

African Spirituality and the Gukurahundi Mass Grave Exhumations in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The mass killings in the southern part of Zimbabwe from 1983 to 1987, which are commonly known as the Gukurahundi massacres, raise a number of issues, including the need to exhume bodies of those killed in order to bury them in a proper way. This article contributes to the debates on exhumations of mass graves in an African context by examining the connection between avenging spirits and transitional justice through a detailed discussion of Bantu cosmology. The article argues that though the exhumation of the graves of those killed during the Gukurahundi massacres is resisted by those in power, exhumations are pertinent and in line with the Bantu traditions of properly re-burying the dead. Doing so fills a need to appease avenging spirits in order to achieve proper transitional justice and closure.

Keywords: African spirituality, avenging spirits, Bantu cosmology, closure, exhumations, Gukurahundi killings, transitional justice