

Religion and Philosophy in the Zimbabwean African People's Union Army

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The importance of religion as both a philosophical and ideological tool of war has long been studied by anthropologists and political scientists who recognize the interconnection between religion and philosophies of freedom and protection. Religion is as often used as grounds for justifying war as it is for avoiding it, and in war, it is used as a tool for creating community and unifying individual fighters and groups. This was certainly the case during the Zimbabwean Liberation Struggle (1965-1980), during which, the Chinese-backed Zimbabwe African National People's Union (ZANU) and the Soviet-backed Zimbabwean African People's Union (ZAPU) fought an apartheid Rhodesian government for the country's independence. Despite the importance of religious philosophies and rituals to both political parties and their armed guerrilla groups, studies such as David Lan's 1985 *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*¹, and others by prominent historians² have only highlighted the role of African traditional religious shrines and philosophies to ZANU and have forthrightly denied the role of African traditional religions in ZAPU's camps. This gap in the histories of the two parties is in part due to the fact that Robert Mugabe's ZANU won the first national elections, after which he persecuted ZAPU veterans, effectively silencing their histories and stymieing research on the political party and guerrilla fighters. This paper seeks to address this gap through documented oral histories of ZAPU veterans who discuss their use of shrines and the ways in which their personal belief systems, including that of Christianity, atheism, and their native religious practices shaped their views of the war, freedom and the post-independence government. The oral histories also highlight how their intertwined religious and political philosophies have shaped their contemporary views of the Zimbabwean political state.

¹ Lan, David. *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

² See Harber, Clive R. "Weapon of War: Political Education in Zimbabwe." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 17, no. 2 (1985): 163-174.