

The Deployment of a ‘Sacred Song’ in Violence in Zimbabwe: The Case of the Song ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa Ramadzibaba*’ (Zimbabwe was/is Born of the Blood of the Fathers/Ancestors) in Zimbabwean Politics

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Abstract

The dominant narrative in the study of religion in Africa is that African indigenous religions are non-violent, peaceful and seek to promote healing and integration. In this paradigm, it is militant missionary religions such as Islam and Christianity that promote violence. Such an approach misses the key learning that no religion is violent in and of itself: only the determination of individuals and groups acting in the name of a particular religion is relevant as to whether/the extent to which a religion can be appropriated and deployed to perpetrate violence. This article explores the deployment of a song, ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa Ramadzibaba*’ to justify ‘sacred violence’ to ‘defend Zimbabwe against witches/enemies’. The central research question is: How is the song, ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa...*’ appropriated and deployed to sacralise violence in Zimbabwean politics? The article describes the song and analyses some of the contexts in which the song has been strategically performed. The study seeks to underscore the manipulation of indigenous spirituality in justifying violence. Theoretically, the study challenges the naïve claims that indigenous religions are ‘pure and upright’ in relation to violence.

Keywords: sacred violence, African indigenous religions, political songs, narratives, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The academic study of religion in Africa in general, and Zimbabwe in particular, tends to adopt a rather innocent and romantic, but simplistic and essentialist view of religion. If one the most demanding questions of today is, ‘is religion dangerous?’ (cf. Juergensmeyer 2000), the dominant chorus in response by most African scholars is, ‘no!’ Religion is regarded as a powerful marker of African identity. The formulation by the Kenyan scholar, John S. Mbiti (1969: 1) and the Nigerian scholar, E. Bolaji Idowu (1967:11) that ‘Africans are notoriously religious’ holds sway in most African (and Zimbabwean) Departments of Religious Studies, or Theology and Religious Studies. A positive and rather celebratory spirit dominates approaches to the study of religion in Africa. The celebration of religion (particularly, African Indigenous Religions) in Africa is due to a number of factors, including the need to respond to colonial and negative descriptions of African Indigenous Religions, the quest to portray Africa as offering the world the resource of spirituality, a reaction against secularization and other factors.

In this article, we seek to challenge the tendency to always valorize African Indigenous Religions positively by examining how one particular song, ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa Ramadzibaba*’ (shortened to ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ hereafter), that draws on indigenous religion, has been evoked and performed to justify ‘sacred violence’ in Zimbabwe. We argue that the deployment of the song serves to sanction and sacralize violence has been appropriated as a call to arms. The song is laden with religio-cultural symbolism and its performance has served to give violence a holy façade, what Berger has called a sacred canopy or a veil of mystification (Berger 1967: 26-27). Although the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) of President Robert Mugabe and its various wings (especially the Youth and Women’s Wings and the war veterans) have sought to monopolize the song as part of the quest to get a grip on ‘patriotic history’ (Ranger 2005: 7-8), it is striking to note that the same song has also been appropriated by University of Zimbabwe students when demonstrating against ZANU-PF and Mugabe.

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But before we go further, we would like to look into the intrinsic character and workings of songs so as to provide the conceptual lenses through which to see how the song *Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa* has been a source of violence or has managed to evoke feelings of hostility against imagined or actual political enemies. To do this, we resort to narratology and argue that songs create and reinforce particular narratives.

The evocative character of song, emerging out of the verve it creates, has received much attention, especially from social psychologists. In this article, we push beyond the sound and verve. We emphasise the narrative that is either created, espoused or reinforced by the contents of the song. We are concerned about what the contents of songs do from a rational point of view. We ask what the function of song is. We transcend the notion that songs are only for purposes of '*morari*'/verve. In Zimbabwe, when *morari* is called for, it is an effort to get masses emotional and act. Hence at political rallies or demonstrations, songs are used often to emotionalize people. Our question, therefore, is what story is being told and, more precisely, how is it told, and not primarily what emotions are being created, notwithstanding the fact that the two are closely linked. We contend that there is a qualitative difference between the two, which appeals to different sensibilities. The words create a story which appeals to the cognitive domain, and the sound and rhythm supported by the words (though not always necessary) appeal to the emotions.

In analyzing the song *Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa* we treat it as a narrative-creating and carrying phenomenon. As Bhabha observes, narratives sum up events or a series of events, real or invented stories. And Barthes asserts: 'Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation' (Barthes 1982:251). While song is left out on this list, we argue that songs also espouse and create narratives. In times of conflict, as we will see when we discuss the times when *Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa* was deployed, different parties offer different narratives for the same event. The narratives differ depending on the side giving the narrative and its intentions in doing so. Narratives are functional. For the most part they are presented to accentuate certain positions in support of specific official positions with a view to mobilise endorsement by a critical mass of people so that the narratives become national (see Holstein & Gubrium 2000). In times of crises and conflict, narratives tend to reproduce and grow like living organisms and their purpose is to criminalise, demonize and delegitimize the other and by so doing emphasize the rightness,

authenticity, legitimacy, and justice of one's own narrative. There is the more urgent and not debatable need to eliminate 'opponents' when the narrative is suffused with religious undertones, as is the case with *Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*. 'Ramadzibaba' (of the Fathers) denotes a primordial understanding of the nation undergirded by historical and religious axiomatic assumptions. As shall be shown, *Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa*, is a return to historical and religious arguments that invoke antiquity. They take a primordial approach to rivet their narratives to foundational myths (Wasserstein 2003). Some national narratives may change over time; others remain static, with only minor changes and others are invented. There is no fixed process of how they evolve or change (Dajani Daoudi 2015). Chitando (2005) observes how religious songs have been appropriated in the political discourse in Zimbabwe.

Narratives comprise who did what, when, where and how inter alia. Therefore, we draw attention to the following framework of five W's and an 'H': Who, What, When, Where, Why and 'How?' by Yehudith Auerbach (2010: 104-106) as another complementary avenue via which to understand the role of *Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa* in constructing narratives and how that leads to conflict and violence. The six elements provide a unity and coherence based on a logical relationship among these five elements, and it gives the narrative force and helps make songs such as *Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa* memorable. This has to be read in view of the need of human beings to live in an environment that is meaningful, comprehensible, organized and predictable, as we pointed above. Auerbach (2010: 102) notes that the 'ideal type' of national narrative in a conflict is structured according to the following format: **Who?** There is a hero or heroes of the narrative and this person or persons personify/ies the entire national entity as it is or as it should be. This or these heroes, may also symbolize the suffering of the people and its continuing sacrifice. **What?** Under the 'what' element the victory of 'our' side is told and this victory is often miraculous or religious in nature. It is here that the existential question is asked and answered. If the 'what' is not about victory it will tell how 'we' were defeated by murderous people who did so with no justification. The **Why** dimension deals with why a group undertakes what it does. In the context of conflict each side will attribute its good deeds – peace initiatives, release of prisoners, etc. – to internal factors such as the pursuit of its own inherent sense of peace and justice, while negative acts – the killing of children, terrorist attacks, targeted killings, etc. – will be attributed to external factors and usually to the enemy, for it is the enemy, in its wickedness and aggression, that forced

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'us' to act this way out of self-defense. The latter part of these dimensions also speaks to the '**How**'. How an injustice happened or a group says it happened can contribute to why a group thinks it is justified to act in the way it does. **When** the event took place is a mythical point in time that links what happened 'in those days' to 'these times'. For both parties in a conflict over identity, time undergoes a process of 'collapse' (time collapse) in which 'the interpretations, fantasies and feelings about a past shared trauma commingle with those pertaining to a current situation' (Volkan 1997: 35). The case of linking the third Chimurenga (liberation war) of 2000 to the first (1896-1897) and second (1964-1979) is a good example in the case of Zimbabwe. That is why *Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa* which was composed during the second Chimurenga made a lot of sense during the Third Chimurenga. Time between the two periods was collapsed. **Where** the event took place is not a meaningless geographical point; rather it is a 'place of legend' charged with historic and religious connotations. The dispute over names of places echoes the dispute over the link between the place and those who fight for and over it while making use of the national narratives that have come to be tied to this place. No wonder why following attainment of independence many African countries took new names for the countries (from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe) as well as for the streets.

The five 'Ws' and an 'H' are narrated with the following ends in mind: They justify the societal *goals* during the conflict; stress the importance of personal safety and national survival (*security*), and outline the conditions for their achievement; *delegitimize* the opponent and deny his or her humanity; project a particular positive *self-image* : positive traits, values and behaviour to one's own society; present *victimhood* by accentuating the unjust harm, evil deeds and atrocities perpetrated by the adversary; generate *patriotism*: an attachment to the country and society, by propagating loyalty, love, care and sacrifice; refer to *unity*: the importance of ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements; and refer to *peace*: present an idyllic peace as an ultimate goal of the society, and society members as 'peace loving' (Bar-Tal & Salomon 2006).

Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa functions to fulfil the above. Alongside the national anthem and other 'songs that won the liberation war' (Pongweni 1982), it sanctions the shedding of 'less important blood', what Butler (2009) refers to as not grievable lives, in defence of the ideals of sovereignty and nationhood, even as these very concepts are themselves contested (Ndlovu-

Gathseni & Muzondidya 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). This contestation was felt in the nationalist movement of the 1960s and the armed liberation struggle of the 1970s (Sithole 1999; Muwati, Mutasa & Bopape 2010). ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ serves to remind performers and audiences that Zimbabwe was not handed on a silver plate, but that it came through a heroic struggle in which precious blood was shed. Constantly, Mugabe evokes the blood of the heroes, the sons and daughters of Zimbabwe, in his speeches to arouse and mobilize his supporters (Mugabe 2001). In the following sections, we shall outline the song, ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’, describe some of the contexts in which it has been performed and analyse how indigenous spirituality has been appropriated to justify violence in Zimbabwe.

‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’: Unpacking a Militant Spiritual Song

The song, ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ must be located firmly in the country’s nationalist history, particularly the armed liberation struggle of the 1970s. The Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), the military wing of ZANU, utilized songs for mobilization, articulating ideology and boosting morale (Bhebe & Ranger 1995; Ravengai 2016). ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ is designed to remind people that the struggle for liberation called for sacrifice and that such sacrifice must be honoured, even if it means shedding the blood of ‘traitors, sell-outs and stooges of Britain’ (Chimuka 2015), who of late have been an opposition force, including the main opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). As it turns out, the identities of ‘heroes’ and ‘sell-outs’ are neither permanent nor static. The revolutionary icons of today can be labelled traitors tomorrow, depending on how they stand in relation to the centre of power. Factional fights within ZANU-PF have seen stalwarts of the liberation struggle demoted to traitors.

The performance of this song at the height of ZANU PF’s dwindling support was meant to collapse time and connect the Second Chimurenga to the First Chimurenga (1896/7 Shona/Ndebele resistance). Crucially, ZANU-PF considers the First Chimurenga a holy war (a jihad in some versions of militant Islam) where indigenous spirituality challenged the invading religion of the colonialists, Christianity. It might be important to note that the name Chimurenga comes from the spirit medium Murenga who promised immunity from bullets to those who were fighting against white settlers (Ranger

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1967:217-220). The religious factor is already identifiable. (Mbuya, Grandmother) Nehanda and (Sekuru, Grandfather) Kaguvi are celebrated for upholding their spiritual beliefs in the face of an arrogant Christianity. Nehanda and Kaguvi became patron saints of the Second Chimurenga, with indigenous spirituality enjoying a revival. In the same vein, Lan (1985) has also underscored the role that spirit mediums, key figures in Shona religion, play in Zimbabwe. Many Christian converts resorted to hiding their Bibles as some militant cadres declared Christianity an alien religion which was part of the colonialists' strategy to loot and plunder Zimbabwe's wealth. In one of Comrade Chinx's (ZANU's prime composer/performer) songs, '*Maruza Vapambepfumi*' (You have lost, you looters) a rhetorical question is posed: '*Kuna St John, kuna St Mark. Ko, St Nehanda iri kupi? St. Chitepo iri kupi?*' (There is St. John, there is St. Mark. Where is St. Nehanda? Where is St. Chitepo?)

'*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' is a song for mobilization, calling upon the audience to hearken to its description, to its narrative and take up arms. Below we summarize the central stanzas:

Zimbabwe ndeye ropa baba! x 2 (Zimbabwe is born of blood!)

Zimbabwe ndeye ropa ramadzibaba (Zimbabwe is born of the blood of the fathers/ancestors)

Mambomaona kupiko baba? x 2 (Where have you seen them?)

Mambomaona kupiko mabhunu? (Where have you seen the Boers?)

The text above is short, repetitive and poignant, but pregnant with meaning. The reference to the blood of the fathers/ancestors is consistent with the patriarchal perspective, even though Nehanda, a woman, was central to the struggle for liberation. Blood denotes sacrifice, dedication and fortitude. It is the blood of the comrades that waters and nourishes the revolution. The red colour in the national flag reminds Zimbabweans of the cost of independence. The national anthem says that Zimbabwe '*yakazvarwa nemoto weChimurenga neropa zhinji remagamba*' (was born out of the fire of Chimurenga and the abundant blood of the heroes). Vambe and Khan (2009) contend that the national anthem can be read as a political biography which seeks to promote a particular version of Zimbabwe. The occurrence of blood in both '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' and the national anthem is not accidental. In many ways, the idiom of blood is central to the construction of Zimbabwe. In the nationalist

imagination, Zimbabwe is a community of diverse actors who are brought together by the blood that was shed in the struggle for independence.

Space constraints prevent us from exploring the use of the blood in Zimbabwean music relating to the First, Second and Third Chimurenga. However, we can draw attention to the war song, '*Tochema kuZANU*' (We appeal to ZANU) where there is reference to '*ropa rakawanda rakasara kuTembwe*' (a lot of blood was left/shed at Tembwe). It is a funeral dirge with a sorrowful and deeply touching tone. Another mournful song by Flavian Nyathi and Blues, '*Ropa ReZimbabwe*' (the Blood of Zimbabwe) contributes to the memorialization of the Chimoio and Nyadzonja massacres. It suggests that the blood of individual cadres, too numerous to be accounted for, can be subsumed under the red colour on the national flag.

The reference to '*ropa ramadzibaba*' (blood of the fathers/ancestors) in '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' is important, as we have already pointed out. These departed fathers (as expressed by the song) who shed their blood are regarded the real owners of Zimbabwe. They are the 'guardians of the land' (Schoffeleers 1979). That they are described as 'fathers' is consistent with the patriarchal foundations of Zimbabwean society (Campbell 2003; Muchemwa & Muponde 2007). They are seen as the spiritual guarantors of the modern nation known as Zimbabwe. To say, '*Zimbabwe ndeye ropa ramadzibaba*' is to say that Zimbabwe is not an ordinary nation: Zimbabwe said to be protected by the departed elders of the community. As they rose to defend their sacred space when they were alive, so must the present (and future) generation/s always be ready to defend their land (Chitando 2005). Indigenous spirituality emerges here as a powerful mobilizing force. Zimbabwe is not mere soil: it is holy land for which precious blood has been and will be shed. Woe to those who overlook this heavily spiritual 'truth'!

One factor to accompany reflection on why reference to the dead seems to have magical power to provoke action is that the dead are a central phenomenon among the Africans, including Zimbabweans. Some have asserted that a dead person is more respected than a living person among the Shona. One daily action of speech in Zimbabwe is swearing by the dead. If in a conflict, one swears by the dead, for example swearing by their mother – *ndinopika namai vangu varere pachuru* (I swear by my mother who lies buried on the anthill), that signals that the person is ready for the worst, because the conflict has been sacralised by reference to the dead. Mugabe has often made such acts of speech, swearing by Nehanda and Kaguvi (Chitando 2016a).

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When he would say this, violence would break out like a whirlwind. The dead are not to be joked about. *Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa*'s generation and sacralisation of conflict and violence has to be understood in this light. The performance and consumption of the song thus rides on the back of this conception of the dead.

We noted that narratives identify a hero or heroes of the narrative and this person or persons personifies the entire national entity as it is or as it should be. On the other hand, they also identify the enemies. The second part of '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' refers to the need to identify '*mabhunu*' (Boers) in order to deal with them decisively. To this end, this is a martial song. It is a call to arms, similar to another song, '*Bhunu raenda nebara kumusana*' (the Boer has run away with a bullet in his back). The one difference, however, is that while the latter is triumphalist, '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' has a somewhat sombre tone. It is built on victimhood. The struggle was projected as one between 'sons and daughters of the soil' and the Boers. In a similar way, post-apartheid South Africa has had to deal with the performance of the song, '*Dubula iBhunu*' (Shoot the Boer) by Julius Malema, the leader of the Economic Freedom Party, comprising youth who broke away from the African National Congress (ANC). The concept of 'Boer' signifies an oppressive system promoting white privileges in Southern Africa. We are convinced that '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' must be read in this context of mobilizing black agency to counter an oppressive system, of whatever sort. No wonder University of Zimbabwe students deploy it against what they perceive as the oppressive regime of Robert Mugabe. However, it has become clear that the 'struggle' is in fact never one, but many. Once the struggle against white settler colonialism and apartheid ends, other struggles emerge. In particular, contradictions within the ruling class, reminiscent of what the late political scientist Masipula Sithole (2009) called 'Struggle with the Struggle' during the liberation war, generate new tensions, instigating new appropriations of war-time slogans, songs and imagery.

It is, however, critical for us to underscore the point that in a post-armed struggle period, 'Boer' can become a place holder for all those who oppose the establishment or status quo. Thus, political opponents such as members of the opposition, or even those who belong to a different faction of the ruling party, qualify to be labelled as 'Boers'. As the 'Boers' had to be destroyed during the liberation struggle, so too must they be destroyed during the post-armed struggle period. Reflecting on a related song '*Musha Una*

Mabhunu (A homestead/household with Boers) by Elliot Manyika, the late ZANU-PF Political Commissar, Guzura and Ndimande (2015: 15) write:

Elliot Manyika's '*Musha una mabhunu*' subtly urges for the extermination of the 'enemy.' When one analyses the song on a metaphoric level one is drawn to the fact that political opposition are (sic) equated to the '*Mabhunu*' who were the white Rhodesian security personnel. This then suggests a link between the opposition and colonialists (;) an important message which ZANU (PF) has always been keen to drum in order to discredit the MDC. In the song, the singer demands to know the households which are harbouring '*mabhunu*'(,) which can be read as households with MDC supporters. The singer wants these households identified in order that these 'sell outs' be brought to the party which will then deal with them (sic).

'*Mabhunu*,' (Boers) '*vatengesi*' (sell outs), 'witches', 'enemies of the state', 'quislings', 'friends of Bush and Blair' and others who have 'strayed from the revolutionary path' stand qualified to be 'bombed and vanquished' (Manyika's other songs make reference to the need to 'bomb and shell' spaces occupied by the enemy). Only those who remain firm and devoted to the ideals of the ancestors, the way of the party and the defence of Zimbabwe's sovereignty stand protected. In order to constantly jog the memories of the citizens who might forget their sacred responsibility to defend Zimbabwe at all costs and at every turn, songs such as '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' must be performed regularly, as was the case with the belting out of revolutionary music at music galas and ZANU PF rallies in post independent Zimbabwe, as we will see shortly. Amnesia is a tragedy for a revolutionary people. To the preachers of human rights and promoters of non-violence, a rhetorical question is posed: 'Where were you when we died for these very same rights?' (Chitando 2016b: 60).

The Retrieval and Deployment of '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' in Independent Zimbabwe: An Overview

Having attained political independence in 1980 after a gruelling guerilla war, Zimbabwe was a favourite of many in the international community. Indeed,

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Zimbabwe's struggle had drawn a lot of attention and Robert Nesta Marley, an outstanding reggae musician, penned a song, 'Zimbabwe' to acknowledge the country's birth. However, the country has experienced numerous social, political and economic challenges. In this section, we seek to highlight a few of the contexts in which the song, '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' has been retrieved and deployed in the quest to achieve specific goals.

First, ZANU-PF has been quite adept at resuscitating the war spirit in all its post-independence political and ideological battles. In the face of a restive opposition, especially after the emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999, ZANU-PF resorted to war-time strategies. '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' was appropriated to mobilize the Youth and Women's wings to 'defend the party and the country' against the opposition. In violence related to the elections in 2000, 2002, and 2008, the song was appealed to in order to justify the crushing of dissent. There was a very systematic conflation of 'Zimbabwe' with 'ZANU-PF and Mugabe'. There was a move to present Zimbabwe as facing a dangerous regime-change agenda. In this scheme, patriotism and defending the land of the ancestors meant siding with ZANU-PF/Mugabe and confronting the opposition. While there is nothing wrong with being patriotic about one's country, the problem lies in that the love and commitment for country has been conflated with the love and commitment for ZANU PF in Zimbabwe. Differently put, patriotism has been conflated with ZANU PF nationalism, and yet the two are distinct. However, even though the two can be correlated, they are analytically distinct. The ZANU PF nationalist discourse is presented under the guise of patriotism; yet these discourses are driven by different socio-psychological processes. Patriotism refers to the noncompetitive love of and commitment to one's country. It focuses on promoting the welfare of one's nation, but is neutral with regard to the evaluation of others. Nationalism on the other hand is related to the superiority of the ingroup over outgroups and implies the exclusion or even domination of outgroups. Consequently, it is associated with higher levels of chauvinism, prejudice, militarization, hawkish attitudes, social dominance orientation and lower levels of internationalization (Kemmelmeier & Winter 2008: 863). Songs such as *Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa* function to facilitate instrumentalist nationalism under the guise of patriotism.

Second, and closely related to the foregoing, was the appropriation of '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' in the fast-track land reform programme (FTLRP), also called the Third Chimurenga. Mugabe and ZANU-PF made the land

question the central issue in all elections from the year 2000. Many farm invaders performed the song as they evicted the white farmers and black farm workers. The *jambanja* (commotion) that was brought about by the FTLRP brought the country into an undeclared state of war. Indeed, the performance of the song, ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ during this period served not only to take the peoples’ minds back to the time of the liberation struggle of the 1970s, but also to sacralize the whole exercise, considering that land is sacred in Zimbabwe because it is associated with the ancestors as we detail shortly. This was consistent with the message that ZANLA cadres had kept emphasizing during the nightly mobilization meetings (*pungwe*): if ever ZANU’s right to rule was threatened, the war would return!

The performance of ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ and other war-time songs during the FTLRP was accompanied by the emphasis on the spiritual value of the land. To participate in the FTLRP was to engage in a righteous undertaking which had the backing of the ancestors. In particular, Mugabe articulated an appealing indigenous theology of the land. With his rhetorical power and fluency in English and Shona, Mugabe urged the ‘sons and daughters of the land’ to ‘strike fear in the heart of the white man’. After all, the land had not come back cheaply: the sacred blood of the ancestors and combatants had been shed in the armed struggle for it to be recovered. According to Mugabe (2001: 109):

Our perspective on the land reform programme derives from our struggle for sovereign independence, and the compelling fact that the last and decisive seven years of that struggle took an armed form that demanded of us the precious and ultimate price of our blood. We died and suffered for our land. We died and suffered for sovereignty over natural resources of which land *ivhu*, [/] *umhlabati*, is the most important.

The appeal to indigenous spirituality in the FTLRP was secured by tying it to the First and Second Chimurenga. The quest to recover the stolen ancestral land was not a mere political ploy by a political party under pressure, or a revolutionary icon’s waning charisma, Mugabe and ZANU-PF insisted. Rather, it was a sacred duty which had to be obeyed, even if it meant violence had to be perpetrated. In leading the taking back of the land, Mugabe was said to be acting in accordance with the demands of the ancestors and obeying

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ancestral oracles (see Mukonyora 2011: 137). Comrade Chinx performed another song, ‘*Hondo Yeminda*’ (The war for the land) where he underlined the need for taking the land at all costs.

Third, apart from performing the song, ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ in violence related to elections and the FTLRP, ZANU-PF also deployed the song in its contestations with the MDC in Parliament. As the MDC became more assertive and threatened to dislodge the nationalist party, debates sometimes degenerated into physical confrontations in Parliament. Chaos would break out when the MDC Members of Parliament (MPs) would begin singing, ‘*ZANU Yaora*’ (ZANU is now rotten). ZANU-PF MPs would counter by singing, ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’. Here, ZANU-PF would be reminding the MDC of its lack of revolutionary credentials and refusing to concede any ground to the opposition. Further, we surmise that the retrieval and deployment of the song was designed to instill sacred fear in the MDC MPs. The song is reminder of ZANU-PF’s capacity to use violence to achieve set objectives. Its performance in a conflict setting is meant to subdue opponents. After all, Mugabe had at one time declared that he had degrees in violence. His MPs thus ride on the back of that declaration by their leader. Manyika’s song had also extolled ZANU-PF’s militancy by proudly declaring, ‘*Mbiri yechigandanga, ndombiri yatinayo*’ (the militant/revolutionary/violent record is what we have).

Fourth, it is critical to acknowledge that ZANU-PF has not enjoyed a monopoly when it comes to appealing to militant songs such as, ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’. The University of Zimbabwe’s Students Union has used the song to mobilize resistance to Mugabe and ZANU-PF using ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ and other songs from the 1970s war of liberation. Makunike (2015) has outlined the ‘love-hate’ relationship between the University of Zimbabwe students and Mugabe’s government. In the early years of independence, up to the late 1980s, most students were aligned to ZANU-PF and regarded themselves as an extension of its structures. As was the case with most churches and other civic organisations, the notion of ‘nation building’ was extolled and students regarded themselves as the vanguard of the ongoing ‘revolution’ to ensure that blacks obtained access to the gains of independence. Despite the violence in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions in the early 1980s, there was an air of optimism regarding the fledging state.

From the late 1980s, however, student activism took a more militant turn. In particular, ZANU-PF’s quest to create a one party-state was staunchly opposed by the University of Zimbabwe’s Student’s Union. Corruption by the

ruling elite, abandonment of the socialist ideal and increasing sensitivity to criticism led to running battles between (anti-) riot police and students. In addition, the struggle to have state grants increased, akin to the ‘Fees Must Fall’ movement seen in South Africa in recent years, generated many demonstrations. Many of these demonstrations were characterized by violence by both the police and the students. Significantly for this essay, the song, ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ was performed by students in order to mobilize and generate some verve. Further, the song was also meant to critique the ruling elite and to remind it of the sacrifice that characterized the struggle for Zimbabwe. Thus, in the hands of the students, the song ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ challenged ZANU-PF’s exclusive claim to be the repository of the memory of the liberation struggle. At the University of Zimbabwe student demonstrations, *Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa* was often accompanied by the song inter alia, ‘*Amai nababa musandichema, kana ndafa nehondo. Ndini ndakazvida, kufira Zimbabwe, pamwe chete nevamwe. Kumbira kumudzimu, ufambe zvakanaka kana wopinda musango, sango rine shumba*’ (My parents, do not mourn if I die in the war. It is my choice to sacrifice my life for the country (Zimbabwe) together with the others. Ask the ancestors for a safe journey into the war zone full of lions). What is important about this song in relation to the *Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa* are the religious motifs that can be distilled from it. These include death and the ancestors. These songs sacralised the cause of the demonstration. Violence could and often would follow. This, therefore, supports our hypothesis that African religion, at whose centre are death and the ancestors, can be deployed for violence and not peace as the dominant narrative seems to assert.

‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’, African Indigenous Religions and ‘Righteous Violence’

In the foregoing sections, we have highlighted the extent to which the song, ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ has been deployed to both initiate and sacralise violence in Zimbabwean politics. We contend that these observations have definite implications for the discourse on religion and human security in Africa. Our descriptions and analyses of the retrieval and deployment of ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ shows that African Indigenous Religions are at the disposal of creative politicians as they were in the past in the wars between

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African societies in precolonial times. They can be appropriated to further political ideologies and to explain (away) violence.

In the particular case of independent Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF and Mugabe have arrogated the right to interpret ancestral ideals and use these to their political advantage. Mugabe stands in the line of the towering figures of Zimbabwean spirituality, such as Nehanda and Kaguvi. He is set within the sacred cosmic order. In the song, '*Mudzimu woye*' (oh spirit), another war-time song, Manyika proceeds to locate the living Mugabe in this very line of ancestors by declaring, '*VaMugabe mudzimu wedu*' (Mugabe is our ancestor) (Gonye & Moyo 2012: 98). As one who stands within the line of the ancestors, Mugabe can, with sacred authority, declare what is good for Zimbabwe. To challenge him is to challenge the cosmic order. Thus, he stands to proclaim:

Zimbabwe needs ZANU-PF and not sponsored and unprincipled and counter-revolutionary political parties. Zimbabwe *ndeye ropa*. *Sibokumbula igazi lama qawe* (Zimbabwe was won through a bloody war, the precious blood of our remembered heroes) (Mugabe 2001: 81).

Indigenous spirituality is here brought into the service of a political party. The declaration, 'Zimbabwe needs ZANU-PF' is a political statement that has a religio-spiritual underpinning to it. Mugabe's rhetorical performance and spiritual gerrymandering suggests that the entity called Zimbabwe needs ZANU-PF. Why? Because the history of ZANU-PF is written in blood: the precious blood of the ancestors! Interestingly, in this public speech, Mugabe switches between Shona and Ndebele to reinforce the same point, namely, that the story of Zimbabwe is the story of ancestral blood. In this way, he seeks to forge a national identity based on a shared sense of sacrifice and struggle for liberation. The music by party cadres such as Comrade Chinx and Manyika deepens the conflation between Mugabe and Zimbabwe. Gonye and Moyo express this in a very lucid and informative way:

Chinx and Manyika recite, vindicate and glorify this history of defiance, resilience and revolution. Chinx and Manyika stand as vigorous party chanters and are chroniclers and are very useful in the process of narrating the birth of the nation as a feat accomplished by the ZANU PF party and therefore a heritage that party will forever

defend. In their songs, the nation is imaginatively moulded as one with identifiable heroes, makers and detractors. The songs present Chaminuka, Nehanda and Kaguvi as ancient heroes and founders of the nation, now spiritual ancestors, and Mugabe as the divinely ordained new ancestor and courageous defender of the nation (Gonye & Moyo 2012: 98).

Within ZANU-PF, the valorization and sacralization of Mugabe has given rise to slogans such as, '*VaMugabe chete chete!*' (Mugabe only!). Although the theme of how African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe have contributed to Zimbabwean politics requires a separate study, it is strategic to note that some of them have built on the indigenous idea of Mugabe's putative identity as 'the Chosen One' to reinforce the notion of his supra-human status. In such a scheme, to differ with Mugabe in terms of policies, approaches and vision is to defy the ancestors and God (Tarusarira 2016: 111-112) and is taken to justify that violence may be needed to bring 'apostates' back into line. The fading of memories of the sacrifices of the past heroes may be perceived as a need to reawaken them by energetic performances of songs such as, '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*'.

Conclusion

The case of '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*' thus highlights the need for a critical approach and hermeneutics when analyzing the interface between religion and human security in Africa. The tendency to cast only missionary religions such as Islam and Christianity as militant threats to human security needs to be discursively critiqued. There is a need to awaken to the reality that no religion is violent in and of itself. Concomitantly, no religion is peaceful in and of itself. A religion 'is' 'violent' or 'peaceful' to the extent that some social actors, especially those with power, choose to manipulate pre-existing religious ideas and practices to initiate and justify violence, or to promote peace. In the case of '*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*', indigenous spiritual beliefs have been utilized in a specific socio-cultural, political and economic context to initiate and justify acts of violence. In other contexts, such as in human trafficking in Nigeria (Ikeora 2016), African Indigenous Religions are appropriated to keep individuals in bondage.

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Does the singing of ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ cause violence in Zimbabwe? Although such a question looks preposterous, it is a fair and heuristic one to uncover the constraints behind the present approach in studying the intersection between religion, conflict and human security. Given our association of the song with incidents of violence, one may wrongly conclude that the song, in and of itself, generates violence. This is far from the truth: on many occasions, the song is performed without any violence. Furthermore, we reiterate that a song has no agency. Agency lies in people. However, our argument is that the song has been systematically appropriated and deployed to initiate and justify violence on many occasions, and because its invocation of the ancestors leads back to blood, the dead and the ancestors, elements all of which are central to Shona religion, including in Zimbabwe. It is thus in order to assert that to uphold the idea that African religion is peaceful in and of itself is not only simplistic, but also fallacious and bent on stifling a critical engagement with the concepts of religion, conflict and peace. What must always be primary in analyses of religion and human security in Africa (and globally) is the need to read the historical, economic, political, cultural, social, ethnic and other factors that are critical to whether religion is amenable for manipulation for violence or peace. Studying religion and human security ahistorically and in a decontextualized manner, risks glossing over and masking factors at the core of conflict and violence and lends the process to misframing the situation. As Bourdillon (1990) has demonstrated, religion in Africa (and elsewhere) never stands alone. Religion is always embedded in political, economic and other dynamics. This line of thinking resonates with Cavanaugh’s (2009) argument that it is a myth to refer to the ‘thirty years of religious wars’ in Europe (1618-1648) as religious wars for various reasons including that at all times religion worked together with socio-economic and political interests making it difficult to separate these factors. We highlighted how historical, ideological, political and economic factors are relevant for understanding the performance of ‘*Zimbabwe Ndeye Ropa*’ and how this both generated and justified violence.

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