



Deconstructing Peace Through the Human Needs Theory on The Protracted Mozambique Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Despite being hailed as a post-conflict success story following the 1992 Rome General Peace Accords, Mozambique has relapsed into recurring cycles of violence, including the recent insurgency in Cabo Delgado. This study investigated the fragility of this peace construction by analyzing the structural causes of conflict through the lens of John Burton's Need-Based Conflict Theory (1991). Adopting a Systematic Literature Analysis (SLA) based on PRISMA guidelines, the research synthesizes findings from ten key academic articles published between 2020–2025. The analysis reveals that post-war stability was merely a negative peace characterized by elite settlements that failed to address non-negotiable human needs. Specifically, the findings highlight critical deficits in four dimensions, distributive justice due to elite resource capture; identity suppressed by hegemonic national narratives; security biased toward strategic assets over human safety; and recognition denied to victims and marginalized groups. The study concludes that sustainable peace in Mozambique requires a paradigm shift from managerial conflict settlement to structural conflict resolution that satisfies these fundamental ontological needs, particularly regarding economic fairness and cultural inclusion.

KEYWORDS

Conflict Resolution; Distributive Justice; Human Needs Theory (HNT); Mozambique

INTRODUCTION

The Mozambican Civil War (1977-1992) was one of the most destructive conflicts in post-colonial African history. This conflict has its roots in the post-independence phase of the country's transition when Mozambique proclaimed its independence from Portugal on June 25, 1975 under the leadership of the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) led by Samora Machel ([Newitt, 2025](#)). After gaining power, FRELIMO adopted radical socialist policies ranging from the nationalization of assets, the collectivization of agriculture, to political support for regional liberation movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) ([Bertelsen, 2022](#); [Manzoni, 2023](#)). This series of policies caused widespread resistance, especially in rural areas and opened up space for the emergence of the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO), which then launched armed resistance through guerrilla strategies ([Finnegan, 2023](#)).

As tensions escalate, the two actors are involved in gross human rights violations, including mass killings, child abductions, executions without due process, and destruction of public facilities ([Sambo, 2025](#)). The impact was profound about one million people died from hunger, disease, and armed violence. Millions more were displaced, while the national economic structure collapsed so that Mozambique became one of the poorest countries in the world by the end of the war ([Newitt, 2025](#)).

Efforts toward peace began to take shape in the late 1980s through informal diplomatic channels involving moral-institutional actors such as the Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome and Bishop Jaime Pedro Gonçalves of the Catholic Church of Mozambique ([Chakawa & Mangiza, 2023](#)). After more than two years of dialogue, the Treaty of Rome was signed on October 4, 1992, covering a ceasefire, military reforms, demobilization of combatants, and the holding of the first multiparty elections in 1994 ([Wiegink, 2020](#)). The role of the United Nations through ONUMOZ helps strengthen the implementation of peace, including the repatriation of refugees and monitoring of the electoral process.

The enduring significance of this case lies in its demonstration that the 1992 Rome Accords, once celebrated as a global model for post-Cold War diplomacy actually established a precarious negative peace that failed to address deep-seated structural grievances. The contemporary relevance of the Mozambican experience is starkly evidenced by the 2013-2016 return to armed confrontation and the ongoing, brutal insurgency in Cabo Delgado since 2017, which has resulted in thousands of fatalities and a massive humanitarian crisis ([Bueno, 2021](#); [Macagno, 2025](#)). Furthermore, the post-2024 political unrest and the resulting loss of life underscore that the unresolved ontological needs of the population continue to fuel systemic instability ([Sambo, 2025](#)). Consequently, Mozambique serves as a critical case study for both theory and policy, illustrating how 'managerial' peace settlements that prioritize elite interests over fundamental human needs inevitably lead to recurring cycles of violence.

Although often considered one of the successful models of post-Cold War conflict resolution, the resulting peace turned out to be fragile. Violence between the government and



RENAMO resurfaced in 2013-2016, while an Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado since 2017 has caused thousands of deaths and forced millions to flee ([Bueno, 2021](#)). Even after the signing of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2019 between President Filipe Nyusi and RENAMO leader Ossufo Momade, sporadic violence persisted in Sofala and Manica ([Macagno, 2025](#)). These facts show that post-1992 peace does not touch the root of the problem and raises fundamental questions about how peace construction is actually built and why the conflict in Mozambique is sustainable, a question that is the main focus of this study.

In this context, this research focuses on the Need-Based Conflict theory developed by [John Burton \(1990\)](#). This theory departs from the premise that destructive conflicts arise when the basic needs of human beings and social groups are not met by political structures, state policies, or social orders ([Kriesberg & Burton, 1991](#)). The basic needs in question include security physical and existential, identity which sense of collective existence, recognition of social role and dignity, and distributive justice. These four needs are non-negotiable, it means that even if a peace treaty has been signed, peace will not survive if these needs remain unmet. Although academic discourse on post-conflict dynamics in Mozambique has developed rapidly, the existing literature tends to analyze peace failures in a fragmented or partial way.

Previous studies have generally isolated certain variables as the main causes of instability, such as the focus on extractive political economy and the curse of resources ([Macagno, 2025](#)), technical failures in combatant reintegration programs ([Dzinesa, 2022](#); [Wiegink, 2024](#)), or anthropological aspects related to cultural trauma ([Finnegan, 2023](#)). However, there is still a scarcity of studies that integrate these material, political, and psychosocial dimensions into a single holistic analytical framework to explain the persistence of conflicts that stretch from the 1992 Rome Agreement to the current Cabo Delgado uprising. Specifically, there has not been much research that dissects how the simultaneous disregard of non-negotiable ontological needs of identity, cultural security, recognition, and distributive justice works as a systemic unit that undermines the architecture of peace from inside.

The urgency of this research is even stronger when it is seen that the 1992 Peace Treaty did not completely stop the dynamics of violence ([Dangazela, 2023](#)). The failure of the DDR program, socio-economic inequality, marginalization of rural communities, and a crisis of trust in government institutions ([Manzoni, 2023](#)). It created structural conditions that make basic needs, especially security, recognition, identity, and distributive justice, remain inadequately met. The insurgency in Cabo Delgado and the post-2024 political conflict that sparked mass protests and left more than 300 dead show that peacebuilding in Mozambique is fragile, non-inclusive, and has not resolved the root causes of the conflict's underlying human needs. Through the framework of Need-Based Conflict Theory, this study seeks to explain why Mozambique's conflict recurs and how the fulfilment of basic needs can form a stronger and more sustainable peace.

This study contributes to the field of Conflict Studies and International Relations in three significant ways. First, theoretically, it revitalizes John Burton's Human Needs Theory (HNT)



by demonstrating its enduring analytical power in explaining New Wars, specifically how unmet ontological needs facilitate the rise of violent extremism and transnational radicalization in contemporary Mozambique. Second, empirically, this paper provides a novel longitudinal interpretation that bridges the 1992 Rome Accords with the 2024 post-election unrest. It argues that these are not isolated historical events but a continuous manifestation of negative peace failures rooted in structural neglect. Finally, methodologically, by employing a Systematic Literature Analysis (SLA) via the PRISMA protocol, this research offers a high-level synthesis of state-of-the-art academic literature from 2020-2025. This provides a comprehensive framework that integrates the political, material, and psychosocial dimensions of the conflict, which were previously fragmented in existing studies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework in this article is built entirely on the Need-Based Conflict Theory developed by [John Burton \(1990\)](#). The focus on Burton's theory was carried out because the nature of the conflict in the Mozambican Civil War (1977-1992) showed that the root of the problem was not only related to ideology, political interests, or external intervention, but to the failure of the state structure to meet basic human needs that were non-negotiable. By placing the theory of needs as the sole analytical foundation, this article emphasizes that the sustainability of the Mozambique conflict can only be understood through the lens of the most fundamental human needs in line with the tendency of contemporary literature regarding protracted conflicts in developing countries.

Table 1. Four Principles Human Needs Theory by John Burton

Key Principles	Explanation
Conflicts are structural, not personal	Conflict arises when socio-political institutions fail to provide space for the fulfilment of basic human needs. The root of conflict lies in the repressive structure, not simply in the behavior or character of the individual.
Basic needs are universal and non-negotiable	Identity, participation, recognition, and security are non-negotiable needs. Political compromise cannot replace its fulfilment, so conflicts will recur if these needs remain unmet.
The importance of analytical dialogue and problem-solving	The dialogue process is a tool to open communication barriers, identify the basic needs of the parties, and create mutual understanding. This approach focuses on needs analysis, not on political positions.
Structural transformation is necessary for long-term peace	Conflict resolution requires changes in institutions, policies, and patterns of social relations so that the basic needs of all groups can be met. This transformation is more profound and sustainable than just political agreements or compromises.

Source: Human Needs Theory ([Kriesberg & Burton, 1991](#))



In his contemporary conflict resolution discourse, John Burton introduced a fundamental paradigm shift through Human Needs Theory (HNT), which shows that the root of intractable conflict lies in the denial of basic human needs that are ontological in nature. In contrast to the view of political realism which focuses on the struggle for material interests or state power that is negotiable, Burton argues that the most crucial dimension of conflict operates on a deep psychological level and is non-negotiable ([Bradshaw & Lötter, 2019](#)). Central to this theory is the understanding that political and social stability can only be achieved if institutions are able to accommodate the universal needs inherent in human biology and psychology, rather than simply suppressing differences through coercion.

The most critical dimensions in Burton's framework are Identity and Security. Burton places identity as the main driver of modern conflict, in which ethnic, religious, or social groups demand existential validation of themselves in their relations to the outside world ([Griffiths, 2013](#)). This need is closely related to the expanded concept of security, which does not simply refer to physical safety, but cultural security. This includes ensuring that the group's language, traditions, and values are protected from structural erosion or systemic attack. When a group feels its cultural identity and security are threatened, collective defense mechanisms are activated, often manifesting in the form of communal violence that is difficult to quench.

Furthermore, the dynamics of conflict are complicated by the need for Recognition, Autonomy, and Participation. Human beings have an inherent urge to be recognized as legitimate participants in the social structure, as well as the capacity to influence political decisions that have a direct impact on their lives. Burton emphasized that individuals refuse to be passive objects of external authority, as they demand freedom to self-determination. This failure of the political system to provide space for participation and autonomy creates alienation, which in turn triggers resistance to central authorities in order to regain control of their social and political environment.

Finally, this framework is refined by the dimensions of Distributive Justice and Bonding. Distributive justice in Burton's view goes beyond just the allocation of economic resources, it touches on the aspect of fairness or perceived fairness regarding access and opportunity. Meanwhile, the need for bonding emphasizes the importance of social connectivity and a sense of belonging to the community ([Kriesberg & Burton, 1991](#)). Theoretically, Burton asserts that all of these dimensions of need are simultaneous, in contrast to Abraham Maslow's gradual hierarchy. The academic implication is clear: since these needs are absolute and irreplaceable, conflicts rooted in these dimensions cannot be resolved through settlement, but rather demand a social restructuring (resolution) that guarantees the fulfilment of these basic needs.

In this study, the analysis is only focused on the four dimensions of Burton identity, security, recognition, and distributive justice because these four are the most prominent basic needs in the dynamics of the Mozambique conflict. Identity tensions between the state and

rural communities, chronic post-war insecurity, lack of political recognition of the opposition and marginalized groups, and inequality in the distribution of resources have proven to be structural factors that trigger the recurrence of violence. While the other three dimensions such as autonomy, participation, and bonding remain theoretically relevant, their manifestation in Mozambique is more a consequence of these four main needs. Therefore, a more focused selection of dimensions allows for a sharper analysis and in accordance with the characteristics of the ongoing conflict in Mozambique.

METHODS

The methodology of this study uses the Systematic Literature Analysis (SLA) approach with the guidance of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) to explore the construction of post-conflict peace in Mozambique through the perspective of basic human needs. The SLA approach was chosen because it allows for the collection and analysis of literature in a systematic, transparent, and replicable manner, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of conflict resolution mechanisms, the role of local and international actors, and the negotiation dynamics that shape post-war peace.

The PRISMA guide is used to structure each stage of the research, from literature identification, initial screening, feasibility assessment, to final inclusion, while visualizing the literature selection flow through diagrams that clarify the analysis process and ensure methodological openness. Literature searches are conducted through the Scopus database, which provides publications of highly reputable international journals in the fields of International Relations, Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution. Literature searches were conducted through the Scopus database in December 2025. The search aimed to capture all relevant peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2025.

Article searches are conducted using a combination of keywords such as: ("Mozambique Civil War" OR "Mozambican conflict" OR "Mozambique war 1977-1992") AND ("conflict resolution" OR "peace process" OR "peacebuilding" OR "post-conflict reconstruction" OR "peace agreement") AND ("local actors" OR "domestic actors" OR "civil society" OR "religious actors" OR "community participation") AND ("international actors" OR "foreign intervention" OR "United Nations" OR "INGO" OR "diplomatic mediation"). This search strategy is designed to ensure a broad coverage of the literature that comprehensively discusses the dynamics of conflict resolution and the peace process in Mozambique.

The inclusion criteria used in the article selection are: (1) articles published in the 2020-2025 period, this timeframe was selected to capture the most contemporary academic discourse following the 2019 Maputo Peace and Reconciliation Agreement and the escalating insurgency in Cabo Delgado. This period allows for a critical re-evaluation of the 1992 Rome Accords' long-term structural failures through a modern lens, ensuring the analysis reflects state-of-the-art (2025), (2) written in English, (3) focusing on the context of the Mozambique conflict, (4) being a research article (not an editorial, review, or policy report), (5) relevant to

the field of conflict resolution, and (6) explicitly discussing conflict resolution, the role of local and international actors, and the peace process. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria are set to clarify the limitations of the analysis, namely: (1) articles that are not available in full-text form (full-text unavailable), (2) articles that are duplicate, 3) articles published before 2020 and (4) articles with topics that are not relevant to the focus of the research.

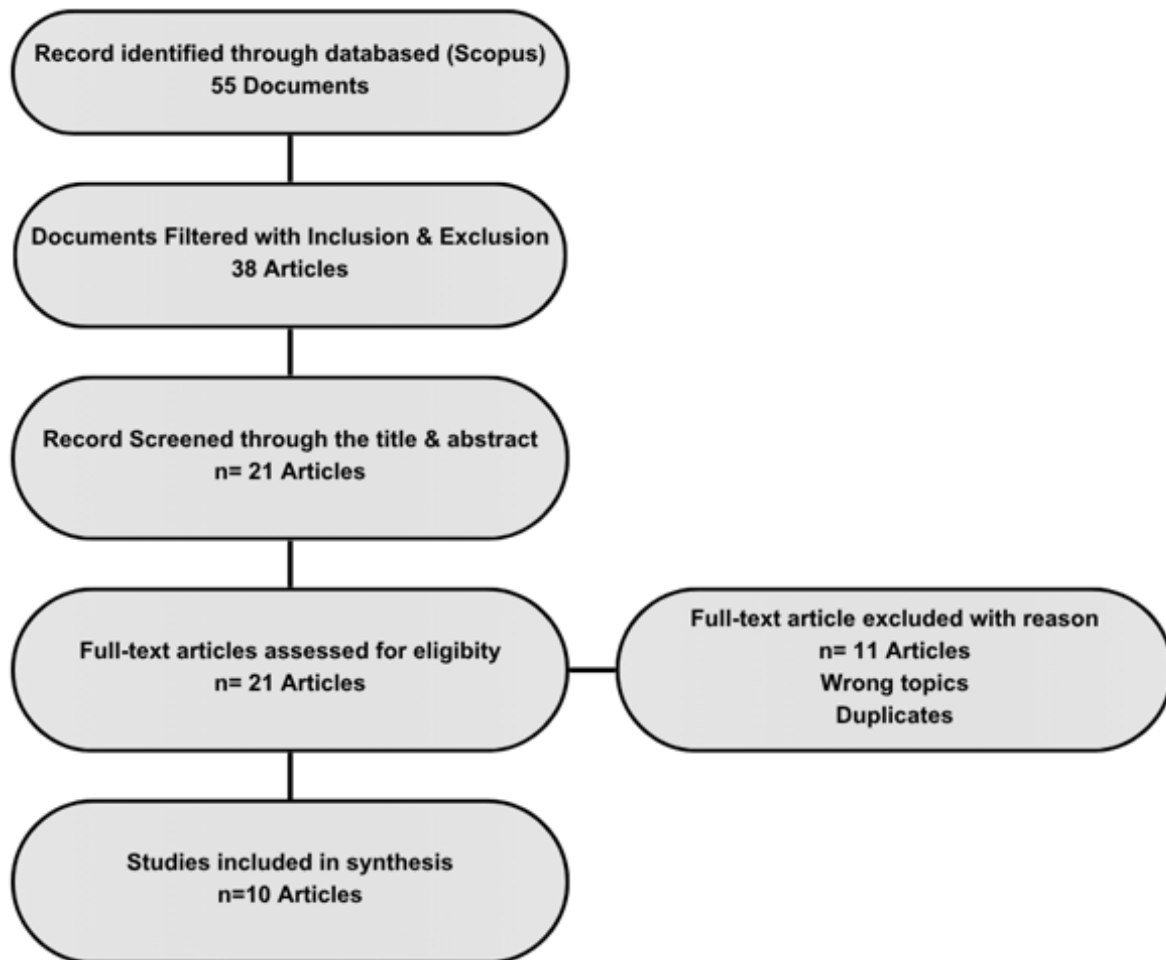


Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram.
Source: Created by Authors (2025)

The screening process was conducted in distinct phases following the PRISMA guidelines. Initial identification through the Scopus database yielded 55 records. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts for thematic alignment, 21 articles remained for eligibility assessment. The final stage involved a rigorous full-text evaluation based on methodological quality and their specific contribution to the Human Needs framework, resulting in 10 core academic articles for thematic synthesis. This synthesis identifies the roles of local-international actors and the mediation mechanisms of Sant'Egidio, while evaluating the success and failure factors of the 1992 Rome Accords. Although the final

sample size is concise, these articles represent the state-of-the-art on Mozambique (predominantly from Q1 and Q2 ranked journals), ensuring that the analysis is grounded in high-impact, peer-reviewed evidence rather than a broad but superficial survey. This depth-over-breadth approach was intentional, aimed at providing a concentrated analysis of the unresolved ontological needs from the 1992 Rome Accords to the contemporary Cabo Delgado crisis.

The study utilized a deductive thematic synthesis. While the coding process was structured around Burton's four dimensions such as Identity, Security, Recognition and Distributive Justice. The analysis remained sensitive to data that exceeded the explanatory scope of HNT (Human Needs Theory), ensuring that the synthesis was not merely a confirmation of the theory but a critical application of it to the Mozambican context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The History of Mozambican Conflict

Historically, the dynamics of the Mozambique conflict began with the destructive Civil War (1977-1992) between FRELIMO and RENAMO which was formally ended through the 1992 Rome Peace Agreement and the 1994 multiparty elections (Domson-Lindsay, 2022). However, post-war stability proved fragile due to FRELIMO's political dominance and the failure of complete combatant reintegration, which left deep discontent and residual armed groups. These structural tensions flared back into armed conflict in the 2013-2016 period after RENAMO rejected the election results, signalling the failure of the first peace phase in resolving the root political and security problems substantially (Abaho, 2020).

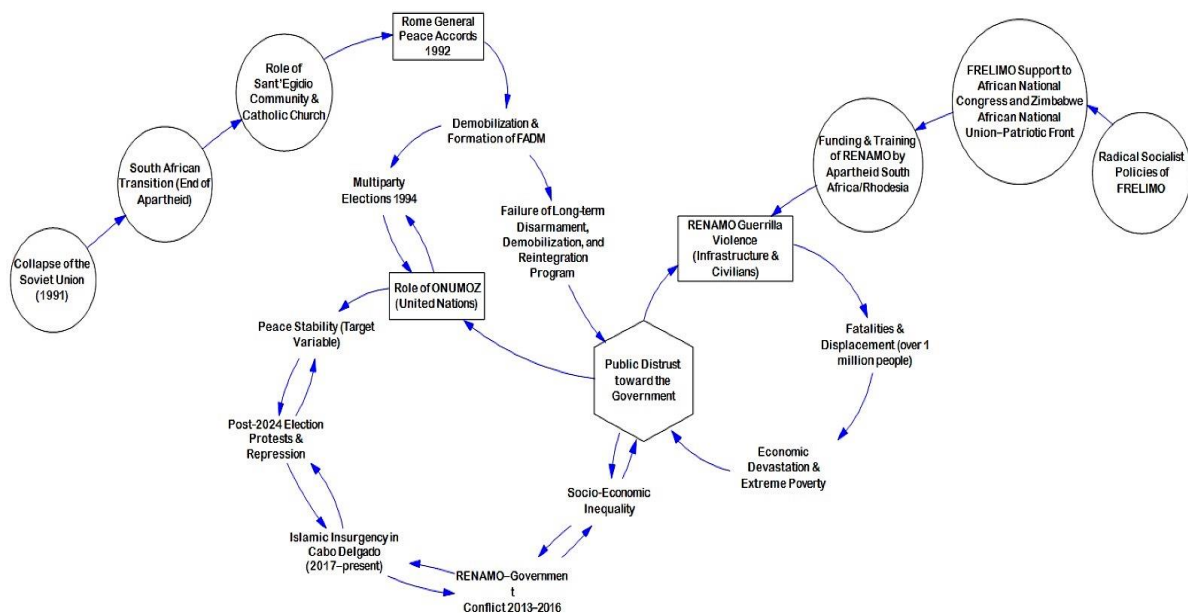


Figure 2. Dynamics of Mozambique Conflict through Years

Source: Created by Authors (2025)



In response to this instability, a second peace effort was pursued through the 2019 Maputo Peace and Reconciliation Agreement which promised the decentralization of power and the full integration of former guerrillas ([Duursma, 2022](#)). However, until 2025, the implementation of this agreement is slow and challenging, marked by disputes over the results of the 2024 elections that led to violence and the emergence of the RENAMO dissident faction ([Newitt, 2025](#); [Sambo, 2025](#)). The security situation is increasingly critical with a new threat in the form of an insurgency of the ISIS-Mozambique jihadist group in Cabo Delgado since 2017, which has created a severe humanitarian crisis and hampered strategic economic projects, making peace in Mozambique currently very vulnerable due to accumulated political discontent and extreme poverty.

Contextualizing the Case: Mozambique as a Protracted Conflict (PSC)

The recurring cycles of violence in Mozambique characterize it as a quintessential Protracted Social Conflict (PSC), where instability persists due to the state's failure to address deep-seated grievances related to non-negotiable human needs ([Burton, 1990](#)). While historical narratives often celebrate the transition from the 1977-1992 Civil War through the Rome Accords, the synthesis of ten key academic articles (2020-2025) suggests that this success was merely a negative peace that suppressed underlying tensions rather than resolving them. By applying John Burton's Need-Based Conflict Theory, the evolution of the conflict from political rivalry to the insurgency in Cabo Delgado and post-2024 unrest can be traced back to systematic deficits in four ontological dimensions.

First, the need for Identity remains a core driver of resistance against FRELIMO's national hegemony, which has long marginalized Islamic and ethnic identities (Mwani/Makonde) in the North. [Macagno \(2025\)](#) and [Darch & Hedges \(2021\)](#) highlight how this forced homogenization triggers radicalization, while Pearce (2020) illustrates how RENAMO provided a counter-history for the Ndau population to validate their existence. Second, Security needs are currently compromised by a state policy that prioritizes asset securitization for international gas projects over the physical and cultural safety of local citizens ([Domson-Lindsay, 2022](#); [Sicurelli, 2020](#)). This militarized response creates a climate of fear, eroding public trust in state institutions.

Third, the lack of Recognition is evident in the systematic exclusion of war victims and veterans from official peace architectures. This denial is reflected in amnesty laws that ignore victim suffering ([Igreja et al., 2025](#)) and the labelling of veterans as bandits rather than democracy fighters ([Wiegink, 2024](#)), forcing these groups to seek legitimacy through spiritual rituals or armed remobilization. Finally, chronic failures in Distributive Justice have created islands of wealth amid extreme poverty. The resource curse in Cabo Delgado fuels a sense of relative deprivation, making marginalized youth vulnerable to insurgent recruitment (Bueno, 2021; [Domson-Lindsay, 2022](#); [Mashimbye, 2022](#)). Contextualizing the Mozambican case through Burton's framework confirms that current vulnerabilities are not isolated incidents



but a manifestation of unresolved structural needs that cannot be settled through elite political agreements alone.

Key Findings from Ten Previous Studies

This section examines and identifies ten international academic articles that address the dynamics of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in post-civil war Mozambique, with a publication year range between 2020 - 2025. The findings were then analyzed and classified through four elements of Need-Based Conflict Theory ([Burton, 1990](#)), identity, security, recognition and distributive justice. This grouping aims to show how each theory provides a different perspective in understanding the root causes of conflict, patterns of power relations, and strategies for peace sustainability in Mozambique. Through this framework, the analysis becomes more comprehensive as it connects aspects of human needs, political structures, and geopolitical contexts that influence the reconciliation process ([Black, 2024](#)).

Table 2. Findings Classify by 4 Human Needs Elements by John Burton

Author (Year)	Identity	Security	Recognition	Distributive Justice
(Igreja et al., 2025)	Split Identity: The stigma of war is inherent (victim vs. perpetrator). The identity of young women is eroded by the role of "economic assets".	Cultural & Spiritual Security: Threatened by <i>the spirit of Gamba</i> (the spirit of the war victim). Traditional practices (early marriage) became a post-war risk.	Victim Denial: The country's Amnesty Law denies the suffering of victims. The Spirit appeared to demand recognition that the state rejected.	Informal Participation: Closed formal justice for supernatural cases; Residents turned to traditional rituals for justice participation.
(Macagno, 2025)	Frelimo hegemony: The national narrative marginalizes the Islamic and Northern Ethnic (Mwani/Makonde) identity triggers radicalization.	Cultural Invasion: Forced modernization and militarization of foreign (SADC/Rwanda) threatens the local way of life (Cultural Security).	Delegitimization: Religious/customary groups in the North are not recognized as <i>legitimate stakeholders</i> by the state/investor.	Pseudo-Democracy: Strategic decisions (gas) are made by elites without involving local citizens; sparked a rebellion.
(Matusse & ...)	Wounded Identity: The Malangatana mural records the	Neoliberal Threat: The imported peace model	Trauma Validation: Murals serve to	Grassroots Voices: Murals as a participatory protest



Gray, 2025	real identity (wounds of war) that the narrative of "unity" of the state tries to erase.	(Outside Actor) ignores spiritual/local values as the basis of inner security.	acknowledge the monsters of war (atrocities) that are hidden in official history.	against the <i>elitist</i> Top-Down peace.
Wiegink, 2024	Reclaiming Identity: Renamo veterans reject the label of Bandits, demanding a dignified identity of "Democracy Fighters".	Physical Insurance: Weapons are stored for fear of state persecution. Physical security is not guaranteed by the state police.	Political Legitimacy: Veterans feel their political voice is not recognized if they do not hold a weapon.	Civil Exclusion: Failure to reintegrate into civil society; Violence is a means of communication/participation.
Domson-Lindsay, 2022	Alienated Youth: Disenfranchised youth adopt radical religious identities as a counter-narrative to a state that offers them no future or sense of belonging.	Militarized Response: The use of mercenaries and military force creates a climate of fear. The state prioritizes the security of gas assets over the human security of citizens.	Labeling/Denial: The government labels insurgents as "external terrorists" to avoid recognizing legitimate internal grievances regarding neglect and marginalization.	Resource Curse: The contrast between massive gas wealth and extreme local poverty creates deep resentment. Locals are excluded from the economic benefits of LNG projects.
Dzinsa, 2022	Religious Integration: Highlights the need to involve Christian and Islamic Councils to address religious polarization and validate diverse faith identities in peacebuilding.	Beyond The Gun: Critiques the military-first approach. Proposes a peace architecture that integrates military commissions with social/religious bodies for holistic security.	Institutional Legitimacy: Advocates for formally recognizing the role of religious and civic leaders in the national peace structure, moving beyond elite-only deals.	Inequitable Peace Dividends: Past peace deals failed to improve the economic lives of ordinary citizens, creating fertile ground for new wars.
Mashimbye, 2022	Ethnic & Youth Exclusion: The insurgency is driven	Privatization of War: Criticism of the state's reliance	Denial of Root Causes: The government's	Relative Deprivation: Highlighting the stark contrast between the



	by marginalized ethnic groups (Mwani) and unemployed youth who feel excluded from the Makonde-dominated	on mercenaries (PMCs) instead of effective public security. The state failed to secure the region, necessitating SADC intervention.	narrative focused on "external aggression" to avoid recognizing internal governance failures and the legitimate grievances of the population.	multi-billion dollar gas projects and the extreme poverty of the locals. The "resource curse" fuels anger against the elite.
(Darch & Hedges, 2021)	Suppression of Makonde Identity: The specific ethnic and regional identity of the Makonde people was marginalized in favor of a homogenized "Frelimo" national identity, treating tribal loyalty as "backward."	Internal Purges: The use of violence (executions) to settle political differences within the movement created a lack of physical and political security for dissenters.	Biographical Erasure: The official history deletes or demonizes rival leaders. Alternative political visions are not recognized as legitimate but are labeled as "treason" or "reactionary."	Economic Centralization: Local cooperatives in Cabo Delgado were suppressed. The leadership denied local elites (e.g., Nkavandame) the right to fair economic exchange, prioritizing state control over local profit.
(Pearce, 2020)	Counter-History: Renamo validates the historical identity of Central populations (Ndau), opposing Frelimo's exclusionary "single history" of the nation.	Defensive Violence: State police (FIR) are seen as invaders; Renamo fighters are viewed as community protectors ("our sons") against state aggression.	Political Autonomy: The conflict is driven by the demand for recognition of local political will (provincial governors), which the central state persistently denied.	Regional Inequality: Central Mozambique feels economically exploited by the Southern elite. Renamo articulates the demand for a fair share of resource wealth (coal/gas).
(Sicurelli, 2020)	(Less focus on cultural identity, more on the image of Italy as a "Normative Power").	Asset securitization: Security is defined as the security of Eni (Italy) assets, triggering	Selective Recognition: Outside Actors (Sant'Egidio) legitimize the cooperative elite, ignoring the new	Closed Diplomacy: The decision of the megaproject was made in Rome-Maputo, the affected people were not involved.



		militarization that threatens citizens.	victims of the gas project.	
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Source: Created by Authors (2025)

From the results of a review of ten scientific articles on conflict resolution in Mozambique, it was found that all studies show the complex dynamics of peace, in which various theoretical approaches explain different dimensions of conflict and post-war reconciliation. The findings were then grouped into the four dimensions of conflict resolution theory, Need-Based Conflict Theory ([Kriesberg & Burton, 1991](#)).

National Hegemonic Identity and Local Resistance

Burton places identity as a fundamental need related to a sense of self in social, group, and national relations. The literature consistently reviewed shows that identity issues are at the heart of the dynamics of conflict in Mozambique. The post-independence state encourages a national narrative that strengthens FRELIMO's hegemony while marginalizing certain ethnic and religious identities, as seen in the findings of [Macagno \(2025\)](#), [Darch and Hedges \(2021\)](#), and [Pearce \(2020\)](#). At the same time, RENAMO veterans rejected the pejorative label of bandits and demanded recognition for their historical role as democracy fighters, as noted by [Wiegink \(2024\)](#).

On the civil society side, public art such as the Malangatana mural functions as a space for reclaiming identity, which is a symbolic medium to re-display collective wounds that were previously erased by the state's official narrative ([Matusse & Gray, 2025](#)). Radicalization of alternative identities also appears among youth who are alienated by the absence of opportunities and the absence of social recognition ([Domson-Lindsay, 2022](#); [Mashimbye, 2022](#)). In Burton's framework, the need for identity is ontological and non-negotiable. The denial of group identity is a form of denial of their existence so that it produces identity complaints that cannot be resolved through ordinary political compromises.

The synthesized literature suggests that addressing these grievances requires structural prevention through community-based problem-solving dialogues that include a diverse range of local stakeholders including veterans, indigenous leaders, and youth to map symbolic and material needs. Scholars also highlight the potential of institutional cultural recognition, such as bilingual curricula and inclusive memorialization, to foster a pluralistic national narrative. Furthermore, the analyzed studies point to the importance of protecting public expression spaces, such as community theaters and mural arts, as vital conduits for identity recovery ([Matusse & Gray, 2025](#); [Pearce, 2020](#)).

However, the dominance of Burton's ontological identity framework in explaining local resistance in Mozambique must be contrasted with the lens of political constructivism. Critics of this view argue that identity is often not a fixed ontological need but rather a strategic instrument manipulated by elites for power mobilization ([Fearon & Laitin, 2003](#)). In the



Mozambican context, RENAMO's narrative as democracy fighters can be viewed as an elite strategy to gain political leverage rather than a mere expression of unmet basic needs. Recent studies identity narratives in Sub-Saharan Africa are frequently reconstructed to trigger political polarization for electoral interests, challenging the idea of identity as an immutable human need ([Green, 2021](#)).

This poses a theoretical tension for Burton's approach, if identity is fluid and politically constructed ([Brubaker, 2006](#)), then community-based dialogue or symbolic recognition may act only as cosmetic solutions. Without deconstructing the political structures that intentionally produce identity politics as a survival tool for elites, the fulfilment of ontological needs will remain superficial. Thus, the identity crisis in Mozambique is not just about a lack of recognition, but about the active exploitation of social differences by political actors.

Mozambique Security

Within the framework of Human Needs Theory, security is not only related to physical protection but also includes cultural security, which is the certainty that one's traditions and way of life are protected. The findings of the study show that there is a wide gap between the definition of security by the state and the perception of public security. Security policies in Mozambique generally prioritize the protection of strategic assets such as natural gas projects so that the safety of civilians is neglected, as explained by [Sicurelli \(2020\)](#) and [Domson-Lindsay \(2022\)](#). The militarization and use of private military contractors exacerbate fear while eroding public trust in the state ([Darch & Hedges, 2021](#); [Mashimbye, 2022](#)).

Furthermore, there is a cultural security crisis that can be seen from the disruption of traditional practices, unaddressed spiritual trauma such as the Gamba phenomenon, and the rise of problematic social practices. In some areas, people choose to keep weapons as a self-protection mechanism ([Pearce, 2020](#); [Wiegink, 2024](#)). According to Burton, this action is a logical consequence when state institutions fail to meet the security needs of the public. In Burton's framework, security is inseparable from identity and recognition. When security needs are not met, people are encouraged to take self-help measures that prolong conflicts.

The literature indicates that bridging this security gap requires a shift toward a comprehensive model that prioritizes citizen safety within police and military engagement rules. Scholars emphasize the potential of community-based security agreements that unite investors, the state, and citizens in civilian oversight, particularly in extractive zones. Moreover, integrating traditional security institutions, such as indigenous and religious leaders, is identified as a factor in restoring symbolic security. Findings also suggest that demobilization and reintegration programs are more sustainable when they incorporate socioeconomic protection and mental health services, reducing the reliance on weapons as a form of life insurance ([Pearce, 2020](#); [Sicurelli, 2020](#)).

From a security perspective, the reliance on Burton's human security concept faces significant challenges from the paradigm of Structural Realism. Realism argues that in



asymmetric warfare situations, such as in Cabo Delgado, the state acts as a rational actor caught in a security dilemma ([Possen, 2008](#)). The Mozambican government's priority on protecting natural gas infrastructure through militarization is not necessarily a mere neglect of human security, but a rational response for state survival to secure the national revenues crucial for overall stability ([Walt, 1991](#)).

This tension suggests that civilian security and state security often exist in a zero-sum relationship that cannot be fully resolved through needs-based reconciliation ([Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020](#)). [Adamson & Tsourapas \(2020\)](#) analyze highlights how African states are often forced to sacrifice local human security for the sake of border stability and international logistics in the face of asymmetric threats. Therefore, simplifying security issues to the fulfillment of ontological needs risks ignoring the geopolitical pressures and transnational terrorist threats that do not adhere to the logic of community-based conflict resolution.

Recognition between Politics and legitimacy

The need for recognition as a legitimate party is often violated through selective exclusion mechanisms. Empirical evidence suggests that recognition failure is a symbolic wound that is systemic in nature. Amnesty laws and peace architectures that focus on political stability tend to give legitimacy to elite actors and international mediators but ignore recognition of victims, veterans, as well as religious and traditional actors. In this context, some victims seek legitimacy through supernatural experiences or customary rituals ([Finnegan, 2023](#); [Igreja et al., 2025](#)). External legitimacy of actors such as Sant'Egidio and foreign investors also encourages the exclusion of local actors who hold moral authority in the community ([Dzinesa, 2022](#); [Sicurelli, 2020](#)).

In Burton's perspective, recognition is an ontological necessity. Without real recognition, dignity is not recovered and collective wounds tend to result in social disintegration. The scholarly consensus points toward the importance of substantive recognition mechanisms, such as reforming transitional justice to include community-designed symbolic reparations and truth disclosure. The analyzed literature suggests that establishing local reconciliation councils provides space for victims and indigenous leaders to lead reparation rituals. Furthermore, findings indicate that formalizing the roles of religious and civil society institutions within the peace structure could prevent foreign elite legitimacy from overshadowing local moral authority. Scholarly evidence also supports the use of pluralistic educational curricula to reduce the delegitimization of historical narratives ([Dzinesa, 2022](#); [Igreja et al., 2025](#)).

Burton's insistence on recognition as a non-negotiable need can be debated through the lens of legal pragmatism and institutionalism. Critics argue that in fragile post-conflict settings, granting total recognition to all local actors including those who may challenge formal state law can undermine the process of rebuilding state authority ([Snyder & Vinjamuri, 2004](#)). The amnesty laws criticized by Burton as a symbolic wound are often bitter but

necessary political pacts required to stop immediate violence, representing the classic dilemma between peace vs. justice ([Saidin, 2021](#)).

This critical analysis suggests that recognition is not a standalone variable but must be aligned with the rule of law. In modern transitional justice, broad symbolic recognition without institutional strengthening often grants a pseudo-legitimacy that may fuel future conflicts ([Oettler, 2017](#)). The challenge for Mozambique is not merely providing symbolic recognition as Burton suggests, but integrating that recognition into a formal legal structure without triggering institutional fragmentation.

Distributive Justice as the Root of Structural Conflict

This dimension is the most prominent form of failure and is the main trigger for the return of violence. Economic inequality, resource grabbing by elites, and the absence of a fair benefit-sharing mechanism are recurring themes throughout the study. Large-scale gas projects and investments create islands of wealth amid local poverty, while strategic decisions are often taken through closed diplomacy between Rome and Maputo without involving the affected citizens ([Bueno, 2021](#); [Macagno, 2025](#); [Sicurelli, 2020](#)). This inequality creates a sense of injustice that is easily mobilized into conflict ([Domson-Lindsay, 2022](#); [Mashimbye, 2022](#)). The failure of the post-peace economic program to absorb former combatants into the job market further strengthens the potential for remobilization ([Wiegink, 2024](#))

In Burton's framework, although distributive justice is not an ontological necessity in the sense of identity, it is a material prerequisite that supports or actually undermines the fulfilment of other ontological needs. The scholarship indicates that structural transformation is contingent upon binding benefit-sharing mechanisms and transparent fiscal decentralization. Reintegration efforts, according to the reviewed articles, are most effective when oriented toward local market needs through vocational training and community ownership models. Furthermore, independent evaluations of the social and cultural impacts of extractive projects are highlighted in the literature as prerequisites for sustainable investment. Revitalizing local cooperatives is also suggested as a means to reduce elite dominance and ensure that economic benefits reach affected populations ([Bueno, 2021](#); [Darch & Hedges, 2021](#)).

The link between distributive injustice and conflict in Burton's framework can be further complicated by the Greed vs. Grievance debate. While Burton emphasizes grievance (complaints), evidence from Northern Mozambique also indicates elements of greed, where actors exploit conflict for economic gain from natural resources ([Berdal & Malone, 2000](#)). In this scenario, violence becomes an economic function that is highly profitable for militant groups, often offering financial incentives far higher than the promises of state-led development.

Recent research confirms that the presence of natural resources like natural gas creates incentives for violence that cannot be resolved through distributive justice rhetoric alone



without robust law enforcement ([Cusato, 2020](#)). This tension implies that fulfilling material needs may not stop the conflict if the war economy remains more lucrative for the perpetrators. Thus, distributive justice is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for lasting peace in Mozambique if the circuits of economic greed are not dismantled.

Table 3. Fulfilment Status Map of 4 Main Dimensions Needs ([Burton, 1990](#))

<i>Dimensions of Needs (Burton)</i>	<i>Fulfilment Status</i>	<i>Improvement Indicators (Elite/Formal Level)</i>	<i>Failure Indicators (Ontological/Grassroots Level)</i>	<i>References</i>
<i>Identity</i>	Weak and selective fulfilment; hegemonic national narratives still dominate	Adoption of official cultural recognition policies; bilingual local curricula; funding for provincial cultural programs; inclusive memorialization featuring multiple narratives	Emergence of alternative identity claims and youth radicalization; public art as an outlet for recognition; veterans demanding legitimacy; perceptions of identity delegitimization	Macagno 2025 ; Darch & Hedges 2021 ; Matusse & Gray 2025 ; Wiegink 2024 ; Domson-Lindsay 2022 ; Darch & Hedges 2021 ; Pearce 2020
<i>Security</i>	Fulfilment biased toward protecting strategic assets while civilian security is neglected	Reform of national security concepts with human security at the core; civilian oversight mechanisms for project security; inclusion of traditional leaders in local security committees; redesigned DDR with social guarantees	Weapons retention among civilians; erosion of trust in security forces; disruption of traditional practices and untreated spiritual trauma; increase in early marriage	Igreja et al. 2025 ; Wiegink 2024 ; Domson-Lindsay 2022 ; Mashimbye 2022 ; Sicurelli 2020 ; Darch & Hedges 2021 ;
<i>Recognition</i>	Many groups remain substantively unrecognized; transitional mechanisms remain elite-centric	Transitional justice reforms including truth-telling and public apologies; revised amnesty ensuring victims' rights; localized reconciliation councils; formalizing local actors in the peace architecture	Victims seeking legitimacy through customary rituals or supernatural experiences; delegitimization of local leaders; perception that aid benefits only elites	Igreja et al. 2025 ; Wiegink 2024 ; Dzinesa 2022 ; Sicurelli 2020
<i>Distributive justice</i>	Highly inadequate;	Binding benefit-sharing agreements between	Islands of wealth amid local poverty; protests	Macagno 2025 ; Wiegink 2024 ;



	elite capture and extractive inequalities dominate	investors and the state; transparent and accountable fiscal decentralization; reintegration programs aligned with local markets; independent socio-cultural impact audits	and mobilization driven by injustice; remobilization of former combatants due to lack of economic opportunity	Domson-Lindsay 2022; Mashimbye 2022; Darch & Hedges 2021; Sicurelli 2020
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Source: Classified by Authors (2025)

A map of the status of meeting needs based on John Burton's theory reveals a sharp structural gap between formal mechanisms at the elite level and ontological realities at the grassroots level in the Mozambique conflict. In the Identity dimension, despite formal initiatives such as local curriculum and cultural policies, the hegemony of the national narrative still dominates the public space. This paradoxically triggers the radicalization of youth and the demands for legitimacy from veterans who feel that their identity is delegitimized by the state ([Macagno, 2025](#); [Wiegink, 2024](#)). This exclusion pattern continues in the Security dimension, where the fulfilment of needs is biased towards the protection of strategic assets of foreign investment. While elites discuss security reforms, civilians experience an erosion of trust in the apparatus and disruption of traditional practices, which forces them to retain weapons as a guarantee of physical safety ([Igreja et al., 2025](#); [Sicurelli, 2020](#))

This gap is widening in the dimensions of Recognition and Distributive Justice. The elite-centric mechanism of justice transition fails to provide existential validation for the victims of war, encouraging them to seek legitimacy through customary rituals or supernatural phenomena as a form of protest against the neglect of the state ([Dzinesa, 2022](#); [Igreja et al., 2025](#)). In the economic sector, promises of fiscal decentralization and benefit-sharing agreements have proven ineffective against the reality of elite capture. The emergence of islands of wealth in the midst of a sea of local poverty is evidence of a real distributive failure, which directly triggers the remobilization of former combatants and social unrest due to the absence of economic opportunities ([Domson-Lindsay, 2022](#)). Overall, this table confirms that peace in Mozambique is still procedural and fails to address substantial basic needs.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the construction and fragility of post-1992 peace in Mozambique by synthesizing contemporary scholarly perspectives through the lens of John Burton's Human Needs Theory. Based on a systematic analysis during 2020-2025, the findings indicate that the cessation of hostilities following the Rome Accords was not sufficiently matched by structural efforts to address fundamental human needs. The synthesized evidence identifies recurring

patterns of deficit across four dimensions such as identity, security, recognition, and distributive justice, which appear to correlate with the persistence of localized violence and social fragility. Within the scope of the literature reviewed, the 1992 agreement functioned primarily as an elite-centered settlement, leaving various ontological needs of the broader population largely unaddressed.

While acknowledging the limitations of relying exclusively on a concentrated base of secondary data, the study identifies critical thematic trends that have implications for peacebuilding. The analyzed literature suggests that peace models prioritizing elite bargains over structural and participatory interventions may remain vulnerable to relapse. Furthermore, the patterns identified in the scholarship point toward the potential importance of community-based dialogues, inclusive memorialization, and benefit-sharing mechanisms in addressing the root causes of conflict. Ultimately, this study does not seek to provide a universal policy mandate but rather offers a theory-informed synthesis of the structural roots of Mozambique's instability as identified in recent high-impact research. Future studies involving primary field data are encouraged to further validate these synthesized findings and provide a more granular understanding of the conflict's evolving dynamics.

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