POLITICAL VIOLENCE & TERRORISM: THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the social aspect of terrorism and political violence. It highlights the influence religion has over political movements in nation-states, where they serve as agents of social change. However, their operations have largely revealed serious egregious violations of fundamental human rights and international humanitarian laws both on the nation-states and its people. Also, the political movements such as, the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Wahhabis, Deobandis, the Haqqani Network, Hizbullah, Hamas, and Boko Haram; havetheir origins traced, their main goals listed, driving philosophies, and brief introductory overview of their violence and human rights abuses all discussed. This essay, finally, points out and makes a case about the damaging influence of religionon political movements in nation-states, and the fact thatcivil societies have not critically examine the consequences of their actions, at least in the beginning of their activities, so as to prevent theirexcessive use of violence and serious abuses of human rights. Some of these political movements uses religion as a cover up, and as a consequence metamorphosed from liberation movements to terrorist organizations causing damages to the nation-states they harbor. In most cases, the critical mass tends to misconstrue the actual intentions of the leaders of these movements till it is too late to effect any meaningful structural

changes to their forms and identity (which they acquired over time). As a result, their excesses or abuses are accepted as "normal" relative to their socio-political agenda, and the detriment of the critical mass they sought to liberate. Therefore, civil societies must be vigilant, questioning, and scrutinizing leaders of 'religious-fraternized-political-movements' in order to make certain of their strategies and processes of their socio-political agenda.

Thus "Political challenging movements need to engage hegemonic forces with ideational and symbolic weapons of their own; as they must question the "naturalness" of the status quo's power,… in effect they must disentangle how the social world should be, from how it is, offering a critique and legitimation for collective action… [rather than follow blind moral realists positions]" (Antonio Gramsci 1971, as cited in Williams, 1996, p. 373).

Introduction

This work is a comparative analytical paper between V. Tishkov's: *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society,* 2004 and D. Lan's: *Guns and Rains: Guerrillas & Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe,* 1985. In this essay, I will explore the influence of religion on political movements. Further, I will show the varying processes of how religions such as, Islam and Traditional African Religion (TAR) got co-opted or captured into the agitations of mainstream political groupings. More so, I will examine the discourse of the mode of operations of these religious persuasions and their social notion of violence. Primarily, the general perception of violence or conflict in any culture is considered evil or bad, especially worse when it has religious connotations. Nordstrom &Martin, citing Riches, observed that the term 'violence' is a politically-correct word, which socio-political actors avoid using but victims never stop referring to, because of its impact on them (Nordstrom & Martin, 1992, p. 7). More so, Durkheim and Parsons consider violent conflicts as dysfunctional or negative but Fanon (1963) argued that conflict in general and violence in particular are positive tools to effect social change or to decolonize (Nordstrom & Martin, 1992, p. 30). Thus violence or conflict, becomes positive when it restores social order, but negative when it brings about social disorder.

Gyekye (1998, p. 1-2) defines religion as the conviction of men, that, there is in existence some ultimate supreme being who is considered as the originator and sustainer of the whole universe; and that, men must always seek to have constant relationship with this being. He goes

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on to say that religion is based on sound moral values which must reflect in the life of the worshipper and informed their decisions or judgments. For instance; a worshipper must cultivate humility, showing concern for the well-being of others, displaying a non-confrontational attitude, and eschewing violence at all times. However, "despite the existence of these similar doctrines and practices, each religious system is limited to the people from whom a particular system emerged and who practiced that system from generation to generation" (Gyekye, 1998, p. 3). Clearly, how religious an individual or persons or ethnic groups are, is determinant or defined by (their) culture. For example, Gyekye (1998) observed that to be born into an African society is to be born into a culture which is extremely religious. This means that, in Africa, religion permeates every aspect of human endeavor - starting from cultivation, sowing, eating, harvesting, marrying, and warring as well as the interaction of individuals with both humans and nature.

Political Movements are largely groups of persons who form an organization whose primary objective or focus is political. These kinds of movements, according to Turks (1982, p. 122), were "much more likely to be expressive reactors to a climate of political conflict and vilification than to be political actors in the sense of using violent means to further reason [their] political ends". Classical examples were the freedom fighters of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) guerrillas fighting to liberate Zimbabweans from colonialism (Lan, 1985, p. 3); Separatists Movements like *Eskadi Ta Akatasona (ETA),* which was seeking independence for all the seven provinces forming the imaginary "Basques Homeland" – i.e. *EuskelHerria* (Linstroth, 2002, p. 222); The Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) – which were engaging in armed conflict seeking political autonomy from Britain in Northern Ireland (Nordstrom & Martin, 1992) and state-centered political Islamic organizations.

At this juncture, a distinction must be drawn between freedom fighters and terrorists organization even though these two bodies may use violent means to pursue their political agenda. However, the tipping-point is where a political organizations uses fear, excessive force and violence against non-combatant civilians, as a bargaining chip or political tool to demand a political change (Wardlaw, 1989 as cited in Schwarz, 1998, p. 483). More so, such organizations' missions, and covert *modus operandi's* – such as, how they are financed, and recruitment of memberships (whether they are using religion as a front) must be considered (Gunaratna, 2003; Mamdani, 2004). Some of these Islamic political organizations have deep religious roots and were developed as genuine, deep passionate popular religious political

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movements to serve the voiceless majorities, the disenfranchised, marginalized and the oppressed but over the years have crossed the thin-line from freedom fighters to terrorists organizations by becoming more militant, aggressive and use of excessive violence. Some of these religious political movements exercising states violence are *Hizbullah,* it was formed as a direct reaction to Israel's invasion of northern Lebanon in June 1982 (Mamdani, 2004, p. 171). Another is*Hamas* – whichmeans an Islamic Resistance Movement, created shortly before the December 1987 Intifada as a more militant, Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood - a religious, political, and social movement founded in Egypt and dedicated to the gradual victory of Islam. Since the mid-1970s, the Brotherhood had been expanding its influence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip through its vast array of social services. Hamas' advocacy of an immediate holy war to liberate Palestine rendered the Brotherhood's policy of gradual Islamicization ineffectual. It employs violence and terror to demand autonomous rule in Gaza, West Banks and all the territories occupied by the Israeli forces and replaced the State of Israel with an Islamic state (Bucaille, 2004, p. xiii; Ant-Defamation League, 2006).

Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between *Hamas* and *Fatah* – they are the two rival political movements of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). *Hamas* originally had a dual purpose of carrying out an armed struggle against Israel - led by its military wing, *the Izz al-Din Qassam Briga*des - and on delivering social welfare programs. *Hamas* is designated a terrorist organization by Israel, the US and EU, due to its refusal to renounce violence and recognize Israel. Under the group's charter, *Hamas* is committed to the destruction of Israel. But it is seen by its supporters as a legitimate resistance movement and has garnered popular support for its social work. And Hamas officials often argue that they cannot recognize or accept Israel's existence until it recognizes their existence. In 2006, it won a stunning victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections, sparking a bitter conflict with the rival *Fatah* faction of Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.

Fatah, on the other hand is derived from the initials of the Arabic name, HarakatTahrirFilistin, or Palestine Liberation Movement, in reverse - was founded by Arafat and a handful of close comrades in the late 1950s. They wanted to rally Palestinians in the diaspora in neighboring Arab states to launch commando raids on the young Israeli state. The group came out into the open in 1965; under Arafat's effective leadership it became the strongest and best organized of the Palestinian factions and it has remained so ever since. Arafat took

advantage of the power vacuum in the Arab states following Israel's defeat of the allied Arab armies in 1967 to cultivate greater autonomy for the Palestinian cause.   But at the same time, he was successful in raising huge sums from supportive Arab states that shared his vision of a purely Palestinian nationalist movement - and feared the influence a successful Palestinian leftist one might have on their own populations.

Arafat took over as chairman of the executive committee of the PLO in 1969, a year that *Fatah* is recorded to have carried out 2,432 guerrilla attacks on Israel.   The ejection of Palestinian fighters from Jordan during the Black September of 1970 saw Arafat's power base move to southern Lebanon.   Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon saw him and the Fatah leadership banished to distant Tunisia.   But the struggle was not over in the West Bank and Gaza: Arafat loyalists - *the Fatah Hawks* - were key players in the first Palestinian intifada which broke out in 1987.

The Oslo peace process of the 1990s brought back many of the *Fatah* "old guard" back to run the newly formed Palestinian Authority.   Also it specified the creation of a large Palestinian security force, mainly to protect Israel from militant attacks under the peace accords.   The *Fatah* Hawks were dissolved, but in 1995 the *Fatah* leadership instituted its own militia, *the Tanzim*.   It acted as a counterweight to the military might of the home-grown militant Islamist groups *Hamas* and Islamic Jihad which served as an unofficial pro-Arafat and pro-Palestinian Authority offensive force that could attack Israeli forces in the West Bank.   The *Tanzim* became the leading political and military force behind the *al-Aqsa* intifada, which broke out in 2000.

The *Taliban* - they emerged in the early 1990s in northern Pakistan following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.   A predominantly ethnic Pashtun movement, they came to prominence in Afghanistan in the autumn of 1994.   It is commonly believed that they first appeared in religious seminaries - mostly paid for by money from Saudi Arabia - which preached a hard line form of *Sunni* Islam.   The *Taliban's* promise - in *Pashtun* areas straddling Pakistan and Afghanistan - was to restore peace and security and enforce their own austere version of *Sharia*, or Islamic law, once in power.

In both countries they introduced or supported Islamic punishments - such as public executions of convicted murderers and adulterers and amputations of those found guilty of theft. Men were required to grow beards and women had to wear the all-covering *burka*. They showed a similar disdain for television, music and cinema and disapproved of girls aged 10 and over

going to school. Pakistan has repeatedly denied that it is the architect of the Taliban enterprise. But there is little doubt that many Afghans who initially joined the movement were educated in *madrassas* (religious schools) in Pakistan. Pakistan was also one of only three countries, along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which recognized the *Taliban* when they were in power in Afghanistan from the mid-1990s until 2001. It was also the last country to break diplomatic ties with the *Taliban*. But Pakistan has since adopted a harder line against *Taliban* militants carrying out attacks on its soil.

The attention of the world was drawn to the *Taliban* in Afghanistan following the attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001. The *Taliban* in Afghanistan were accused of providing a sanctuary to *Osama Bin Laden* and the *al-Qaeda* movement who were blamed for the attacks.Soon after 9/11 the *Taliban* were driven from power in Afghanistan by a US-led coalition, although their leader *Mullah Mohammad Omar* was not captured - and neither was *Osama Bin Laden*. In recent years, the *Taliban* has re-emerged in Afghanistan and grown far stronger in Pakistan, where observers say there is loose co-ordination between different *Taliban* factions and militant groups.

The main Pakistani faction is led by *HakimullahMehsud,* whose *Tehrik Taliban* Pakistan (TTP) is blamed for dozens of suicide bombings and other attacks.

Observers warn against over-stating the existence of one unified insurgency against the Pakistani state, however. The *Taliban* in Afghanistan are still believed to be led by Mullah Omar, a village clergyman who lost his right eye fighting the occupying forces of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Afghans, weary of the *mujahideen's*excesses and infighting after the Soviets were driven out, generally welcomed the *Taliban* when they first appeared on the scene. Their early popularity was largely due to their success in stamping out corruption, curbing lawlessness and making the roads and the areas under their control safe for commerce to flourish. From south-western Afghanistan, the *Taliban* quickly extended their influence. They captured the province of *Herat*, bordering Iran, in September 1995. Exactly one year later, they captured the Afghan capital, Kabul, after overthrowing the regime of President Burhanuddin Rabbani and his defense minister, Ahmed Shah Masood. By 1998, they were in control of almost 90% of Afghanistan.

They were accused of various human rights and cultural abuses. One notorious example was in 2001, when the *Taliban* went ahead with the destruction of the famous Bamiyan Buddha statues in central Afghanistan, despite international outrage.

On October 7, 2001, a US-led military coalition invaded Afghanistan and by the first week of December the *Taliban* regime had collapsed. Waziristan is seen as the source of *Taliban* resistance in Kunar and Ningarhar provinces in the north-east of the country, and in the southern militant strongholds of Zabul, Kandahar and Helmand.

Deobandists - this type of Islamic doctrine / school started in *Madrassa's* in northern India. The Deobandi Islamic tradition has long sought to purify Islam by discarding supposedly un-Islamic accretions to the faith and reemphasizing the models established in the Koran and the customary practices of the Prophet Mohammed. Additionally, Deobandi practices have a wide appeal in Pakistan and Afghanistan among the Taliban and it is believed that the reason Islamic societies have fallen behind the West in all spheres of endeavor is because they have been corrupted by the amoral and material culture of Westernization, and have deviated from the original pristine teachings of the Prophet Mohammed.

The *Haqqani* Network —it is a militant organization blamed for several high profile attacks against Western, Indian and government targets in Afghanistan. It is often described by Pakistani officials as a predominantly Afghan militant group. But its roots reach deep inside Pakistani territory, and speculation over its links to some powerful quarters within the Pakistani security establishment refuse to die down. The leader of the group, JalaluddinHaqqani, is a *Jadran* tribesman from Afghanistan's Paktia province. He owns properties in the neighboring North Waziristan tribal region of Pakistan. North Waziristan was the base from which he organized raids against the former Soviet troops that occupied Afghanistan in 1980s. The United States official circles admit that Mr. *Haqqani* was a prized asset of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in those days. He was also one of the favorite commanders of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) who decided how much international funds and equipment each commander should get to fight the Soviets. Also many in the West and Pakistan believe he is still an asset of the ISI, though the Pakistani military denies this. The outreach of the *Haqqanis* would be far too limited without the material, tactical and logistical support of powerful elements in Pakistan. The bulk of *Haqqani's* network fighting force are made up of militant Pakistani fighters, called *Punjabi Taliban* by locals in Waziristan, they are made up of thousands of Arabs and Central Asian fighters who started to pour into South Waziristan. When the Pakistani army tried to check this influx, it led to a violent conflict in the *Wana*region of South Waziristan in

2002, and again in 2004. The growing strength of Waziristan-based militants is seen as having turned the tide against the Americans in Afghanistan in recent years.

Wahhabism, originated from Saudi Arabia. A fundamentalist *Sunni* Islamic movement founded in the mid-18th century by Mohammed Abd-al-Wahhab. They believe their Islamic doctrine is the only true form of Islam, and are very hostile to Sufism. The Wahhabis' emphasis on conformity makes external appearance and behavior a visible expression of inward faith. Therefore, whether one conforms in dress, in prayer, or in a host of other activities becomes a public statement of whether one is a true Muslim. Because adherence to the true faith is demonstrable in tangible ways, the Muslim community can visibly judge the quality of a person's faith by observing that person's actions. In this sense, public opinion becomes a regulator of individual behavior. This doctrine believes in the strictest interpretation of the *Shari'a* law. Ardent followers neither smoke nor drink. They do not shave their beards, do not recognize governments' authority and believe in the full practice of the *Shari'a* Law (Ware &Krisriev 2000).

In fact, all these are religious Fundamentalists' Movements which believed in pure, unadulterated Islam practices (Mamdani, 2004, p. 37, 154; Tishkov, 2004, p. 172-3; Graffin, 2001).

It is significant to note that, the Deobandi School and the *Taliban* are strict followers of the *Hanafi* legal code (a *Sunni* Muslim tradition which makes considerable use of reason or opinion in legal decisions. For instance, States should not be involved in deciding God-human relationships. Rather, the state should be concerned only with the violation of human rights within the jurisdiction of the human affairs and human relationships). Saudi Arabia strictly follows the *Hanbali* legal code (considered the hardest of all the rules and regulations. It mandates that Islamic faithfuls [like the *Sunnis* not *Shi'a*] deny other religions the right to function openly on the Arabian Peninsula - a right that is clearly protected in international law). This is a divisive point between the Taliban and the Saudi government. What confuses things is that both Saudi Arabia and the Deobandi School (i.e. the *Taliban*) are often referred to as *"Wahhabis."* This term, which originally referred to an Islamic reformer in the 18th century, developed a completely different meaning in India under British rule. What is important is that the term *"Wahhabis"* means something very different in the Saudi Arabian context than it does in the *Taliban* context. One must never assume that Saudi Arabia and the *Taliban* share the same

Islamic vision; they do not (Graffin, 2001). Last but not the least, *Al-Qaeda*, uses Islamic religion as a front and adopt extreme terror and violence to champion their political course of "participating in state affairs" (Mamdani, 2004, p. 36, 175).

Finally, the *Boko Haram* Islamists group – It is Nigeria's militant Islamist group fighting to overthrow the federal government and create an Islamic state. The group's official name is *Jama'atuAhlis Sunna Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad*, this Arabic inscriptions means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". The charismatic Muslim cleric, Mohammed Yusuf, formed Boko Haram in Maiduguri, the headquarters of the organization in 2002. He set up a religious complex, which included a mosque and an Islamic school. The name'Boko' originally means 'fake' but came to signify Western education, while 'Haram' means 'forbidden'. Loosely translated from the local Hausa language, this means "Western education is forbidden" (Chathia, 2011, p. 1). Since the Sokoto caliphate, which ruled parts of what is now northern Nigeria, Niger and southern Cameroon, fell under British control in 1903, there has been resistance among the area's Muslims to Western education.The group's attracts youthful recruits who are influenced by the Koranic phrase like: "Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors"(Chathia, 2011, p. 1). Its political goal was to create an Islamic state, and the school became a recruiting ground for jihadis to fight the state. For instance, in 2009, Boko Haram carried out a spate of attacks on police stations and other government buildings in Maiduguri. It promotes a version of Islam which makes it "haram" for Muslims to take part in any political or social activity associated with Western society. This includes voting in elections, wearing shirts and trousers or receiving a secular education. Moreover, Political movements can transform into political parties. Such political parties do not employ violence to pursue grievances but believe in campaign and wrestling political power through the ballot box. Some examples are the "Unity party" (*HerriBatasuna*) and Basque People's party (*EuskelHerritarrok*) which are fighting for an autonomous Basque Country (Linstroth, 2002, p. 216). The Zimbabwe African National Union or Popular Front (ZANU/PF) fought the Rhodesian state government in 1966 to liberate Zimbabwe from colonialism (Lan, 1985, p. 124-5). Lastly in Chechnya, the Vainakh Democratic Party (VDP) was formed in 1990 to champion democratic reforms in the Chechnya republic and to protect the national rights of the Chechen people (Triskov, 2004, p. 58).

To conceptualize religious influence on politics, Williams (1996) observed that religious influence can be filtered through the lenses of interpretive anthropology, sometimes called symbolic anthropology. It stresses the idea that culture is meaning expressed through symbolic means. This school argued that symbols carried multiple meanings. Symbols were used and created in public, social exchanges. The identification of cultural life requires isolating symbols, identifying their meanings, and showing how they resonate within a specific dynamic cultural context (Rao & Walton, 2004). However, to Geetz (1983) there were connections between sacred cosmos and political order which synergized through collective mental products called worldview or ethos. In this regard, religion has become a force for political life, because of its influence on cultural systems. Therefore, religion has helped to establish a clear sense of "what is" and "what ought to be" (Williams, 1996, p. 370). Also religious influences on political relationships were central in the creation of symbolic worlds. It affects the ordering of relations among societal members and acts as central foci of politics and religion. In this regard, religion is less about beliefs than about meanings. Also, religion can be a conservative sociopolitical tool (Liebman&Wuthnow, 1983) and a progressive force in defining the political landscape of nation – states (Epstein, 1991; Casanova, 1994, as cited in Williams, 1996, p. 370).

As a former Minister of Economics and Finance in Dudayev's regime, Abubakarov (1998) wrote about the impact of Islamic religion on General Dzhokhar Dudayev presidency of Chechnya in 1991 (Abubakarov, 1998). Dudayev observed that the great religion of Islam could not have developed from the lifeless desert of Arabia among the nomadic tribes, but among peoples of high culture and mutual respect who were living in the earthly paradise of the Garden of Eden - which is Chechnya. Further, the *Vainakhs*i.e. "our [Chechen] people" consisted of five tribes. These were Chechen, Ingush, Akkins in Dagestan, Kristins in Georgia. Such were the Chechnya ancestry, which birthed the Islamic faith (Tishkov, 2004, p. 51). Furthermore, Dudayev, who had "never been a Muslim"(Tishkov, 2004, p. 78) realized that to achieve the insurmountable dream of national liberation of Chechnya, and to lead the Chechen nationalists guerrillas against the Soviet Army; it was absolutely crucial he aligned himself with the Chechen Islamic leader Abdul-Baki, to make him "a spiritual pillar of his power" (Tishkov, 2004, p. 79). However, Baki refused on the grounds of widespread corruption, the gulf of social inequalities and the starvation in Chechnya. Dudayev relentlessly pursued another spiritual leader of Chechnya - MukhamedbashirHadji. This too backfired, culminating in his immediate self-

imposed exile. However, before his exile, these two Islamic spiritual leaders were stigmatized and branded as infidels and traitors of the Islamic faith (Tishkov, 2004, p. 80).

According to Williams (1996) religion legitimizes governments, which has the capacity to divert or siphon potential grievances into other worldly concerns; and provides organizational support for sociopolitical movements by offering a framework of justice which mobilizes participation for change. For instance, the traditional religion legitimated the ZANLA guerrilla's existence and popularized their cause. A guerrilla fighter observed:

"We spoke to the old people who said that we must consult the mediums. We were taken to Nehanda... We told her 'We are the children of Zimbabwe, we want to liberate Zimbabwe'. She was very much interested" (Lan, 1985, p.136).

Moreover, to ensure that justice prevailed and the imaginary desired society the ZANLA guerrillas' were hoping to establish became a reality, the guerrillas killed many prostitutes, all those who used Ambi (skin lightening cream) and witches – who possessed absolute evil powers and opposed the *Mhondoros*. They were considered to be a necessary ritual cleansing to force the new anticipated society into being (Lan, 1985). It is important to note that even though the ZANLA guerrilla's actions were acceptable traditional ritual, in essence the act although symbolic or imaginative lent credence to the notion that "image is everything" (Linstroth, 2002, p. 205) when dealing with symbolic anthropology. Notwithstanding, these barbaric acts in the name of religion and culture do not negate the fact that, the killings in reality were cruel and a clear violation of the victims' fundamental human rights. Besides, the killings also suggest that any "religio-political" (Williams, 1996, p. 368) actions or actions by "others" (Mamdani, 2004, p. 23) to a cause other than accepted norms of certain societies are usually met with brute force. However, Maxwell (1995) indicated that religion recognizes retribution, by arguing that so many people who were killed unjustly have "...come out as spirits against those who had ordered their comrades to kill them" (p. 328). Therefore, there is the need to widen the net to include the actions of political movements and inactions which must be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague, as crimes against humanity or as basic human rights violations. It must be noted that, in the light of international laws and norms governing comity of nations, Lan's (1985) assertion that the millenarian aspects contextualize the ZANLA guerrillas' assassinations, obviously justifying the killings, are simplistic and understated, and as such do not hold water. It is simply denial or refusing to accept responsibility of the

revolutionary "violent excesses, that are the phantom of terrorism" (Aretxaga, cited in Sluka, 2000, p. 47).

In addition, Lan's revelation that the ZANU PF politicians were not directly in contact with the spirit mediums in Zimbabwe but were rather operating from the Zambian capital by coordinating the affairs of the ZANLA guerrillas; does not exempt them from the atrocities. These politicians are equally accountable. The ZANLA guerrillas connected to the peasant leaders and spirit mediums and realized that they were willing to resist the colonial government, even though the actions of the religious peasant leaders and their spirit mediums were considered in Mozambique as "fraudulent and their practices irreconcilable with the principles of scientific socialism", (Lan, 1985, p. 208) yet actions were not taken to right wrongs and this was clearly an indictment on the religious leaders' integrity and the ritual process.

However, it is significant to note the enormous contributions of the spirit mediums like *EnosPondai, of Chiwawa* medium, *George Kupara of Mutota* medium and the *Mhondoro* medium about the psychological fortification given to the ZANLA guerrilla fighters, consisting of "special magic [*mushonga*] and [*bute*, a cure-of-all medicine for general good health, fortune, and acted as a protection against bullets" (Lan, 1985, p. 158, 168). Also, the mediums, and for that matter religion, accelerated the process of recognition of the ZANLA guerrilla political movement to the Zimbabweans living in the countryside (the peasant population). In an instant"the *Mhondoro* medium transferred legitimate political authority from the village chiefs to the ZANLA guerrillas." (Lan 1985, p. 200). This was seen as a clear indication of the endorsement of ancestral spirits and lesser gods of the pursuit of ZANLA guerrillas to remove the old political order to make way for the new one.

In the words of a former ZANLA guerrilla, "We explained national grievances, then colonialism, then neo-colonialism and capitalism. [Also] we explained ours, would be a socialist government and what that would mean to the masses" (Lan, 1985, p. 201). However, Lan questioned the extent to which these political terminologies were explained and understood. The period of these briefings or meetings were just thirty minutes, interspersed with songs to prevent boredom. Obviously, how can effective teaching and dissemination of information taken place, against the backdrop of high levels of illiteracy among the peasant farmers who constituted the bulk of the recruits. It could be argued that the massive support the ZANLA guerrillas enjoyed

could be based on flawed perceptions and understanding of the issues at stake. No wonder, there were massive violations and killings.

Moreover, the spirit mediums helped in the recruitment exercise of the new guerrilla fighters (Lan, 1985). The mediums imposed some complex religious restrictions on the ZANLA guerrillas. Among some of which were that young unmarried girls should not have sexual intercourse; the men must not have physical contact with a menstruating woman; they were also not to eat food prepared by a woman with a young child, or a pregnant woman and must eat only food prepared by elderly women. Besides, the fighters must desist from eating okra, beans, peanuts, and all vegetables. The fighters were forbidden to kill either a baboon or an elephant. This was because they were spiritual mediums which can serve as a channel of communication (Lan, 1985, p. 158-9).

The war in Chechnya was described as "group versus state conflict" (Tishkov, 2004, p. 127). In fact, it was a war, whereby Chechens wanted to secede from the Russian federation. Historically, Islamic religion as practiced among Chechens was the moderate type i.e. the Sunni Islam. It adhered to the Sufi Turuq or Tariqah methods of instruction (Umarov, 1985; Tishkov, 2004). The Sufi tariqat movement primarily rejects the interpretation of Koran after the first four imams (i.e. leaders of the official prayer rituals) and the shari'a. It believes the cult of the local sheikhs and declarations of new holy sites are invalid (Ware &Krisriev, 2000). However, in the mid nineteenth century developed the *Shamil* imamate form of Islam, which was based on *'adat* systems of social norms and customs mainly of non-Islamic origin (Tishkov, 2004; Pokrovskii, 2000).

Ny yea The *Shamil* is the religious and political leader who introduced new reforms of the *adats* which were at variance to the direct precepts of the *Shari'a* Law during the colonial era of the tsarist Russia (Tishkov, 2004; Sykiainen, 1999). During the Stalinist regime, Islam was suppressed because of the *Shari'a* law which oppressed women and *adat-* which among other things allowed an individual to "buy or abduct a bride and [commit] permit crimes as a cover up by the relatives of the perpetrators" (Tishkov, 2004, p. 167). *Mehk-khel* – meaning the high court, was formed based on Islamic principles and ideals. It is a new political movement which supports Chechens' right to self-determination (Yandarbiyev, 1996). The "…Islamic philosophy of life and death…made the religion an active national political force in the liberation of the enslaved" (Tishkov, 2004, p. 170). However, Chechens do not see themselves as Islamic

people, and that religion was insignificant in the identity formation of the Chechens (Derluguian, 1999).   In addition, the principle of collective suffering rather than religion, culture, or language, solidifies the Chechen identity, and not religious factors which had ~~had a~~ little or no impact on the origin of the Chechens' "national revolution"(Tishkov, 2004, p. 53).

In 1995, the Chechnya political landscape took a dramatic turn. It was because of the arrival of Omar Ibn Al- Khattab into the karamakhi community in Dagestan with his Arab guerrillas and massive financial support from Osama Bin Laden, the former leader of Al-Qaeda (Tishkov, 2004). Wahhabism, arguably considered as the purest form of Islam began to spread in Chechnya through the activities of the Arab guerrillas. As noted above, Wahhabism is different from the traditional Sufi tariqats' Islamic system known to Chechens for many years. The Wahhabis, referred to the Sufis as pagans and polytheists. These challenges polarized the entire Chechen communities and villages. Thus whereas the elderly and the veterans believed in the Sufi tariqats' system the youth and the revolutionaries have bought into the Wahhabis practices. Again, the practices of Wahhabis have become more attractive and popular among the radical youths because funds, cars, and arms from automatic weapons to stinger missiles (Ware &Krisriev, 2000) are made available to faithful's. Also praying in front of cameras before battles, and the different Islamic names such as, "the wolves of Islam", "the Warriors of Islam" and "Jamaat" which the Chechen fighters wear, and the use of iconographs like the wearing of the green headbands, crying "Allah Akbar!" and performing *zikr* [which is invoking *Allah*] on TV cameras proved appealing to many of these combatants (Tishkov, 2004, p. 172-3).

It is important to note that Sufi tariqats' system is contrary to the Islamic principles and traditions enshrined in the Koran and Haddith [i.e. traditions relating to Mohammed and his companions].   For example, the Sufis' sect maintained that the sheikhs or *ustazes* know the sacred mysteries of Islam; that is, truths are mysteries and are only known to Allah. Thus, in the Sufis' tradition, the sheikhs act as mediators between the Allah and His slaves (worshippers). This is contrary to basic Islamic tenets. More so, the *ustazes* are without sin or error; again this is absolute heresy because it is only the prophet [Mohammed] who was made error proof by Allah (Tishkov, 2004).

In 1998, the Maskhadov government instituted the *Shari'a* law as the basis of existing order in Chechnya. Obviously, the Wahhabis' influence might have contributed immensely in

this regard. Chechnya received generous financial support from Saudi Arabia to propagate these purest forms of Islamic beliefs and practices throughout the republic (Tishkov, 2004).

In sum, it will be an intellectual travesty to underestimate the influence of religion on political movements. It has a potency of changing an entire country or causing the various political actors to adopt religious tenets as the fundamental law of the land, which regulate all the social, economic, cultural, scientific and political life of the citizenry. To Williams (1996), religion is the best predictor of political behavior throughout most of the histories of the world. Therefore, it is an undeniable fact that, religion has the potential power to sponsor social change and resist it, as well (Gramsci, 1971).

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"It is self-defeating [then], to study violence as if it were obscene, nor does recognition of its relevance condone or encourage it. Quite the contrary is true. Like many things, violence is deeply ambiguous in all its aspects, containing both functional and dysfunctional tendencies, capable of both positive and negative outcomes".
(Nieburg 1969, as cited in Nordstrom & Martin, 1992, p. 30)