfolding war with Renamo.⁷ Popular militias (*milícias populares*) – initially created as political forces in communal villages

⁷ “Mozambique: Frelimo Draws the Battleline,” *Africa (London)* (116), 1981, 38. For more detailed historical context of how state-initiated militias were formed, see Chapter 4.

and state companies – were no longer linked to the local party hierarchy but to the military headquarters and received military training. In addition, Frelimo formed territorial defense forces (*forças de defesa territorial*) in 1985, which received rudimentary military training to defend the rural areas in the districts.⁸ Provincial military headquarters trained militias as first defenders of villages, state farms, companies, and towns.⁹ Over 400 Tanzanian soldiers assisted with the training of the militias, and Portugal provided weapons and uniforms.¹⁰ An estimated 50 percent of the population of Zambézia had received military training by 1986.¹¹

The delegation of military tasks to state-initiated militias backfired in many areas. Uncontrolled distribution of weapons contributed to insecurity on roads and in rural areas.¹² People often complained about the state-initiated militias for being “dangerous, drunken, undisciplined thieves” (Finnegan 1992, 211). In the northern provinces, the local administration sent militias to force people into communal villages (Alexander 1997, 7).¹³ In Zambézia province, militia-men were involved in assaults on buses and stole from the local population.¹⁴ Moreover, militia members proved disloyal, as the rebels were able to recruit them as combatants and spies (Alexander 1997, 4).¹⁵ Local administrations, therefore, faced major challenges in mobilizing and retaining militia members.

As a response to the worsening security situation in the late 1980s, the Naparama militia formed as a result of a community initiative. The militia gained in a short amount of time a large number of followers and successfully drove Renamo out of its strongholds in Zambézia and Nampula provinces (see Chapter 5). What explains the large-scale grassroots mobilization for community-initiated militias in the late 1980s, as compared to earlier failed state attempts? This puzzle is especially striking given the apparent lack of firearms and other resources for the grassroots movement.

⁸ It is unclear what the exact difference is between the popular militias and the territorial defense forces; in many districts, the popular militia appeared to be part of the territorial defense forces.

⁹ On state-initiated militias in government-controlled areas in Gorongosa, see Igreja (2007, 132).

¹⁰ “A ‘Worst-Case’ Security Scenario for Mozambique,” *Africa Now* (32), 1983, 86–88.

¹¹ Gil Lauriciano, “Resistência popular cresce na Zambézia. Dez mil pessoas armadas com zagaias,” *Notícias*, November 22, 1986. In areas that were affected by the war in the late 1970s, such as Manica province, Frelimo had already created militias and provided district administrators with weapons (Alexander 1997, 4).

¹² “Distribuição de armas não foi bem controlada reconhece Ministro do Interior,” *Notícias*, May 28, 1991.

¹³ República Popular de Moçambique, Província da Zambézia, Gabinete do Administrador do Distrito de Morrumbala, *Relatório Informativo*, December 11, 1981 (AGZ, Quelimane).

¹⁴ Interview with local government representative (2011-09-28-Gm5), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 28, 2011; Interview with civilian (2011-09-14-f1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 14, 2011.

¹⁵ Interview with community leader (2011-09-23-Lm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 23, 2011.

State-led militia mobilization is not necessarily doomed to fail, as the sustained mobilization of the civil patrols during Guatemala's civil war and of the self-defense committees (*rondas campesinas*) in southern Peru show (Stoll 1993; Remijnse 2002; Starn 1995; Degregori 1999). Such state-initiated militias can bring about a "self-reinforcing logic," restoring agency among villagers that previously suffered from insurgent and state violence (Starn 1995, 568). Why was the community-initiated Naparama militia able to instill agency and attract new members where the Mozambican state-initiated militias were unable to do so?

7.1.1 The Experience of Wartime Uncertainty

As outlined in Chapter 2, I start from the premise that the benefits and risks of participating in militia organizations are difficult to calculate and project. In such unstable and uncertain environments as civil wars, individuals oftentimes base their decisions on whether to join armed organizations on other means than rational calculation. They draw on familiar knowledge and institutions from their community that may, if not overcome, then at least stabilize such uncertainty.

To establish the context of uncertainty in Mozambique, it helps to look at how civilians experienced and made sense of the war, as described to me in interviews. All of the armed groups involved in the war targeted civilians due to the "identification problem" in irregular civil wars, which made it difficult to distinguish supporters from collaborators (Kalyvas 2006). In northern Mozambique, the "pattern of violence" (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017) of armed organizations was therefore characterized by repertoires of kidnappings, killings, and rape, and selective, collective, and indiscriminate targeting of civilians.

A central theme in my interviews was the notion of "luck": being spared from violence and emphasizing violence's arbitrary nature. Indiscriminate violence mostly occurred in contested zones where few people remained, but through which people traveled (see Kalyvas 2006). When civilians encountered combatants in these zones, they were likely to experience violence whether the combatants were from Frelimo or Renamo, as a pastor in Nicoadala explained: "I'm not going to say that those who killed are those who did not kill. All killed. They killed side by side. Men suffered."¹⁶ According to the pastor, civilians had difficulty convincing combatants that they were loyal: when traveling somewhere, "it was a matter of luck whether you arrived – arrive and you were safe. But on the way – [there was] killing just killing . . .".¹⁷

¹⁶ Interview with religious leader (2011-09-06-Pm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 6, 2011.

¹⁷ Interview with religious leader (2011-09-06-Pm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 6, 2011.

In less contested, enemy-controlled zones, civilians were usually targeted either selectively, based on their position within the enemy's organization, or collectively, based on the fact that they lived in enemy-controlled areas.¹⁸ When combatants entered an enemy-controlled zone, they targeted leaders and enemy collaborators based on their association with the rebels:

When Frelimo entered an area controlled by Renamo, they kidnapped half [of the population] and there were also some [people whom] they killed – those conniving, those who had some relationship [with Renamo]. They even asked the people who the leader was in that area.¹⁹

However, due to the fact that combatants often did not wear uniforms, it was difficult to identify those who were fighting or collaborating with the enemy, and so often all people living under the enemy's control were *collectively* targeted:

Did Frelimo also kill regular people who weren't Renamo combatants?

If you lived in a Renamo-controlled area, [Frelimo] said that you as well belonged to Renamo; as much as Renamo did the same in Frelimo-controlled areas. This was war. When you are in war, you are there to kill.²⁰

Most often, little selective targeting occurred, and civilians were targeted just by their location, in particular when they had moved between places and were suspected of being spies:

There was a problem during the war. When Renamo arrived in the [Frelimo-controlled] town and met someone who had fled from the area under their control and they recognized him, they killed him. When Frelimo arrived here [in the Renamo-controlled area], they killed as well, saying that we fed [Renamo].²¹

In line with this perception that violence was omnipresent and arbitrary, community residents felt that among those targeted were often innocent civilians.²² In addition, it was uncertain whether alleged enemy collaborators would be killed as combatants could decide to kidnap them instead:

Even here [in Frelimo-controlled areas] there were some that had the attitude to kill, others did not; the same was true for over there [with Renamo], [when] they came and

¹⁸ On the concept of collective targeting, see Steele (2017). Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood (2017) refer to the same concept as “identity-based targeting.”

¹⁹ Interview with former Frelimo combatant (2011-09-13-FmI), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 13, 2011.

²⁰ Interview with former Frelimo combatant (2011-09-13-FmI), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 13, 2011.

²¹ Interview with civilian (2011-11-24-m18), Namilasse, Murrupula, Nampula, November 24, 2011.

²² Interview with community leader (2011-09-23-Lm3), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 23, 2011.

took us [with them], some killed, while others said we can't kill, we will take them with us.²³

Many respondents stated that whether they would be spared from being killed was thus arbitrary:

Renamo did not behave badly toward all the people they met, it was a matter of luck for each of us! [When] Frelimo came for rescue, they also mistreated people, it was a matter of luck for each of us!²⁴

[Renamo] killed us, it was a matter of luck.²⁵

It was just war. You needed to be lucky to stay alive.²⁶

Pointing to war as a state of exception – “war is war” – and staying alive as a “matter of luck,” respondents found it difficult to predict whether they would be alive tomorrow.²⁷ There was little that they could do to make sure they survived. Even joining Renamo, the military, or the state-initiated militia did not seem to provide assurance that one would be spared, as this former Renamo combatant pointed out: “Where we met each other, we fought; some were wounded, [some] killed and others were saved. It was war.”²⁸ The combatant did not indicate anything that could have explained who was wounded, killed, or saved.

Interviewees recognized that the type of war they had experienced – a guerrilla war “between brothers” whose root causes were difficult to understand – did not leave much room for predictability. In contrast to the anti-colonial war between the Portuguese and the Frelimo liberation movement, the reasons for the war were impossible to understand, and the enemy difficult to recognize:

So we thought the following: We already received our country [from the Portuguese] and [among] those that are fighting among Blacks, we can't recognize the enemy as the uniforms are the same, and the weapons are the same. If they had been white, we would have understood that they were the enemy.²⁹

Respondents perceived the particular type of war – the guerrilla war – as one in which anyone could be potentially affected by violence. Violence therefore seemed somewhat limitless, as this former local government official explained:

²³ Interview with community leader (2011-09-23-Lm3), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 23, 2011.

²⁴ Interview with local government representative (2011-10-03-Gm6), Nicoadala, Zambézia, October 3, 2011.

²⁵ Interview with civilian (2011-11-28-f12), Chinga, Murrupula, Nampula, November 28, 2011.

²⁶ Interview with civilian (2011-11-28-m22), Chinga, Murrupula, Nampula, November 28, 2011.

²⁷ Interview with civilian (2011-11-28-m22), Chinga, Murrupula, Nampula, November 28, 2011.

²⁸ Interview with former Renamo combatant (2011-11-25-Rm9), Murrupula, Nampula, November 25, 2011.

²⁹ Interview with civilian (2011-09-14-f1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 14, 2011.

“In whatever guerrilla war, there is not much control. Only in wars between regular armies, there is control.”³⁰

My conversations with civilians, community representatives, and combatants thus affirm the importance of uncertainty during the civil war in Mozambique. Especially after the initial years of the war when Renamo switched from selective to collective and indiscriminate violence, the war’s context provided few hints about who would be spared from violence. Joining an armed group – whether a rebel or government force, or a state-initiated or a community-initiated militia – was not an obvious choice with measurably less risk of experiencing violence.

7.1.2 Explaining Militia Mobilization

The Naparama militia helped manage the uncertainty of war by relying on preexisting social conventions. I suggest two main mechanisms through which social conventions facilitate militia mobilization: First, *commonality*, whereby the militia represented an innovative institutionalization of common, preexisting social conventions, and second, a *context for self-empowerment*, which instilled a belief in agency and enabled the large-scale mobilization of members. Table 7.1 provides a schematic of the argument’s key components and the indicators relevant for analyzing the empirical material.³¹

In addition to these proposed mechanisms from my theory on militia mobilization, I also explore alternatives in this chapter. While classic approaches to mobilization do not directly respond to decision-making under

TABLE 7.1. *Overview of factors, mechanisms, and indicators explaining militia mobilization*

Factor	Mechanisms	Indicators
Social conventions	Commonality	Militia resonates with communities: Credible expertise of leaders Salient purpose Militia provides innovation: Reinterprets and adapts social conventions
	Context for self-empowerment	Belief in agency/claim of ownership: Identification with militia Hope and sense of purpose: Expression of pride; expectation of success

³⁰ Interview with local government representative (2011-11-10-Gm13), Nampula, November 10, 2011.

³¹ Chapter 2 outlines this theory in more detail.

uncertainty, they can still serve as a template for alternative explanations. The main alternative explanation is to receive (reliable) information that allows people to make projections about future trajectories of being a civilian versus being a militia member.

First of all, people may directly or indirectly experience members of the militia being spared from violence, thereby updating their expectations by *learning*. If learning was sufficient to explain mobilization success, we should see interviewees linking their decision to join militias exclusively to having experienced that militia members are spared from violence and being sure that this information is correct.

Second, the state might provide resources and institutional support to militias to enlist them in their counterinsurgency efforts, which could make a militia more attractive to joiners. These mechanisms would be *resource allocation* and *political opportunity* (McAdam 1982). If such support was sufficient to explain mobilization success, we should see evidence of the local government and military providing resources such as weapons, food, and transport to militias and a willingness to cooperate with militias in the form of information exchange. Individual recruits would report that they joined to receive a salary or other material benefits.

A third option would be that there is little risk calculation because people are desperate to change something in their lives. The security situation may deteriorate in such a way that *discontent* becomes salient, which motivates participation in new armed groups (Gurr 1970; Paige 1975; Scott 1976). If discontent was sufficient to explain mobilization success, we should see people referring exclusively to their hardship when speaking about their motivation to join the militias.

When tracing the mobilization process of the Naparama militia and comparing it to that of the popular militias, I evaluate each of the mobilization mechanisms – those I propose and the alternatives – and the validity of the causal chain to explain why the Naparama militia was more successful than the state-initiated popular militia in mobilizing.

7.2 EXPLAINING NAPARAMA MOBILIZATION IN NICOADALA, ZAMBÉZIA PROVINCE

7.2.1 The War in Nicoadala

Using evidence from Nicoadala district in Zambézia province – which was one of the main districts of Naparama activity and also its headquarters for most of the time that Naparama was active – I develop and evaluate the different mechanisms to explain how Naparama mobilized (see map in Figure 7.1).

The war came to Nicoadala in central Mozambique for the first time in early August 1984 during Renamo's second offensive in Zambézia province.

Renamo attacked the outer boroughs of the district town close to the railway line that connects Quelimane to Zambézia's second-largest city, Mocuba. Renamo combatants looted people's belongings and abducted people, mostly to carry goods back to their base in Mabadane, in the border area between Mocuba and Namacurra districts to the northwest of Nicoadala (Lemia 2001, 36).³² Nicoadala's district capital lies at the crossroads of the main Highway Number 1, and the road to the coastal provincial capital Quelimane. Nicoadala served as a buffer zone for the advancing rebels that sought to occupy the provincial capital, and convoys on roads around the town were targets of constant ambushes.³³

A second wave of attacks reached Nicoadala in 1986. Renamo pillaged and destroyed stores, the main administrative building, and the hospital. In late 1988 and early 1989, Nicoadala experienced a few confrontations between Renamo and Frelimo, and Renamo advanced up to ten kilometers from Quelimane. However, Renamo never occupied the district town.³⁴ Direct confrontations remained limited. Small groups of Renamo combatants often attacked the town in the early mornings when most of the population and military were hiding in surrounding areas.³⁵ By the late 1980s, many displaced people had settled in the district capital in government-organized displacement camps (*centros de acomodação*).³⁶ These villages were frequent targets for Renamo attacks; in particular, right after people had received relief goods.³⁷

³² Before July 25, 1986, Nicoadala was part of the Namacurra district.

³³ Interview with local government representative (2011-10-03-Gm6), Duguduia, Nicoadala, Zambézia, October 3, 2011.

³⁴ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-09-Nm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011.

³⁵ Interview with local government representative (2012-02-25-Gm16), Quelimane, Zambézia, February 25, 2012.

³⁶ The population called these settlements *aldeias* (villages), since in their structure and organization they resembled communal villages, which Frelimo had attempted to construct right after independence to introduce socialist forms of production in the countryside. Frelimo's villagization policy met lots of resistance in Zambézia. By 1982, only 2 percent of the population in Zambézia lived in communal villages (Legrand 1993, 90). During the war, the local administration registered all newly arrived displaced people and then allocated land to them to build a hut in a displacement camp in which other people with the same origin had settled. The displacement camp then received the name of the village from where most of its residents originated.

³⁷ Interviews with local government representatives (2011-09-15-Gm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 15, 2011; and (2011-09-28-Gm5), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 28, 2011. The displaced population put a heavy burden on the local residents and conflicts arose. After several neighborhoods had experienced the first assaults, Nicoadala's residents accused those coming from war-affected areas to have brought the war to the district capital. The residents also complained that they did not receive any relief goods like the displaced population did. See interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-22-Nm15), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 22, 2011.

Although Frelimo military units were stationed in Nicoadala's district capital, their response to Renamo attacks was ineffective, as this former Naparama combatant reported:

The suffering that people experienced – Frelimo could not cope [with it]. Renamo came at night, hammering against front doors [so that] people came out and they [could] arrest them, take them with them and collect all their belongings. This meant that the population did not live at ease. Every morning [we] talked about the number of people kidnapped during the night.³⁸

Community members told stories of soldiers failing to pursue Renamo combatants to their base and fleeing rather than defending the town as they were too few to succeed.³⁹ The army units stationed in Nicoadala usually retreated to wait for reinforcement from Quelimane.⁴⁰ In 1988, the Russian-trained Red Berets (Boina Vermelha) Special Forces and Tanzanian soldiers were stationed in the district to prevent Renamo from attacking Quelimane. One of Renamo's targets was the water facility in the Licuar locality, which Frelimo protected by enlisting *antigos combatentes*, former combatants from the liberation struggle, who had settled in the area.⁴¹ However, these forces only improved the situation in or close to the district capital; rural areas continued to be targets for frequent attacks.⁴²

The state-initiated popular militias were not an effective counterinsurgency force either. They were organized as early as 1980 by a subunit of the provincial unit of the national army's chief of staff, with the relevant unit reporting that it had trained 3,000 militias across Zambézia province by February 1980.⁴³ The popular militias were recruited locally and their task was primarily defensive. They were organized similarly to the army in sections, platoons, companies, and battalions, patrolled their communities at night, and informed the population of any imminent threat.⁴⁴ Popular militias had limited access to weapons, which meant shooting them primarily to warn the population in case

³⁸ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-19-Nm12), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 19, 2011.

³⁹ Interviews with former Frelimo combatant and civilian (2011-09-13-Fm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 13, 2011; (2011-09-14-ft), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 14, 2011.

⁴⁰ Interview with community leader (2011-09-29-Lf2), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 29, 2011.

⁴¹ Interview with religious leader (2011-09-06-Pm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 6, 2011.

⁴² Interview with community leader (2011-09-23-Lm3a), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 23, 2011.

⁴³ República Popular de Moçambique, Ministério da Defesa Nacional, Comando do 1º Batalhão de Infantaria Zambézia, Comissariado Político das Forças Populares de Libertação de Moçambique, Secção de Milícias Populares, *Relatório*, February 18, 1980 (AGZ, Quelimane).

⁴⁴ República Popular de Moçambique, Ministério da Defesa Nacional, Comando do 1º Batalhão da 7ª Brigada Infantaria da Zambézia/Mocuba, Estado Maior do 1º Batalhão da Zambézia/Mocuba, Secção de Milícias Populares. *Nota N.º 083/MM/80, Assunto: Pedido de Viatura*, May 14, 1980 (AGZ, Quelimane); Interview with local government representative (2011-09-15-Gm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 15, 2011.

of an assault.⁴⁵ Militias only received a salary if they were employed by a company to protect factory sites; none of the others received any pay and the population was expected to support them with food.⁴⁶ In 1987, there were attempts to professionalize the militias through increased military training and political education.⁴⁷

The state-initiated militias had a bad reputation among some respondents, and they could not mobilize enough community residents. Several respondents claimed that militias did not have a specific task during the war as they were either absent or fled.⁴⁸ It was unclear how joining the militia would or could help manage residents' uncertainty: joining could just as easily increase the chances that they would suffer violence as if they were to remain civilians. The popular militias were part of Frelimo's restructuring of society after independence that served to politically educate and control the population through its involvement in mass organizations and the eradication of anything "traditional" (Frelimo 1978). However, communities in Zambézia, historically a region of resistance (Isaacman and Isaacman 1976), successfully refused to move into communal villages and were suspicious of efforts to strengthen the state's reach into rural areas (Chichava 2007). Across Mozambique, militia desertion rates were high, the government had to resort to forced recruitment, and the population often complained about militias mistreating the people they were supposed to protect (Finnegan 1992; Alexander 1997). Many militiamen joined Naparama when they had the chance to do so.⁴⁹

The state-initiated militia could not mobilize and retain enough community residents, as the militia did not resonate with local communities and did not provide an opportunity for self-empowerment. Community residents did not identify with the militiamen and their limited ability to confront Renamo did not provide the agency that community residents required to address the difficult situation they found themselves in. As I will show in the following section, these two mechanisms, commonality and the context for self-empowerment, operated in the social mobilization of Naparama.

⁴⁵ Interview with former Frelimo combatant (2011-09-13-Fm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 13, 2011.

⁴⁶ Interview with community leader (2011-09-23-Lm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 23, 2011.

⁴⁷ República Popular de Moçambique, Província de Zambézia, Direcção Provincial de Apoio e Controlo, *Relatório*, September 12, 1987 (AGZ, Quelimane).

⁴⁸ Interviews with civilian (2011-09-14-ft), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 14, 2011; community leader (2011-09-23-Lm3), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 23, 2011; and government representative (2011-09-28, Gm5), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 28, 2011.

⁴⁹ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-11-05-Nm43), Nicoadala, Zambézia, November 5, 2011; Interview with community leader (2011-09-21-Lm2), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 21, 2011.

7.2.2 Mobilizing Naparama in Nicoadala

The difficult conditions in Nicoadala in 1988–89 led residents to welcome the relief Naparama promised. The displaced community invited Naparama leader António to Nicoadala after hearing stories about his activities in other regions. The local government had no knowledge of this initiative and tried to prevent Naparama from mobilizing in Nicoadala. However, when the administration saw the groups' benefit – the “recuperation” of weapons and population from Renamo-held territories – they tolerated Naparama's activities.⁵⁰

Commonality. In its mobilization process, the Naparama leadership made references to (traditional) religion, which resonated with local communities and attracted followers. As discussed earlier, António claimed that he had received a mission from God to liberate the Mozambican people from war by use of a bulletproof medicine (Nordstrom 1997, 58).⁵¹ Traditional medicine for personal defense has historical roots in Mozambique, in particular in the region where Naparama formed, the area of the Makua-Lomwe linguistic group (Do Rosário 2009, 327; Dos Santos Peixe 1960; Isaacman and Isaacman 1983).⁵² Protective measures featured during the liberation struggle and the civil war (Wilson 1992; Wiegink 2020). But the reference to Christian symbols also resonated in a society in which Catholicism was strong.⁵³ The reference to well-known conventions thus was salient within communities.

In addition, the leader's expertise provided the necessary credibility for resonance to occur. Whenever António introduced himself to the people and the local administration, he did so by first demonstrating his powers. When he first arrived in Nicoadala, he asked local leaders to call all the town residents together for a meeting:⁵⁴

[António] dug a ditch, it seemed as if he wanted to bury a person. Dug, and put a mat on the ground. He entered, closed [the ditch], ... and then spoke from underneath the

⁵⁰ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-19-Nm13), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 19, 2011.

⁵¹ Rachel Waterhouse, “Antonio's Triumph of the Spirits,” *Africa South (Harare)* (May), 1991, 14.

⁵² See Do Rosário (2009, 327) on a medicine against the danger of lions; see also interview with a civilian, (2012-05-03-m25), Namarrói, Zambézia, May 3, 2012, who told me about a medicine against cobra bites; see Dos Santos Peixe (1960) on a potion historically used during war. Scholars also point to the use of such a medicine during the Barue rebellion against the Portuguese in 1917 (Isaacman and Isaacman 1976).

⁵³ António often mixed Christian and Muslim with African traditions. See Rachel Waterhouse, “Antonio's Triumph of the Spirits,” *Africa South (Harare)* (May), 1991, 14–15. Aside from the story of his resurrection, the reenactment of the resurrection, and claiming to have received the mission to liberate the Mozambican people from Jesus Christ, António often prayed from a bible during his ceremonies (Interview [2012-03-12-Jm3], Quelimane, Zambézia, March 12, 2012).

⁵⁴ António repeated this ceremony in places where he was unknown and whenever journalists or researchers visited him. See interview with journalist (2012-03-12-Jm3), Quelimane, Zambézia, March 12, 2012.

ground and we heard [him]. . . . Then he woke up, went to the fire with clothes [that melt when they burn], and started to take firewood and [touched] his arms until the fire was extinguished. And he didn't burn himself.⁵⁵

This demonstration of invincibility was crucial for people to believe that António could mobilize the necessary resources to save them from violence, and served as a major motivation to join.⁵⁶ António's power over life and death created confidence in the new movement: "We were left with admiration. There existed a person in the world who treated people so that they wouldn't die? But this [must be] God [himself]!"⁵⁷

Individual protective medicine was common during the war, but Naparama's *innovation* was to provide an organizational framework for the use of such medicine, thereby turning it into a collective practice.⁵⁸ Every new member had to go through an initiation ritual that took place as follows:

Thirty youths were taken to be treated. [António] vaccinated us with razor blades. [He] cut our bodies with razor blades and put the medicine [into the wound]. Others he rubbed the whole body [with the medicine]. After all this, we were put to a test, [he] took sharpened machetes and attempted to cut [us], but because of the medicine, the machetes did not hurt us. He took a rifle and shot in our direction and nothing happened with us. And then we were told the rules that we had to respect. We paid five meticais for a small ceremony.⁵⁹

Protective measures during war usually focused on personal protection. Spirit mediums, traditional healers, or traditional chiefs could be accessed on an individual basis and they often limited access to those in power such as chiefs or commanders of higher rank (see Wilson 1992, 544). Access to spiritual power was an expression of social differentiation, emphasizing the elite individual more than the group. For the state army, the popular militias, and the rebels, the use of protective measures was therefore not a means to mobilize people to join their forces; Renamo, as well as the state army in the late 1980s, mostly relied on forced recruitment (Vines 1991; Weinstein 2007; Schafer 2007, 78–79).

⁵⁵ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-12-Nm6), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 12, 2011.

⁵⁶ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-14-Nm8), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 14, 2011.

⁵⁷ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-09-Nm4), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011.

⁵⁸ Naparama was organized similarly to military forces into sections, platoons, companies, and battalions; group interview with former Naparama commanders (2011-08-23-Gr-Nm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, August 23, 2011. The initiation rituals also had a socialization effect to teach members about norms of behavior within the group, but I focus here on the *mobilizational* effect of the initiation (Cohen 2016, 21).

⁵⁹ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-09-Nm2), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011.

To ensure the effect of Naparama's medicine, each member had to follow a strict code of conduct that concerned his or her behavior in the household, within the family, and on the battlefield. On the battlefield, Naparama combatants were not allowed to look back, only look ahead; no one was allowed to be in front of the other; no fighting in the shade, always in the sun; if the enemy was in the shade, we were not allowed to be in the shade as well; . . . we could not retreat when we heard shots, we had to go there where they [Renamo] were.⁶⁰

These rules demonstrate how the militia adapted social conventions to the new social context. By continuously advancing, often while singing, and not turning back, Naparama created such fear among Renamo combatants that direct confrontations between the two forces were often averted. Renamo combatants left their bases as soon as they heard Naparama approaching. If a Naparama combatant violated any of these rules, he or she forfeited the protection of the medicine: "when someone shot, the bullet chased you until it hit you."⁶¹ All deaths among Naparama combatants were explained by reference to violations of these rules.

At first glance, inoculation against violence might be interpreted simply as reducing individuals' risk of injury or death in battle when joining the militia. But it was more than that: it tapped into shared beliefs and built institutions to make the militia effective in battle, effectiveness which in turn reinforced those beliefs and generated a context for self-empowerment.

Context for Self-Empowerment. The promise of relief from the suffering turned Naparama into a movement that reclaimed civilians' agency over a war that had reduced them to spectators. Respondents frequently claimed ownership over the movement:

It was a movement that emerged from within the population, it just emerged like this, they fought with spears and supported Frelimo in their fight against Renamo. It was the population that fought against Renamo in order to capture Renamo bandits.⁶²

The people idealized Naparama as their prime solution to constant flight and damage to family and property, and the passivity that these experiences created. Interviewees frequently repeated that they had been "tired of war" and had needed to do something about it:

It was the people revolting, the people were tired of war, so they preferred to volunteer, encounter those that made war and neutralize [Renamo].⁶³

⁶⁰ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-09-Nm2), Nicosadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011.

⁶¹ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-09-Nm2), Nicosadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011.

⁶² Interview with civilian (2011-09-09-m2), Nicosadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011.

⁶³ Interview with former local government representative (2011-09-15-Gm1), Nicosadala, Zambézia, September 15, 2011.

What did Manuel [António] say to the people to encourage them to receive the vaccine? Nothing, they just volunteered because they were tired of war. Each one's courage is what incentivized them to go. An example: If you didn't get to eat for one or two days, wouldn't you search for something to eat?⁶⁴

When the war began, we always had to flee to the bush. My alternative was to join Naparama to defend myself and my family.⁶⁵

We were tired of all the suffering, and since we saw that the Naparama combatants did not flee, I decided to be vaccinated to protect myself and my family.⁶⁶

Naparama thus provided the tools to strive toward greater autonomy and empower the people to confront those that made war. The vaccine offered the necessary courage for self-defense instead of flight. Most members thus joined voluntarily.⁶⁷

Naparama nurtured people's belief in agency by responding to two important hardships. The militia provided the opportunity for people to reclaim their farmland and the ability to provide for themselves,⁶⁸ and to bring back family members abducted by Renamo. People no longer had to rely on the absent and inefficient state armed forces:

I was in my house, one time [Renamo] came during the night and abducted my sister and my brother and took all of my documents. It was during the night, it was raining, no one noticed anything, and so they were kidnapped and [Renamo] left. We did not have any way to defend ourselves, we were simple people. Everyone was just suffering. The moment when this man [António] appeared, I volunteered in order to search for my family. . . . That's what led me to be a Naparama.⁶⁹

Those most exposed to Renamo violence sought to overcome their passivity the most. In Nicosadala, many of the Naparama members came from displacement camps that had formed in several neighborhoods of the district capital.⁷⁰ It was in these camps – that people referred to as “villages” – where many Naparama combatants in the Nicosadala district were mobilized:

⁶⁴ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-30-Nm20), Nicosadala, Zambézia, September 30, 2011.

⁶⁵ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-28-Nm17), Nicosadala, Zambézia, September 28, 2011.

⁶⁶ Interview with former government representative (2011-09-23-Gm4), Nicosadala, Zambézia, September 23, 2011.

⁶⁷ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-28-Nm17), Nicosadala, Zambézia, September 28, 2011.

⁶⁸ Interview with community leader (2011-09-23, Lm3a), Nicosadala, September 23, 2011.

⁶⁹ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-12-Nm6), Nicosadala, Zambézia, September 12, 2011.

⁷⁰ Rachel Waterhouse, “Antonio's Triumph of the Spirits,” *Africa South (Harare)* (May), 1991, 14–15; Interviews with former Naparama combatants (2011-09-09-Nm1), Nicosadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011; and (2011-09-22-Nm15), Nicosadala, Zambézia, September 22, 2011.

Where did Manuel António mobilize people for the Naparama?

That was in the village. Because many displaced people lived in the village – people tired of the war. So when [António] Naparama came and said “I am bringing [the Parama medicine],” all these people that were there in the village and suffered accepted [António’s offer], and the [Naparama] commando was set up in the village.⁷¹

Thus, the most vulnerable population, which lived in simple huts, had limited access to food, and was often in conflict with the local population over scarce resources, was the most attracted to the Naparama militia.⁷²

Community residents therefore became the main agents and beneficiaries of the new movement, which led them to identify with the Naparama. The movement was independent of any existing political, religious, or traditional organizations (Wilson 1992, 563).⁷³ This openness along with António’s attention to the plea for agency by the people made community residents believe that there was no difference between Naparama and the people. When asked for their views on Naparama, respondents repeatedly emphasized that Naparama and the people were the same – “Naparama *was* the population. Because they were the sons of the people.”⁷⁴

In addition to the claim of ownership and belief in agency, the hope that Naparama generated was crucial for the context of self-empowerment. Naparama’s arrival nourished people’s hope to be reunited with abducted family members:

There were seventeen people in my house, all of them were abducted. . . . I recuperated my mother and three children, I lost the remaining [family members]. [The wish to be reunited with my family] is what gave me determination and courage to join [Naparama] to recuperate the people.⁷⁵

When I thought about everything that had happened with my mother [who was shot by Renamo combatants], I gained the courage to agree to join Naparama.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-09-Nm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011.

⁷² Interview with former government representative (2011-10-03-Gm6), Nicoadala, Zambézia, October 3, 2011; Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-22-Nm15), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 22, 2011.

⁷³ It is important to note that António did not refer to any historical roots of the medicine or his powers himself. This fact increased the impression that people had of him of being “one of them.” It also demonstrates that Naparama was not simply reproducing certain traditional spiritual practices, but innovating in the sense of using various social conventions to create something new, which served to mobilize the population in a much more effective way.

⁷⁴ Interview with religious leader (2011-09-06-Pm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 6, 2011.

⁷⁵ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-09-Nm4), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011. See also Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-09-Nm2), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011.

⁷⁶ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-09-Nm2), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011.

Naparama combatants expressed pride in fulfilling this dream by bringing back their families from areas under Renamo control:

My family had been abducted by Renamo, so I thought about becoming a Naparama to try and recuperate my family. . . . After receiving the vaccine, I proceeded to go to the bush and recuperate my brothers and my mother.⁷⁷

This courage created “a sense of purpose despite the surrounding violence and chaos” (Beal 2006, 235). Community residents were proud that they were able to capture Renamo combatants without any military training and equipment:

It was normal for a peasant to engage the enemy because he was vaccinated. There were even peasants who captured [Renamo combatants] in their fields and took their weapons because they prevailed over the enemy.⁷⁸

In sum, the resonantly familiar and innovative militia institution provided people with the necessary courage to manage uncertainty, defend themselves and confront Renamo, hoping to end a war that had reduced them to passive victims.

Alternative explanations. The fact that Naparama combatants frequently pointed to the protective force of the vaccine as a motivation for joining could be understood as learning. Potential members could update their information and make a rational calculation that joining would protect them from violence. While such information influenced people’s sense of purpose and expectation of success of the militia, there is little evidence that learning alone led recruits to manage the uncertain environment and to decide to join for guaranteed personal protection. The explanation of why people joined was always linked to the fact that members had to have the courage to go through the initiation ritual and confront the enemy in the bush; their fear of being killed did not completely subside with joining:

They came with a vaccinated person. They had their magic and invited those who showed courage to come and he treated the courageous person, and then they went and did their work and returned.⁷⁹

In fact, those who decided not to join emphasized their fear. As a response to my question whether he joined the Naparama, a community resident replied: “No, because I was afraid to kill.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-28-Nf1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 28, 2011.

⁷⁸ Interview with local government representative (2011-09-23-Gm4), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 23, 2011.

⁷⁹ Interview with local government representative (2011-09-15-Gm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 15, 2011.

⁸⁰ Interview with civilian (2011-10-02-m5), Nicoadala, Zambézia, October 2, 2011. I collected similar evidence from other areas of Naparama activity in Nampula, where interviewees pointed out that those who did not join did not have the necessary courage.

As to the mechanism of discontent, there had been plenty of previous opportunities for community residents to get involved in local self-defense through the state-initiated militias, opportunities that many did not avail themselves of. In addition, many members of the popular militia subsequently joined Naparama to improve their chances of survival in battle. So, it is clear that discontent alone did not motivate people to join.

The allocation of resources and new political opportunities and state support for Naparama also do not sufficiently explain the success of mobilization. The local government was skeptical of Naparama, as the self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Frelimo party had led to abandoning traditional authorities and all forms of religion. Local governments allowed António to hold a meeting to present his case to the people, but they did not provide the militia with any resources, institutional capacity, or information sharing. Confronted with the hesitant attitude of the local government, António did not ask for any support other than people for his troops.⁸¹ In fact, the district administrator in Nicoadala at the time refused to allow Naparama to operate; as the administrator spent his nights in Quelimane, however, his substitute signed the necessary papers to allow Naparama to recruit members.⁸² Much later, António received material support such as transport, but this did not seem to have influenced members to join.⁸³ None of the respondents mentioned that they received a salary or individual material benefit as Naparama members. In fact, they complained that they had never been paid for their services even after the war had ended and mobilized to receive demobilization benefits.

In sum, evidence from Nicoadala supports the argument that social conventions, through the commonality and the context for self-empowerment that they provided, were integral to mobilization, and weakens the case for alternative explanations. While learning, opportunities, and discontent may have played a role in mobilization processes, they were not sufficient to bring about large-scale mobilization. By providing a template based on social conventions and turning it into an innovative institution, Naparama provided community residents with the agency they thought they had lost.

7.3 EXPLORING NAPARAMA MOBILIZATION IN MURRUPULA, NAMPULA PROVINCE

To establish whether the argument applies more broadly, I explore whether the same causal path can explain Naparama mobilization in Murrupula district in Nampula province. Murrupula had similar relevance for Naparama, as the

⁸¹ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-09-Nm4), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 9, 2011.

⁸² Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-09-19-Nm13), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 19, 2011.

⁸³ Interview with local government representative (2011-09-15, Gm1), Nicoadala, Zambézia, September 15, 2011.

militia's provincial headquarters were located close to Murrupula's district town. Nampula's Naparama evolved independently of the militia in Zambézia (see Chapter 5). The district's strategic situation was similar to the one in Nicoadala. The national highway crosses the district (see map in Figure 6.3) and, as in Nicoadala, Renamo frequently targeted Frelimo military convoys for ambushes. The district is, therefore, a suitable comparative case to analyze whether the mechanisms present in the Nicoadala case also explain community-initiated militia mobilization in Murrupula.

7.3.1 The War in Murrupula

Shortly after Renamo had reached Nampula province in April 1983 (see Chapter 4), Murrupula experienced its first attacks on the outer wards of the district town, communal villages, and traffic on the main Highway number 1. While attacks remained scattered during the first years of the war in Murrupula, the district experienced an increased level of insecurity starting in 1986. Travel from Murrupula to Nampula city was only possible in military columns, and the trip of about fifty miles could take up to three days.⁸⁴

Murrupula was home to an important Renamo base at Namilasse, in the Chinga administrative post, to the west of the main highway (see map in Figure 6.3). Combatants frequently transported goods from Namilasse to a base in Mogovolos to the east of Murrupula, attacking cars and trucks between the district town Murrupula and the Kazuzo village when crossing the main highway. Although Frelimo armed forces captured the Namilasse base in 1989, and Renamo moved the military commando to Muecate district further north, the district remained a target of frequent attacks.

Similar to the situation in Nicoadala, community residents of Murrupula were frustrated with how the military responded to the frequent attacks by Renamo. When the district administration called for military support from Nampula city, it came late and the soldiers left promptly after responding to an attack. On their way out of the district, soldiers pillaged the local population's belongings, which, from this former Naparama combatant's perspective, resembled Renamo's behavior:

[Naparama] were not part of the government, but we emerged due to the suffering. When the war came here, [Renamo] took all our property, because we had fled. The military arrived late, after the enemy had already left. So we decided to defend ourselves. The military came here and didn't do anything; while leaving, they took our livestock instead of protecting us.⁸⁵

Thus, the people were open to alternative means of self-defense.

⁸⁴ Interview with former Frelimo combatant (2011-11-25-Fm12), Nampua, Murrupula, Nampula, November 25, 2011.

⁸⁵ Interview with former Naparama commander (2011-11-03-Nm32), Mothi, Murrupula, Zambézia, November 3, 2011.

7.3.2 Mobilizing Naparama in Murrupula

As outlined in Chapter 5, similarly to what happened in Zambézia, Naparama spread across Nampula province because diffusion agents traveled and made Naparama known to people, and communities proved receptive to new means to end the suffering imposed on them by the war. In Nampula province, it was António's acquaintance from Ribáuè, Ambrósio Albino, who formed the first Naparama unit in Murrupula. He was living in Nampula city working as a traditional healer when Gregório Nampila, the son of the local leader and traditional healer Nampila of Mothi, a village five miles of the district town of Murrupula, met him in the city in 1989.⁸⁶ In his narrative, Gregório Nampila depicts how Naparama formed in Murrupula as an unanticipated by-product of searching for a cure for his father's illness:

I went to Nampula [city], and when I arrived, I met a traditional healer who was practicing divination. My father here [in Mothi] was sick, and so I decided to [ask for] divination as well. After the divination, I said to the traditional healer, "I could not bring you my father, it's complicated, let's go together [to Mothi]," and the healer accepted and we came here.

When we arrived here, I told my father that I had brought a traditional healer because I saw him falling ill. He accepted and said he would call his brother. That's when they started to practice divination. The traditional healer said that he had another medicine that would prevent the war from coming here. My father said okay, my brother, son and I are here, so you can prepare the medicine. Ambrósio taught me and my father [how to prepare the medicine], and from then on we started to work.

People from other areas began to hear that the bandits did not reach the area of Nampila, and they started asking us [for the medicine]. We said that if they wanted the medicine, they had to talk to the party in their areas – secretaries and régulos – and bring a document, and we would take the document to the administration so that they would know about it.⁸⁷

Proving their power against the rebels, the Naparama militia quickly attracted recruits. Local Naparama leaders claimed that on the day that they mobilized the first youths to join the militia, Renamo attacked, and Naparama combatants pursued them and recuperated a weapon, thereby demonstrating their effectiveness.⁸⁸ After this first day of Naparama activity, the Naparama

⁸⁶ I took the date of the meeting between Gregório Nampila and Ambrósio Albino from the report about the formation of Naparama in Murrupula written by the provincial Frelimo party committee. Partido Frelimo, Comité Provincial, Departamento de Trabalho Ideológico, Nampula, *Relatório do levantamento e estudo efectuado sobre o fenómeno "Napharama" no distrito de Murrupula*, November 15, 1990 (personal archive of Ambrósio Albino).

⁸⁷ Interview with Naparama commander (2011-11-03-Nm32), Mothi, Murrupula, Nampula, November 3, 2011.

⁸⁸ Some respondents claimed that Ambrósio had called the Renamo soldiers to be able to show the effectiveness of the vaccine. Interview with Naparama commander (2011-11-03-Nm32), Mothi, Murrupula, Nampula, November 3, 2011.

leaders did not only recruit residents from Murrupula, but also from neighboring districts.

Commonality. The militia quickly formed in Murrupula, as the social conventions on which it built resonated with the community. Before Naparama formed, Mothi's residents had used other means to defend themselves against attacks by Renamo's local police, the *mujeeba*. For example, traditional healers sprinkled a certain powder in a circle around the village for protection.⁸⁹ Several residents, including Nampila's wife, claimed that Nampila already had a medicine, to which he added Ambrósio's to make it more powerful.⁹⁰ Thus, the use of a medicine and rituals to protect the village from Renamo attacks were a well-established practice. The idea of introducing another medicine that would be able to ward off Renamo was salient – congruent with people's real-life experiences – and resonated with the community.

Without the credibility of the Naparama leaders, however, members would not have been sufficiently convinced to join the militia. The traditional healer from Nampula, Ambrósio Albino, had to prove that his medicine would have the desired effect. People believed in the power of his vaccine when Albino was able to heal Nampila's illness. After demonstrating newly initiated Naparama combatants were able to defeat Renamo combatants, more community residents volunteered to become Naparama combatants.⁹¹ As Albino and Nampila worked closely together – Nampila being a well-respected community leader – Naparama's power to mobilize new members built on both leaders' credibility.

While Naparama's use of social conventions resonated with the community, it also mobilized members by innovating and adapting preexisting rites and rituals to new contexts. The previously used types of medicine were different from Parama in the sense that they protected individuals or the entire village. The Parama medicine, in contrast, created a collective armed force that could patrol, pursue, and even confront Renamo combatants in the event of an attack.

In sum, in the Murrupula case, the same mechanism of commonality as in the Nicoadala case was at work to convince community residents to join the new militia.

⁸⁹ According to residents, a traditional healer from Ligonha close to Zambézia province, Razak, had come to Mothi to lay a medicine around the limits of the village, so that *mujeeba* would not be able to enter the village. See interview with local government representative (2011-11-04-Gm10), Mothi, Murrupula, Nampula, November 4, 2011. Other respondents attribute this method to the traditional healer Nampila.

⁹⁰ See, for instance, interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-11-05-Nm38), Mothi, Murrupula, Nampula, November 5, 2011. See also interview with community leader (2012-06-27-Lm21), Murrupula, Nampula, June 27, 2012, who claimed that Ambrósio's and Nampila's medicine complemented each other.

⁹¹ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-11-05-Nm39), Mothi, Murrupula, Nampula, November 5, 2011; Interview with civilian (2011-11-06-m11), Mothi, Murrupula, Nampula, November 6, 2011.

Empowerment. Given the powerlessness of the local administration when faced with Renamo's rising threat, community residents were increasingly convinced that they had to organize themselves without the help of the government to protect themselves. This belief was strengthened when the provincial government actively called on the people to rely on community strategies of self-defense. Several respondents remembered an instance in which the armed forces' political commissar and Frelimo political bureau member Major General António da Silva Nihia came to Murrupula and encouraged the people to defend themselves, as told by this religious leader in Murrupula:

General Nihia came when the war was intense to talk to the population and ask them to help the government. From then on Naparama started. [The general] did not know about the existence of this group, but he knew that there was a medicine that would prevent people from being hit by bullets.⁹²

A commander from Nampula came and asked us why there was so much war here. The people responded, "You deploy men, but when they come back from a mission, they return to Nampula [city]." The people said they wanted to move to the city together with the commander, because they were tired. [The commander] asked them to prepare themselves with traditional weapons to confront [the enemy] rather than fleeing to Nampula. When the general left, the population came together and searched for a medicine. The medicine's creator was Nampila . . . He started vaccinating people and the war started to decrease.⁹³

As the religious leader's testimony demonstrates, community residents understood the general's call to use "any means at their disposal"⁹⁴ to refer to traditional practices of defense.

As in the Nicoadala case, Naparama formed as a people's movement on the initiative of community residents, without the knowledge of the local administration. Community residents said they "were tired" of fleeing; thus, they no longer wanted to be passive victims of war. The following quotes from former Naparama combatants show how people wanted to turn their passivity into active resistance:

[Naparama] were volunteers; the population was tired [of the war].⁹⁵

Why did you become a Naparama? I was tired of fleeing, suffering, [and] sleeping outside [my house].⁹⁶

⁹² Interview with religious leader (2011-11-02-Pm3), Murrupula, Nampula, November 2, 2011.

⁹³ Interview with religious leader (2011-11-02-Pm4), Murrupula, Nampula, November 2, 2011.

⁹⁴ This is how the report about the investigation into Naparama in Murrupula describes the administration's appeal to self-defense: Partido Frelimo, Comité Provincial, Departamento de Trabalho Ideológico, Nampula, *Relatório do levantamento e estudo efectuado sobre o fenómeno "Napharama" no distrito de Murrupula*, November 15, 1990 (personal archive of Ambrósio Albino).

⁹⁵ Interview with religious leader (2011-11-02-Pm4), Murrupula, Nampula, November 2, 2011.

⁹⁶ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-11-03-Nm33), Murrupula, Nampula, November 3, 2011.

Why did you become a Naparama? It was because of the suffering and the necessity to defend oneself, and we family members were called to receive the vaccine.⁹⁷

I became a Naparama in order to help the elderly who were suffering, didn't sleep in their houses, [and] lost their belongings.⁹⁸

Bandits came at night. This led me to join Naparama. Bandits came and captured families, some of them had to go with them, others they killed. And then [I said to myself] why flee? I will join [Naparama]. This war is the worst. My brother in law had already been captured. I and my group went to receive the vaccine and started to work.⁹⁹

How did Ambrósio mobilize people to receive the vaccine? It was the will of the people because they were tired. During that time, it was normal [that when Renamo] fired [shots], we fled without eating dinner to the bush. It was the strength of the people, they offered themselves to fight. [They were] tired.¹⁰⁰

As a form of violent resistance, Naparama in Murrupula thus emphasized their independence from the government and claimed ownership of the new movement. They were not interested in collaborating with the armed forces, as these had a negative image among the population. In fact, criticizing the behavior of the military and the state-initiated militia, the community welcomed the different attitude of Naparama:

The people liked [Naparama] because the military sometimes retreated; it didn't succeed. When there were only militiamen, they just fired shots from afar, but Naparama, when they heard [something] in Namiupe, they came to help and when [Renamo] attacked the district town, all of them went [there].¹⁰¹

Word traveled fast that Naparama offered a sense of purpose and an expectation of success, and thus an opportunity for self-empowerment. Those Naparama combatants who came from other villages to receive the vaccine in Mothi expected that forming a Naparama militia in their village would bring long-sought peace:

We heard from other people that the war did not reach [the area of] Nampila, [as] there was a medicine that people received as a vaccine, [and so] people on their own went to receive the vaccine.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-11-04-Nm36), Murrupula, Nampula, November 4, 2011.

⁹⁸ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-11-04-Nm37), Murrupula, Nampula, November 4, 2011.

⁹⁹ Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-11-05-Nm38), Murrupula, Nampula, November 5, 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with community leader (2012-06-27-Lm21), Murrupula, Nampula, June 27, 2012.

¹⁰¹ Interview with community leader (2012-06-27, Lm21), Murrupula, Nampula, June 27, 2012.

¹⁰² Interview with former Naparama combatant (2011-11-05-Nm39), Mothi, Murrupula, Nampula, November 5, 2011.

Alternative Explanations. Similarly to the situation in Nicoadala, the district administration provided little if any support to Naparama. In fact, the district administration was very skeptical of Naparama when it first heard about the new movement and started an investigation:¹⁰³

When the district [administration] took notice [of Naparama], the administrator Massina who replaced Avila Wahua sent the information to Nampula to the provincial party committee of Frelimo. [The committee members] were afraid when they heard that there was a group that could not be hit by bullets, so they sent the information to Maputo. [Maputo] responded and asked [the provincial party committee of] Nampula to come here to understand what was happening.

[The delegation] wanted to know whether we wanted to take over the country or what kind of treatment [we were hoping for] when the war ended. They met us and we told them that we were the people, we were tired and we were not trained, but we were losing many of our belongings and that is why we prepared ourselves so that we could go and search for these belongings in the bush. We wrote this down, but the commission that came didn't believe us and asked that one of us would accompany them to meet the provincial governor, Amórico Mfumo. Ambrósio and my secretary went.

When they arrived in Nampula, they told the governor that we were defending our area, our belongings, and family members who had been killed. They asked us if we wanted to be paid, but we said that we were not sent [by the government], we had our medicines just to defend ourselves.

The government report about the visit of the delegation confirms the hesitance of the local administration and military to engage with Naparama. In fact, one of the fact-finding mission's delegates told me that the military was ashamed that Naparama were more successful than them.¹⁰⁴ Other than some limited information exchange and the return of population and weapons to the local government and military, there was no other form of support or collaboration between Naparama and the local government. Similarly to the case of Nicoadala, learning and discontent also did not play a significant role in the mobilization of Naparama in Murrupula.

In sum, Naparama offered community residents in Murrupula who were targeted by Renamo combatants or the *mujeeba* a familiar, but innovative form of organized violent resistance, which promised to provide the people with an opportunity for self-empowerment. One of the major differences between the mobilization of Naparama in Murrupula and Nicoadala was that community residents in Mothi, in the first village where Naparama formed, were mainly

¹⁰³ This is interesting in light of the appeals to self-defense by the provincial military commander cited earlier. Even if respondents remembered that the general appealed to traditional forms of defense, it is unlikely that the Frelimo government and military had a traditional force that was independent of the local party structure in mind.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with provincial government representative (2011-10-10-Gm7), Nampula, October 10, 2011.

concerned about looting and future, more violent attacks. Their aim was to shield the village from any future attacks. In Nicoadala, community residents also sought to protect their houses and their belongings, but in addition, the large number of displaced people also saw Naparama as a tool to bring back their abducted family members from Renamo-held areas.

7.4 CONCLUSION

To understand the militia mobilization process in Mozambique, the context of an uncertain environment makes more sense than the context of traditional approaches to collective action that emphasize calculable risk. Comparing the mobilization processes of the Naparama militia with that of the state-initiated militias during the war in Mozambique in the Nicoadala district in Zambézia province, I argue that the former mobilized more successfully because Naparama created commonality by both appealing to and innovating upon social conventions and providing the context for collective empowerment. A similar causal path applies to militia mobilization in Murrupula. The reference to social conventions in Mozambique – a bullet-proof vaccine and Christian symbols – resonated with community residents and gave ordinary men and women the power to engage rebel combatants. The belief in the power of the vaccine provided people with the necessary hope and sense of purpose. Community residents did not identify with the state-initiated militia influenced by Frelimo's socialist ideology, and its limited ability to confront Renamo did not provide the agency that community residents required to address the difficult situation they found themselves in. Naparama helped to manage the uncertainty that people were confronted with in their daily lives.