

2. Zimbabwe's discourse of national reconciliation

Rhodesia's war concluded with the Lancaster House Constitutional Conference held in London between August and December 1979. Elections¹ the following February brought Robert Mugabe into office as Prime Minister and leader of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF). A policy of national reconciliation was part of the political settlement and, in light of this, plans for the future direction of the nation were established. Elsewhere new governments intent on employing a policy of national reconciliation 'as the official normalisation of a previously abnormal condition' have confronted the dilemma of 'how to remember the unjust or criminal social order that was contested and superseded, while also working for the peaceful co-existence of hitherto antagonistic communities' (Parry 1995:86). This tension is discussed with reference to Zimbabwe, where a policy of national reconciliation set out to address how the former colonisers and the once colonised might live together in the future—a problem predated by identities created by the racial classifications instituted during Rhodesia's colonial era.

This chapter comprises several sections. First, the terms negotiated by the government of national unity in order to achieve peace and national reconstruction are outlined and a space of new possibilities is identified that opened to the former colonists within the politics of belonging. White responses are described, together with outward indicators taken by the government to reflect their acceptance of the new social order. '[A] culture of reconciliation' is not, however, based solely on the promises and expectations of political leaders (McCandless and Abitbol 1997:2). In Zimbabwe, reconciliation has proved to be a multifaceted project, grounded in local initiatives and institutions, which theorise reconciliation somewhat differently to the State. To this end, the discourse of other parties to the process—in particular Christian and civil rights groups—is detailed. Then the government's amnesty—the strategy embedded in its policy of reconciliation for dealing with atrocities committed during the civil war—is examined. Particular attention is paid to the amnesty's capacity to engender insight into the historical legacy, which is necessary to reach some agreement about and to forge a new and just society.

¹ Mugabe and Nkomo fought the election separately. Mugabe's ZANU party won 57 seats and Nkomo's ZAPU party 20, the polls reflecting their regional support.

The official national reconciliation discourse

On 4 March 1980, in an address to the nation, the Prime Minister Elect, Robert Mugabe, introduced the idea of national reconciliation. He promised to abide by the conditions of the Lancaster House Agreement and acknowledged that peace and stability could be attained only if people felt a definite sense of individual security. Mugabe continued:

I urge you, whether you are black or white, to join me in a pledge to forget our grim past, forgive others and forget, join hands in a new amity, and together as Zimbabweans, trample upon racialism, tribalism and regionalism, and work hard to reconstruct and rehabilitate our society... Let us deepen our sense of belonging and engender a common interest that knows no race, colour or creed. Let us truly become Zimbabweans with a single loyalty.²

The new government hoped to promote a stronger national consciousness and unity across racial and regional lines by encouraging all the people who lived in the country to think of themselves first and foremost as Zimbabweans. Reconciliation was to make 'everyone believe that this country belonged to them', to inculcate 'the spirit of belonging' in the minds of everybody, black and white.³ There was good reason for this. During the war, Mugabe, Nkomo and their respective troops had been rivals and distrustful of each other (Moore 1995). While both leaders wanted to see the end of white rule, they adopted different strategies for liberating the country. Where ZANLA, the numerically larger, pursued a Maoist-inspired guerrilla war that involved politicising the black population, ZIPRA, with Soviet support, conducted a more conventional campaign (Alexander 1998:152). Recruitment along regional lines reflected the importance of patron–client relations and left each of the liberation armies dominated by a different language group (Alexander 1998; Bhebe and Ranger 1995:16).⁴ Moreover, other blacks, about whom little has yet been documented, had joined the lower ranks of the Rhodesian military and police⁵ forces.

2 Mugabe, Prime Minister Elect, Address to the Nation, Zimbabwe Department of Information, 4 March 1980.

3 *Parliamentary Debates*, 3 March 1998, col. 3648.

4 At the same time each liberating force faced the challenge of generating popular backing. Where Ranger (1985:284) writes of 'a consistent peasant political ideology and programme', Kriger (1988:320) is more circumspect regarding sustained popular support or cooperation with the comrades. She argues that, although they had grievances, the black populace had to be cajoled with future promises and acts of violence to participate in the struggle. The nationalist cause therefore meant different things to the black elite and the bulk of the black population, who were divided also by lineage, gender and class interests (Hodder Williams 1980:104). Kriger (1988:320) further suggests the war was a time for settling old scores within rural communities, 'an opportunity for various oppressed groups to challenge their oppressors', of which whites and the Rhodesian State were but one, and not always the 'most vulnerable or accessible'. 'To accuse people of not supporting the war,' she writes 'became a nationalist disguise for a host of social and political struggles, and many simply petty rivalries'—a point Ranger (1985:285–7) also concedes.

5 See Chaza 1998.

Mugabe's words were directed as much towards black/black relations as they were to the black/white divide, for infighting between the now victorious nationalist forces had been endemic during the struggle (Kriger 1988; Sithole 1987:90). Reconciliation sought to contain these tensions. With independence, three mutually suspicious armies of ZANLA, ZIPRA and the Rhodesian forces, plus the private militias of internal settlement leaders Muzorewa and Sithole, required integration into a single Zimbabwean Army and Police Force. Here the policy was, at best, only partially successful (Alexander and McGregor 2004:81). Competing black leaders now felt it 'necessary for the principal actors to scale each other's strength and will to rule' (Sithole 1991:554). Although Nkomo and a few of his cohorts were included in Mugabe's government, the early years of independence were, at times, unstable, as factional fighting broke out between Mugabe's ZANLA and Nkomo's ZIPRA forces in the major cities (Alexander 1998:154; Astrow 1983:166–71). Disturbances in the south of the country led to Nkomo's sacking in 1982 and presented a more serious challenge to national reconciliation (see below).

The new leadership offered reconciliation to whites—who had fought but lost a war to protect their privileged position—as a demonstration of respect for past enemies, for minorities and, importantly, as magnanimous behaviour befitting victors. Mugabe said 'nothing is so mean as for the powerful to turn vindictive against the vanquished or the victor to press his advantage too far' (Shamuyarira et al. 1995:36). There were to be 'no Nuremburg-style trials' and Zimbabwe's form of reconciliation was a policy of 'no victor, no vanquished' (Shamuyarira et al. 1995 41–2). Certainly, some blacks did not want to reconcile and expected vengeance to be theirs (Kraybill 1994:211), to settle old scores with their erstwhile colonial enemies.⁶ So there were instances where reconciliation ran counter to popular feeling and leadership had to take a persuasive role to 'impress the moral correctness' of its policy (Shamuyarira et al. 1995:48). Where this was the case, it was sometimes difficult for blacks to know how to behave towards their former masters since retribution was denied them in Mugabe's speech.⁷

Revenge was foregone in the interest of national development and reconstruction. In light of this, 'past differences had to be forgotten and past crimes forgiven' so that people could get on with tackling the country's social and economic problems (Shamuyarira et al. 1995:39). The government committed itself to building a just society based on the introduction of its version of African socialism. Ferguson (1993:83) describes African socialism elsewhere on the continent as a moralising ideology that extends African family metaphors of sharing, solidarity and mutuality to the nation, and contrasts these qualities

6 *The Senate*, 20 January 1982, col. 1187.

7 *Ibid.*

with European capitalism—a selfish and individualistically acquisitive economic system.⁸ Rhodesian settler capitalism, which had seen the exploitation of the majority by a few, would be replaced with ‘socialism with a human face’ and Zimbabwe’s new social order would reflect the communal nature of traditional African society.⁹ This objective was set out in the government’s *Growth with Equity* document (Government of Zimbabwe 1981:1) and was built into its first *National Development Plan* (Government of Zimbabwe 1982), which targeted, in particular, social welfare spending on health, education and transport, particularly in the hitherto neglected rural sector.

Reconciliation therefore contained the seeds of the State’s vision of a just post-colonial society. A more equitable social order was to be achieved through government expenditure and improving the pay and conditions of service, rather than by the redistribution of property. Notwithstanding this, state direction of private enterprise (in the form of marketing arrangements, price and rent controls, allocation of foreign exchange and so forth) was deemed necessary to ensure the economy operated with ‘a social conscience’ and saw a more equitable distribution of goods and services. The private sector was expected to play its part in meeting goals set by the government through employment creation and foreign exchange earnings. At the same time, as the above speeches suggested, Mugabe was at pains to allay white fears and assure them there was room for all, that they also had a stake in the new country. Civil servants’ pensions were assured and individual property rights would not be interfered with unconstitutionally. In effect, reconciliation signalled that socioeconomic transformation would be carried out in an orderly manner (Shamuyarira et al. 1995:32; Astrow 1983:163, 171) and the new society forged within the parameters of the law.

The idea of personal transformation was pivotal to Zimbabwe’s reconciliation policy. Official spokesmen were keenly aware that, at independence, whites remained burdened with identities from Rhodesia’s past. Zimbabwe’s President at the time, Canaan Banana, noted ‘white people needed to be liberated from their false sense of self importance—while blacks needed to be liberated from a sense of self rejection’ (quoted in Lapsley 1986:6). Colonialism was an affliction they shared in common and decolonisation implied the transformation of both parties to the relationship. At the 1980 independence celebrations, Prime Minister Mugabe had warned that individuals could not afford to be

8 See also Grillo 1993.

9 May (1987:35–42) describes in some detail the rights and responsibilities of family membership in Zimbabwe.

backward looking men of yesterday, retrogressive and destructive... Henceforth you and I must strive to adapt ourselves, intellectually and spiritually, to the reality of our political change and to relate to each other as brothers bound to one another by a bond of national comradeship.¹⁰

Decolonisation would entail active confrontation with colonial modes of thought. Mugabe continued, 'our new nation requires of every one of us to be a new man, with a new mind, a new heart and a new spirit'¹¹—that is, metaphorically to be 'born again'. Reiterating this message, other members of the ruling party made it abundantly clear that change, reciprocity and correcting the wrongs of the past were integral to their understanding of reconciliation and provided 'the steps' as it were 'to cross the bridge from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe'.¹² Accordingly, the State's reconciliation discourse opened a dialogue about colonial identity. The policy drew whites into a process of mental disengagement from the past as the means to their liberation and reformation, in order that they be 'freed from the role of an oppressor', a role that had been theirs for decades (Banana quoted in Murphree 1980:4). Their identity would be rebuilt or reconstituted within representations of the new era (Hall 1990:222).

It was not the intention of the new government to drive anyone out of the country. Hodder-Williams (1980:105) made the point that, not only did the transfer of power take place rapidly in Zimbabwe but, having waged a long guerrilla war, incoming nationalist leaders had not been groomed for administration and were therefore ill prepared for government. White skills were needed. It was also doubtful whether the new nation could survive the flight of capital. Political leaders encouraged the minorities to stay. For instance, the Prime Minister requested a meeting with Salisbury Rotarians at which he said:

[T]hose of you with skills will continue to be in great demand...What surprises us in Government is why...some of you should feel either too frightened or too dismayed to remain in the country and play your noble part [in national development]...Of course, if one cannot reconcile oneself to the new political order by adjusting one's mind and heart to the reality of majority rule and the reality of a ZANU Government, then in those circumstances, we certainly would be happier without him and he, I suppose would be happier without us. My concern, however, is not for the negative man...No sane political leaders...can...fail to recognise and appreciate the existence and worth of a community so sizeable and so culturally and economically strong as our white community.¹³

10 'The wrongs of the past must stand forgiven and forgotten', *The Herald*, 18 April 1980, p. 4.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Parliamentary Debates*, 12 June 1980, cols 772–3, and 30 June 1987, col. 29.

13 'Reconciliation a reciprocal process', Zimbabwe Department of Information, 7 April 1982.

The Minister of Labour and Social Services, Kumbirai Kangai, gave similar encouragement when he addressed white commercial farmers in 1980. He was 'amazed' farmers should be leaving in peacetime after fighting so bravely during the war.

Through thick and thin you persisted in carrying on and were able to produce substantial outputs. I am extremely concerned to hear that there are quite a number of farmers already giving up, and many more thinking along the same lines... This is your home. We want you to stay.¹⁴

Farmers who were prepared to remain and give the new government a chance were, he went on, 'true Zimbabweans'. This was also the message taken by government and Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) representatives as they toured the countryside during the early 1980s, talking to various white groups, reassuring them and asking them to stay. White farmers, producing 90 per cent of the country's food requirements, found themselves feted (Palmer 1990:167). The same invitation was extended by the Prime Minister to the Asian community at a dinner they had organised to raise funds for the country's independence celebrations. Here Mugabe pressed Asians to 'feel that they are members of one unified nation', which must make 'maximum use' of their business skills. He made reference to the expulsion of Ugandan Asians in 1972, but reassured local Asians that they were 'citizens of the country' and had a vital role to play in nation building. 'Zimbabwe is your country, take pride in its development,' he said.¹⁵

On these various occasions, officials signalled white accommodation, the conditional acceptance of minorities and their inclusion on the basis of personal change and contributions to national projects. Letters from members of the black majority indicated that they too were aware of white utility in terms of employment opportunities, wealth creation and until such time as skills could be transferred. Writers suggested that, in recognition of 'the second chance generously afforded them', whites should commit themselves to service to the nation by 'uplifting the black standard of living' so that everyone in Zimbabwe could live in prosperity.¹⁶ Those 'who are not prepared to assist... demolish poverty among Africans... should leave the country'.¹⁷ Evidence of such thinking was to be found during fieldwork. Whites who helped Africans 'to come up' were commended as 'people who know why they are here' (in Africa). Mr and Mrs Connolly from Chidamoyo Mission received this accolade for projects 'geared for the betterment of blacks'.¹⁸

14 'Kangai calls on farmers to stay', *The Herald*, 18 July 1980, p. 1.

15 'PM praises Asian community', Zimbabwe Department of Information, 25 April 1984, p. 2.

16 'Whites should accept change', *MOTO*, 5 July 1980, p. 2.

17 'Fight poverty or leave the country', *The Herald*, 19 September 1980, p. 10.

18 'Black people at heart', *The Herald*, 2 October 1997, p. 12.

Thus, reconciliation, as a liberal-pragmatic regime of truth (Sylvester 2000:145), identified the minorities and co-opted them as potential nation builders despite early indications of their ambivalent identification with the nationalist state. Reconciliation, according to the Minister of Economic Planning, was to harness their energies and abilities in order that the high expectations of the black majority at independence could be met through economic development.¹⁹ As part of 'governmentality' (Foucault 1991:92), the State's discourse 'managed' the former colonists by reproducing them as 'useful and docile bodies' but did not release them from 'the burden of being special' (Ndebele 1998:24). Nominated a special role in nation building served to underline, or highlight, minority difference, just as the role simultaneously incorporated and kept them in structural and racial opposition to the majority.

White reflections

In hindsight, what did white informants hear, or find meaningful, in Mugabe's reconciliation speech? What were their private recollections of that time? First and foremost, white informants heard that there would be no revenge or retribution. This early perception was encapsulated in comments that reconciliation meant 'let[ting] bygones be bygones', 'forgiveness', 'no witch-hunt', 'bringing people together', 'liv[ing] happily together' and 'we'll all be equal'. Several made the point that there were many anxious whites at independence, especially among the ranks of the Rhodesian Front and the security forces. A Rhodesian army officer recalled discussing the impending transition of power 'in a big family meeting'. His, and his wife's, family had lived for generations in Southern Africa:

We are both able to trace relatives who arrived in Rhodesia in the 1890s. A grandfather, born on the trek north,²⁰ survived well into his nineties. He therefore lived through the whole colonial era in Rhodesia...This is our home. We decided to stay...even though we thought perhaps we could be strung up from the lampposts in First Street.

Similarly, a conscript, stationed near the South African border during the final months of the war, was aware that retribution was on the minds of captured 'terrorists'. City dwellers also recalled worrying incidents: 'Three months before the end of the war, drunk interim government soldiers trained AKs at us as we walked down the streets of Salisbury.' Mugabe's speech discouraged thoughts

¹⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 5 May 1981, col. 1909.

²⁰ This was an English-speaking trek making its way north from the Cape in South Africa during the 1890s into what had just become Rhodesian territory.

of revenge and called in the guns. Whites such as these heard the reconciliation speeches emanating from representatives of the new government with relief and began to think that perhaps they could remain in the country after all.

Liberals, who had stood in opposition to the Rhodesian Front and argued that majority rule was inevitable, felt they had less to fear. Some initially responded enthusiastically to the idea of reconciliation.

We were stunned by the sincerity of Mugabe's reconciliation speech... we were all victims of Rhodesian Front propaganda and expected a monster...at the time we felt genuinely glad that we could all be Zimbabweans, we were delighted, but now that this has not been so, there are a lot of disillusioned whites and disappointed blacks.

A conscientious objector, who described the war as 'the lost years, just a big gap of waiting until I could come back home', was in the United Kingdom at the time. He recalled listening to Mugabe's speech on the BBC and thinking 'it was a good start, a typically generous response of the blacks...even after a civil war we can still be friends'. He also wondered, however, whether it was a doctrine that would change ingrained attitudes. In retrospect, he thought not. Someone else who 'hadn't had a war' was also struck by the amicable, friendly black response to him as a white, while walking around a regional centre soon after the end of hostilities. There was 'no spitting-on-you attitude because we'd lost the war, rather smiles and greetings. All the races had a let's-work-together, let's-build-together attitude at that time, but now blacks are far more hard-nosed about politics and business.' A younger man, in his final year at a private school near Salisbury in 1980, had felt that

the principle of reconciliation was right. At school it was not discussed, but we senior boys knew the whites were no longer in charge after 1980. The only way to sort out our lives together was to do things with the Africans. Reconciliation took time. At first it was strange because, during the war, the white sense of community was strong, we were like one big family. But, we had to forget the past and adjust. We did it naturally; we did not need to be told what to do by our teachers or by the government.

White liberals such as these accepted reconciliation as simply one of the terms of the peace settlement and credited the ruling elite with giving the white community 'a morale boost' in 1980 by including whites in the new government.²¹

21 Dennis Norman, David Smith and, a little later, Chris Andersen were included in the government of national unity. After the abolition, in 1987, of the 20 seats reserved for whites under the Lancaster House *Constitution*, ZANU PF has continued to 'absorb opposition' and demonstrate its commitment to reconciliation

Mugabe's notion of personal transformation, of repudiating the colonial ethos, appeared harder to grasp. The idea proved difficult to speak about, was glossed over and described as 'a vague philosophy that did not spell out specifically what was expected between races and ethnic groups in day-to-day living'. The young man in his final year of school cited immediately above nominated the importance of 'doing things together'—notably, in his case, when playing sports. His reflections intimate some recognition of the need to build dialogic relationships of equally placed participants or coevals (Parry 1995:94). An elderly woman understood personal transformation more in terms of confronting cultural difference. Wondering if liberals like herself should have been more sceptical, that perhaps Mugabe's speech offering reconciliation 'had been too good to be true', she asked rhetorically:

What was it that the government hoped for, or envisaged, from us in 1980? Did they want a homogeneous society? Did they expect us all to become black? What has in fact happened is that urban blacks are becoming whiter materially, educationally, in interests and leisure activities.

Her remarks are touched with some anxiety about the subordination of her own identity in light of the social and cultural restructuring that has accompanied political change. They also suggest she had grappled with the idea of the reconciliation of diverse cultures, set against a backdrop of increasingly rapid class differentiation among the black majority, for as Raftopoulos (2004a:169) notes, there has been limited recognition of countervailing European influences in the making of Zimbabwean identities.

Other, more intransigent, whites dismissed the policy's relevance for themselves, arguing that it had more to do with 'the older' or 'the younger' white generation. Credit for its introduction as a cornerstone of the new government was denied in other ways. Some pointed out that while 'Mugabe was seen as a saint overseas', the British had, in fact, imposed reconciliation on the new government at the Lancaster House Conference. Similarly, remarks such as 'you probably heard more about reconciliation outside the country than in it', as the policy was well received internationally, demeaned its local import. Others saw little chance of reconciliation working between blacks. They made reference to the latent hostility they noticed between blacks, originating from different regions of the country, employed in the army and Forestry Commission soon after independence and they doubted the effectiveness of the doctrine to contain these tensions.²² A few informants preferred not to comment.

by appointing white MPs (Zimbabwe Department of Information, 10 December 1987, p. 2). While research was under way, two whites held ministerial posts: Dr Timothy Stamps, Minister of Health, and, until 1997, Denis Norman, Minister of Agriculture.

²² See also Zaffiro 1984:103; Alexander 1998.

The significance of the policy cannot, however, be underestimated. Vekris (1991:13) describes Mugabe's declaration as a 'unique opportunity, not only to start building a civilised, prosperous and peaceful nation, but also one that brought together peoples from many and diverse ethnic backgrounds into a united community in a way never achieved anywhere else before'. Importantly for present purposes, reconciliation provided whites with the right to remain in the country with the proviso that they engage in personal transformation and decolonise their identity. In effect, the policy invited critical reflection from them, encouraging and fostering forms of cultural self-recreation (Falzon 1998:70); thereby, the 'grim polarities' of Rhodesia's colonial encounter could perhaps be bridged.

Migration as a barometer of reconciliation

Rhodesian leaders had portrayed immigration figures as 'a barometer of the views and the confidence that people outside the country have of us' (Harris 1972:70). Conversely, emigration evoked strong negative emotions as well as secretiveness among them; they were never sure of each other's readiness to stay and defend Rhodesia's 'western standards' and its 'Christian way of life' (Schultz 1975). In mid 1979, the white population totalled 232 000, the figure dropping to 148 000 just over two years later (CSO 1987:15, 17). Many seemingly loyal compatriots had packed up and left with majority rule. About 100 000, known as 'when wes' because of their predilection for referring back to their lives in Rhodesia, settled permanently in South Africa (Uusihakala 2008:1).

The themes of migration and reconciliation were also linked during the early 1980s. The new government employed migration figures, this time as a metaphor for or 'barometer of reconciliation'. The media repeatedly quoted numbers to demonstrate that fewer whites were leaving, more were returning and hence concluding 'reconciliation works'.²³ Certainly, in official thinking, and as articulated by Mugabe to the Rotarians mentioned earlier, emigration was taken to signal that a person could not 'fully accept the reality of the new social and economic order'²⁴ and refused to live under a black government. A black political activist and thorn in the side of the former Rhodesian government provided some background to this way of thinking:

There wasn't hatred between the races during the war, but suspicion. Each side was suspicious of what the other would get up to next. Those whites who left did nothing to allay black suspicions, and in the event, let remaining whites down...Suspicion continues today. The

23 'Reconciliation works', *The Herald*, 26 June 1985, p. 4. See also Shamyarira et al. 1995:40.

24 *Parliamentary Debates*, 15 August 1980, col. 1655.

government is suspicious of Rhodies regrouping overseas, and worried about disenchanted blacks, left out of the current wealth grab, following a white leader.

In view of this, it is not surprising to find some whites arguing 'I'm still here, aren't I', as if little more is expected from them. 'Those of us who have stuck it out and are still here have proved we have reconciled... anyone who could not reconcile has left.' It had been a case of 'last in, first out', with subject positioning as a new or old immigrant important to understanding relationships with the country, and 'sojourners' were now long gone. The next informant also alludes to the political nature of emigration:

When my parents left, they left for good. They bought one-way tickets, sold everything and advised the necessary government departments. My father did not leave a side door open [by buying return tickets and exiting as holiday makers], so he could not come back economically and now he could not come back politically.

The way this couple exited the country sent an unequivocal message. A conciliatory official from the Ministry of Home Affairs in the early years of independence said, however: 'It's the white African who goes from here who is most likely to feel lost. And he is the most likely to come back.'²⁵ Another, whose letters I will quote from at some length, did just that. The extracts describe the woman's personal transformation in terms of the experience of deracination, emigration and the decision to return to Zimbabwe.

We began our preparations to leave our home, our country, our friends. All the bric-a-brac collected over years was sorted out, all the things that had been saved 'just in case' ruthlessly dealt with. Possessions were shed, leaving only a minimum, the most loved pieces and the most practical. Somehow, throughout the period of cleaning away, giving away and packing away, I felt I had been anaesthetised, going through all the motions until finally we were people without a past, without a history... We moved in with friends for the last two weeks of our time in Zimbabwe while all the threads of our old existence were neatly tied... Emigration is the transplant of a psyche, the transplant of a body as well as a soul... I felt I was wearing a hair shirt... Nor was I prepared for the ego bashing. At home one has a place in the community... emigration leaves me a tadpole gasping for survival in the muddy periphery of a foreign pond.

25 'Zimbabwe's emigrants head back', *The Sunday Mail*, 7 November 1982, p. 1.

The family's subsequent return to the country late in 1984 appeared to the author as the ultimate rite of passage, reflecting her reconciliation with, and recommitment to, the new Zimbabwe.

Pride is a convoluted human emotion, but we had to be true to ourselves and admit that the move for us, at our age, was the wrong thing. It takes a certain courage to leave one's home and, I think, it took even more to analyse our situation and decide to return...The days in Zimbabwe still dawn sunny and crystal clear, I still look out from our bedroom window...this time rejoicing in the fact that we have been given a second chance...I have achieved a certain serenity from the knowledge that although we have problems here, there are as many on the other side, just different ones...Its [the African continent's] problems are ours, the destinies of its various peoples intertwined, best solved by those who belong here [not expatriates]. Why not seize the challenge of solving the problems, in this place, at this time, rather than looking for another place in the sun where, as an immigrant, one doesn't get the chance to be effective. In fact, make adjustments in one's own country... Our strength is that we belong.

In this passage, the Rhodesian legacy is put to one side, transcended rather than worked through or processed (Parry 1995:89), the writer reconciling with Zimbabwe and its problems by moving beyond the past.

Nation building as reconciliation

Reconciliation was not, however, simply an invitation to stay or even to return to reside again in the country but, more importantly, encapsulated the expectation that the white community should join in nation building. Cognisant of this, the CFU advised its members shortly after the transfer of power to 'keep your head down, don't be provoked, get on with what you do well'—namely, large-scale farming. There would be knock-on effects from this. Farmers were 'desperately unsettled at independence' and 'if they could be persuaded to stay, this gave confidence to urban whites, for agriculture is the backbone of the country's economy'. A former CFU representative retold a joke he had shared with a nervous Afrikaner when party officials addressed a meeting, reassuring farmers and asking them to remain in the country, soon after independence at Bindura, a rural centre 100 kilometres or so north-east of Harare. The farmer approached the CFU official and said, 'I'm emigrating.' 'Where to?' asked the official. 'I'm leaving Rhodesia for Zimbabwe,' replied the farmer. I was to hear this hoary tale

in various guises a number of times during fieldwork, always with the notion of the pluri-locality of home (Bammer 1992:vii) and its metaphor of an imagined, transformative migration.

The CFU believed that by doing their job well, and contributing to national goals through food production and foreign exchange earnings, farmers demonstrated their acceptance of reconciliation. A one-time president of the organisation said his body had been prepared 'to work with government' from the outset. He recalled that in the early years he could simply get on the phone and speak to President Mugabe. Another respondent confirmed that the 'CFU leadership wanted to get close to government in order to determine what was expected of whites; they wanted to do the right thing but it took them a few years to work out what that was'. By 1990, however, Mugabe, surrounded by party functionaries, had distanced himself. CFU leaders felt 'shut out' as government officials became more remote from the population at large. National reconciliation had by this time become something of a doubled-edged sword. Farmers, while praised for their agricultural outreach programmes that 'introduce harmony through the races working together, and generate a feeling that all belong to the same country',²⁶ were soundly rebuked for abusing the policy on other occasions. Speaking to this, a retired tobacco farmer believed that by the late 1980s reconciliation was being employed instrumentally and not as an effort to reach across racial and regional divides.²⁷ Where reconciliation had at its introduction stood for 'togetherness', the building of trust and a sense of commonality, the meaning, now changed, simply spelt 'one must agree with ZANU PF'.

Dhalla (1993:19, 20) makes the point that reconciliation is difficult to achieve where there is little consensus about the ideologies and values necessary to constitute a new and just society. Tensions between the State and white business leaders, appearing soon after independence, underscore this observation. The predominately white private sector was avowedly for a free-market economy and had worked closely with the Rhodesian Government (Weiss 1994:129). Like the commercial farmers, they too were alarmed at independence. Speaking

26 The Minister of Agriculture, explaining the importance to national reconciliation of transferring skills and agricultural inputs between the large and small-scale commercial farmers (*Spotlight*, ZBC Radio 1, 9 September 1997).

27 When, in 1997, officials of the Zimbabwe Tobacco Association argued against the administration of a levy raised by growers for research and development projects being taken over by government, they were 'heavily criticised' by the state-controlled press for abusing its policy of reconciliation (see 'War path? What war?', *The Sunday Mail*, 22 June 1997, p. 8; also *Parliamentary Debates*, 10 February 1999, col. 3682). The dispute also served to highlight class tensions within the white community. For instance, while not disagreeing with the farmers' analysis, an urban white remarked that as a wealthy section of white society, 'tobacco farmers should come down and live like the rest of us' instead of provoking the government's ire and drawing unwanted attention to the white community as a whole. Notwithstanding this, whites generally believed reconciliation had, by this time, come to mean largely adopting an uncritical acceptance of the new political order and government actions.

on behalf of the business community in 1984, Mr Thrush MP reported that innumerable entrepreneurs and senior executives in industry had approached and asked him whether 'the government wants us to stay', to which he replied: 'I sincerely believe the Prime Minister to be totally honest in his utterances about reconciliation.'²⁸

The new regime was, however, unconvinced of the business community's preparedness to meet its national goals. By retaining Rhodesian financial restrictions and supplementing these with others of their own making, the government set in place a command economy. As far as the State was concerned, evidence of the business community's readiness to embrace reconciliation was reflected in their willingness to support investment and job creation. This role provided the private sector with some leverage over the government. Nevertheless, in the new government's thinking, some in business circles remained uncooperative and unreconciled. The Deputy Minister of Trade and Commerce, Comrade Sanyangare, therefore accused white businessmen of procrastinating and allowing business opportunities to pass them by as if they were expecting Zimbabwe to fail. This behaviour, he said, reflected a lack of commitment to national objectives and as such was a rejection of the policy of reconciliation.²⁹ Other party officials reiterated the message.³⁰

In their own defence, white leaders talked of the links, or commonality, between the fortunes of the country and private enterprise, while at the same time questioning the sincerity of the government's position. They viewed ministerial accusations of industrial sabotage as contrary to the spirit of reconciliation and damaging to business morale. Further government measures (sales tax, lack of foreign exchange allocations, price and rent controls, inadequate and erratic electricity supplies among others) and Marxist-Leninist rhetoric all contributed to the lack of domestic and foreign investment.³¹ Partly as a result of this ideological difference, Zimbabwe suffered from too little investment throughout the 1980s (Mlambo 1997:50), with concomitant slower growth and reduced economic and employment opportunities—factors the government had counted on to underpin and promote the process of national reconciliation.

Zimbabwe's policy of reconciliation was, in sum, based firmly on political and economic realism. As a discourse conceived to allay minority fears and dissuade whites from a massive exodus at independence and from acts of

28 *Parliamentary Debates*, 18 January 1984, col. 73.

29 'Sanyangare attends ZNCC meeting', Zimbabwe Department of Information, 24 March 1986, p. 2. See also 'Co-operation between government and private sector vital', Zimbabwe Department of Information, 2 December 1985.

30 In another instance, addressing the Institute of Bankers, the President warned that unrepentant and unreconstructed Rhodesian frontiersmen were hindering social and political progress (*The Herald*, 13 July 1985, p. 1).

31 *Parliamentary Debates* throughout 18 January 1984, 26 January 1984, and 3 February 1984.

sabotage thereafter, the policy met with some initial success. The structures of the Rhodesian economy were not dismantled and the land question was sidelined during the 1980s (see Chapter 6). In light of this, the Minister for Education, Fay Chung (1989:9), suggests reconciliation, by leaving the previous regime's economic structures intact, 'benefited white Zimbabweans tremendously', be they in commerce and industry or commercial farming. She could also have added that the policy facilitated the 'embourgeoisement' of the ruling elite (Dashwood 1996:32),³² for, despite episodic accusations of economic sabotage, Weiss (1994:148, 156) points out that by the end of the first decade of independence, the government and the business community had recognised their interdependence and come to an accommodation with each other. An 'implicit co-operation' developed between the State and white capital, bringing with it opportunities for patronage and enrichment (Raftopoulos and Compagnon 2003:19).

White voices

Had whites, in a private capacity, expected in the early years to reply to the offer of reconciliation other than by economic contributions and staying in the country? Did they, as later suggested by Bishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa, ask 'What is my role in bringing about reconciliation?'³³ Not much was heard of such questions around the time the policy of reconciliation was introduced in 1980. A liberal and active member of the Anglican Church, however, reflected:

Pre-independence, we were so anti the Rhodesian Front. People like Alan Savory and Judith Todd, the opposition parties, gave us hope that we could build a multi-racial society...We thought reconciliation was great, we went into town and cheered Mugabe when he came through. I thought 'here's someone new'. Reconciliation held out a promise to me, I took a deep breath and thought at last, the people living in tents [displaced persons] can come home and start new lives...A lot of whites did not hear it, they did not change, but kept going in their own sweet way. There was no official white answer. We felt that the whites had been in charge so long, now we were handing over saying you [the new government] get on with it, we know you can do it, we will fit into your scheme. Therefore we did not feel it was necessary to answer officially, we felt we should now take a back seat. We hoped to be included, not excluded, from the new programme, but in a secondary capacity. When we realised [that a reply was necessary] it was too late. Those

32 See also Weiss 1994:xv; Jenkins 1997:586.

33 'Racial reconciliation is not easy in South Africa', *The Herald*, 29 July 1998, p. 3.

who could have answered for us, such as Alan Savory, had gone.³⁴ The others [political leaders] still here were not interested. We began to feel excluded from the political issues that affect us all.

Her words echo the thoughts of the Anglican Reverend John Da Costa towards the end of the war. At the time of the shooting down of the second Viscount³⁵ by ZIPRA in February 1979, he said 'others are going to set future standards, and we [the white community] may have to ride out a decade not being asked our opinions. In a word it might be time for us whites to shut up' (quoted in Hills 1981:108).

Both suggest that, as the historically dominant party, whites need to reconcile by de-authoring themselves and 'desist from rising to the top'. Their willingness to silence could be perceived as an act of deconstruction and preparedness to be de-centred. They, like Pakeha New Zealanders described by Mulgan (1989:74), might also signal acquiescence and acceptance of a new social order without the need for further discussion through their silence. Silence can, however, mean, and be read, in other ways. Whites who perceived reconciliation as 'a ploy to win international financial support' and 'a political gambit as the government was looking for 10 years of stability in which to establish itself', felt there was no moral requirement to reply.

Thus, for different reasons, whites individually did not publicly acknowledge the State's offer. Notwithstanding this, the liberal informant above indicated that some looked to white political leaders to speak for them. But who were they? Many such as Alan Savory, known to reformers as a 'voice of sanity', in part because he challenged the Rhodesian Front's interpretation of the war (Godwin and Hancock 1993:100), had emigrated. The whites remaining in Parliament were former members of the Rhodesian Front, the party having won all 20 white seats in the 1980 election.³⁶ Their contributions to proceedings in the House were frequently not in the spirit of reconciliation. In debate surrounding the export of emigrants' effects, for example, they ridiculed and poured scorn on the notion.³⁷ Invariably, the priority of white parliamentarians was to protect minority rights by wresting assurances from the new government in the name of reconciliation. Theirs was a vision of a multiracial and multicultural Zimbabwean society where

34 According to Auret (1992:101), Savory was 'induced' to leave Rhodesia in 1979 when it became apparent that he was to be framed on a treason charge.

35 The Reverend had achieved notoriety six months earlier when he gave his 'Deafening silence' memorial sermon after the first Viscount had been downed (see Lapsley 1986:App. 8). This sermon, misread Da Costa claims by some Rhodesians, evoked patriotic but anti-Christian emotions among parishioners (Lapsley 1986:61).

36 Soon after independence, the Rhodesian Front party changed its name to the Republican Front, with Ian Smith as its leader. Four years later, it was renamed the Conservative Alliance, although party policies remained the same throughout. A breakaway faction of white parliamentarians, unhappy with Smith's leadership, formed themselves into the Independent Group.

37 See *Parliamentary Debates*, 1 September 1981, cols 1409–506, and 27 January 1985, cols 1123–34.

minority difference was acknowledged and accommodated. Needless to say, parliamentarians backing minority interests inevitably signalled their distrust of majority rule and provoked critics to ask why minorities were singled out for special treatment. Senator Culverwell, about whom more will be said in Chapter 4, exclaimed: '[O]ne of the most profound statements that was made in this country was done on the night that we were told...that we had a landslide victory when the Prime Minister...came up and spoke about reconciliation.'³⁸ Culverwell therefore found it extremely difficult to understand the whites' need of reassurance and other confidence-building measures.

Mugabe had made the same point when talking of civil service pensions:

Concern has sometimes been expressed, for example, as to whether government will honour its commitment in respect of the remittability of pensions. In spite of assurances by myself and my government, and in spite of the absence of any action to the contrary on our part, concern is still expressed in regard to our attitude on this matter...these assurances and reassurances cannot become a ritual for us which it is thought we have some sort of obligation to engage in on a regular basis. Let me be quite frank. Those who constantly talk about the remittability of pensions strike us as inordinately selfish and lacking in any degree of commitment to this country. Anyone who regards this country as his home, or who intends to make it so, cannot simultaneously seek repeated assurances...This bird of passage mentality is unhealthy and is certainly unacceptable to us.³⁹

The government's vision of a morally just society was a non-racial society, devoid of any racial (or regional) distinctions. In the spirit of reconciliation, special measures based on race and ethnic categorisations were to have no part in public life.

White votes: the 1985 election

The government's frustration with the lack of a positive response from conservative white leaders to its generous offer of reconciliation spilled over after the 1985 election. Before this, concessions to white interests appeared to have been paying off, isolating reactionary white politicians from much of their electorate (Stoneman and Cliffe 1989:46). Prior to the 1985 election, the Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe, formerly the Rhodesian Front, was left with less than half of the 20 seats it had won in 1980. The white community as a

38 *The Senate*, 20 October 1982, cols 1184, 1187.

39 'PM speaks on pensions', Zimbabwe Department of Information, 11 June 1981, p. 1.

whole, however, was taken to have rejected reconciliation when 15 members of the Conservative Alliance were returned to Parliament in 1985, including the former Rhodesian Front Prime Minister Ian Smith. The election campaign had been fought around the issues of national unity and peace. Of 33 485 white votes cast, the Conservative Alliance polled just more than half (18 731) and independent candidates the remainder. Almost one-third of the whites, Asians and coloureds eligible to vote did not bother to go to the polls. Nonetheless, the government viewed the number of Conservative Alliance MPs returned as an act of defiance and a betrayal of reconciliation, in essence a vote for the past⁴⁰ and a demonstration of the minorities' failure to transform their attitudes and loyalties.

Cognisant of this, a group of white liberals tried to salvage the situation by forming the Sector Representation Group, which petitioned whites to support the 'Time to Sign' campaign.⁴¹ The campaign posed two questions to the white electorate—namely, 'Do you affirm your loyalty to Zimbabwe?' and 'Do you support the policy of reconciliation?' The response was both encouraging and disappointing, for although whites were prepared to sign, business was not forthcoming with financial assistance. In the event, the group's efforts were overtaken when the abolition of the white electoral roll, already on the government's agenda, came about in 1987.⁴² The majority of whites had by this time come to recognise that a separate roll left them highly visible and vulnerable to criticism, so they did not oppose its passing. Thereafter, the vocal and, at times, disruptive (although impotent to influence legislative change) white opposition ceased to sit in Parliament and Zimbabwe became for the next 15 years a de facto one-party state. White interests continued to be represented by industry associations such as the CFU and the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI), but not directly at the political level.

In short, the President was by the 1985 election voicing his disappointment with and doubts about the white response to reconciliation. He has become increasingly outspoken on this issue, accusing whites of spurning the policy of reconciliation, of holding back and not accepting the black hand of friendship.⁴³ As one of the State's systems of knowledge, the policy contains authoritarian overtones identified early on by Hodder-Williams (1980:105) as a legacy of the liberation war's command structure. Accusations of the failure to reconcile have

40 'Days numbered for white racists: PM', *The Herald*, 1 July 1985, pp. 1, 5.

41 'White groups dismayed at CAZ victory', *The Herald*, 2 July 1985, p. 5; 'Drive to abolish white roll gathers momentum', *The Herald*, 16 July 1985, p. 5.

42 Constitutional reforms abolished the white electoral roll, introduced an executive presidency and a unicameral parliament. The position of Prime Minister ceased to exist and Mugabe, as the leader of ZANU PF, replaced Banana as head of state.

43 'Saboteurs must leave—President', *The Herald*, 12 August 1988, p. 1; 'Mugabe castigates whites for spurning reconciliation', *The Herald*, 7 June 1996, p. 1.

become a means by which the State stifles debate and prevents discussion of mutually relevant topics. In view of this, the State's discourse of amity and peaceful co-existence had an increasingly hollow ring.

The nation in crisis: Christian approaches to reconciliation

National reconciliation was not, however, a new or novel idea in Zimbabwe. Church leaders of all denominations had repeatedly called for reconciliation of the races since UDI in 1965, and more particularly since the 1969 amendments to the *Land Act* (Lapsley 1986:74). The Anglican Bishop Burrough had spoken of 'the Church's great duty of reconciliation' (Lapsley 1986:27) at his inauguration in 1968. Moral Rearmament emissaries, also active on this score from the mid 1970s, advocated daily 'quiet times' of prayer, moments to 'listen to God' and act accordingly. Like the Anglicans, they perceived rethinking individual values as the key to social change. In addition, church leaders of various denominations could legitimately claim a place for themselves in history for their efforts in bringing various protagonists together to discuss peace initiatives (Kraybill 1994). Some attended the 1976 Geneva and 1979 Lancaster Conferences on their own volition in order to promote the idea of a politically negotiated end to the war in the spirit of Christian reconciliation (Auret 1992:95; Strong 1985:15).

As both Lapsley (1986:74) and De Waal (1990:65) pointed out, however, while there were notable exceptions, such as the Roman Catholic Bishop Lamont and the Anglican Bishop Skelton, too many white clergy expected black Christians to reconcile with their white counterparts, while ignoring the racial disparities of wealth and power that were central to the armed struggle. The Anglican hierarchy—not unusually recruited from Britain and representing one-third (and the largest group) of white church members—often saw itself in partnership with the settlers. Theirs was an attitudinal understanding of reconciliation and, all too often, the Anglican Church's reconciliation discourse appeared to be little more than avoidance of 'a hard moral choice' (De Waal 1990:57).

On the other hand, the Catholic Church and its human rights watchdog, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), established in 1972, understood the Rhodesian conflict somewhat differently. They interpreted the war in structural terms and therefore saw the removal of social injustice as an imperative of reconciliation (Auret 1992). To this end, the Catholic Church set about 'listening' to the victims of human rights abuses, 'truth telling' and writing pastoral letters, as well as collecting and publishing data that illustrated the country's socioeconomic disparities—functions it continues today. Not all white parishioners, however, wished to hear what the Catholic Bishops were

telling them (Auret 1992:34, 43–6). Aware of this, Vambe (1972:234) makes the point that the Christian Church in Rhodesia ‘failed as a symbol of peace, understanding and brotherhood...because it has not been able to influence the hearts and mind of the European’.

After 1980, national reconciliation, although presented by the State as a moral discourse, was not infused with religious values or portrayed as a Christian approach to healing the nation. That church leaders did not play a role in framing the policy was a cause for regret to some. One, banned from talking on radio during the 1970s and present at the Geneva talks, said evangelical Christians, in particular, were concerned that Mugabe’s stand regarding reconciliation was essentially political and economic—‘a tactic to turn enemies into allies’. He added:

There were no Desmond Tutus or Alex Boraines in the Zimbabwean context. The Churches in Zimbabwe let an important chance go by. The new government did not involve them, and the churches did not claim a role. The black churches were at the time prepared to let Mugabe deal with the concept politically, whereas white church leaders were too busy dealing with their own racism.

So, in the event, national reconciliation was not defined or discussed with church leaders as it was in South Africa, where religious values and a human rights discourse converged (Wilson 2000). Yet Christians in Zimbabwe felt they could contribute. They believe the State needs the collaboration of the Church, for the Church provides a model of unity for the nation to follow (Zvarevashe 1994:5). Further, political legitimacy derives from a ‘moral partnership’ (Werbner 1995:99) with God. National leaders therefore have a responsibility to be mindful of and nurture this relationship for the wellbeing of the land and its people. But Church leaders have been disappointed to find that, while the country’s political leaders claim national paternity, they do not present themselves as spiritual leaders. As some black religious figures see things, no separation should be made between spiritual and material wellbeing. Rather, these are considered to be mutually reinforcing and the politicians’ compartmentalisation of life is, therefore, denounced as ‘foreign’.

Although the Mugabe Government did not call on religious leaders to participate, the evangelical churches have, nonetheless, taken it upon themselves to promote reconciliation in their own way, particularly at moments of national crisis. For instance, during the unstable years just before independence, a ‘prayer thrust’ known as ‘A Nation at Prayer’ came into being. ‘Desperate people needed help as to how to hold the nation before God in a time of fear, transition and transformation’ (Strong 1985:23). Thus the movement grew in response to suffering and uncertainty and the desire to see national reconciliation taking

place under God (Strong 1985:13). A diary was prepared, setting prayers for each day of the year. This, published for many years as a newsletter in English, Shona and Sindabele and then later in the local paper, provided a practical guide to petitions for the nation, its political leaders and the wellbeing of the country. An estimated 27 000 Christians from almost all denominations prayed in this way every day during the critical years of transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe.

While public participation in the national prayer movement had slackened by the mid 1980s, interest revived a decade later, again in response to a sense of national crisis. Advertising the reinvigorated 'Nation at Prayer' in 1997, the National Chairman, Reverend Wutawunashe, noted the many problems and 'the spirit of hopelessness that oppresses the nation'. These were exemplified in, among other things, the serious fall in the value of the Zimbabwean dollar following the war veterans' payout, the volatile political situation precipitated by land designation and the confrontation between the government and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions⁴⁴—all issues taken up in the following chapters. The solution proposed was 'not to apportion blame' but to 'pray fervently'; '[d]on't complain about it, pray about it'. In your prayers, 'name the major players...in the crisis...and ask God to intervene in their lives'. Another homily in the form of 'Stand in the gap; don't take the gap' was set before those—black and white—who might now be thinking of leaving the country.⁴⁵

The movement's *Prayer Informer* illustrates the breadth of the evangelical vision of reconciliation. This included repentance for national acts of arrogance against neighbouring countries during the war of liberation, atrocities committed much earlier against the Bushmen who once inhabited Zimbabwe and more recent attacks by the Fifth Brigade in Matabeleland (see below). Parishioners at a multiracial, but female-dominated, lower middle-class service held in suburban Harare focused, however, on more immediate issues. Intercessors prayed about the proposed abortion bill, the state of the government's health services, the imminent collapse of the Public Service Medical Fund, the corruption and greed of national leaders, AIDS and Zimbabwe's involvement in the Congo war. Contributions also reflected their authors' inward political desires. One hoped a new Christian political party would grow out of the prayer movement; another felt the offerings were 'too negative' and parishioners should spend more energy 'giving praise'. Thus, it was Zimbabwe's more immediate national problems, rather than the colonial legacy,⁴⁶ that were foregrounded in parishioner petitions.

44 'Urgent call to nation-wide prayer', *The Herald*, 24 December 1997, p. 6.

45 *The Prayer Informer*, 16 March 1999.

46 The evangelical churches did, however, support a young woman from the United Kingdom who set out on Heroes Day 1998 to walk from Harare to Bulawayo. She carried a large wooden cross—her symbol of reconciliation—to apologise for the actions of her pioneer forefathers. She hoped others would join her

The previous year, in 1996, Harare's various evangelical parishes had joined together to hold a 'Heal the Wounds' service in ZANU PF's Congress Building in central Harare. Several thousand people attended. On this occasion, church members were asked to confess and repent their harboured resentment and unforgiving attitudes. Facing up to these self-truths was referred to as 'the way of coming back', the groundwork required for rebuilding trust and repairing fractured relationships. 'Ask forgiveness for our racial, tribal, cultural and ethnic prejudices. Commit ourselves not to speak negatively of our brothers and sisters, that we might set an example of a Christian family living together for the world to see.' In this, each person was perceived to be answerable ultimately to God and not to the State or any other secular authority. Evangelical Christians did not think Zimbabwe's political leaders set a good example here and accused them of making comments and speeches that stirred up 'racism, disunity, strife and discontent'. In view of this, intercessors prayed 'that the comments and speeches from our leaders would be towards reconciliation, respect and acceptance of all the peoples of Zimbabwe'.⁴⁷

The evangelical churches therefore offered a competing reconciliation discourse that employed psychological and religious metaphors of healing and confession, enjoining a personal relationship with God and respect for the uniqueness and sanctity of others from different racial or regional backgrounds, for they were also God's children. National reconciliation, as propounded by the government, was seen to be bereft of this spiritual dimension that blacks and whites, adopting a Christian approach to reconciliation, considered paramount.

Dealing with the past: Zimbabwe's amnesty

Rosenberg (1999:327), writing the afterword to Meredith's *Coming To Terms*, suggests incoming leaders face a number of choices regarding strategies appropriate to dealing with a country's past. Zimbabwe's policy of national reconciliation contained mixed guidelines on this score. While promising that independence would bestow 'a new history' (the subject of the following chapters), Mugabe also directed at his inauguration that 'the wrongs of the past must stand forgotten and forgiven'.⁴⁸ He made clear his concern 'that my public statements should be believed when I say that I have drawn a line through the past' (quoted in Flower 1987:3). In this way, reconciliation provided an amnesty such that the misdeeds of all protagonists—be they former members

along the way and that her efforts would engender more harmonious race relations in Zimbabwe. Instead, the woman's appearance was met with incredulous laughter from bystanders and the local press, and after her departure, the gesture received little further comment or media attention.

47 *The Prayer Informer*, 13–14 September 1998.

48 'Address to the nation', *The Herald*, 18 April 1980, p. 4.

of the Rhodesian forces, ZANLA, ZIPRA or the militias—were treated as 'equal wrongs' (Nuttall and Coetzee 1998:2). No investigations were made, no stories told. Nor was the policy embedded in an institutional structure such as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), set up in 1995. Zimbabwe has not publicly examined its past in the same way as South Africa has done. Consequently, the guilt of particular individuals has not been established nor the actions of white or black political figures systematically scrutinised.

Mugabe's blanket pardon, while met with relief by many whites, has proved contentious with members of the black majority. Mention was made earlier in this chapter that not all blacks wanted to reconcile. As the 1980s progressed, there was a growing tendency in some black quarters to view reconciliation as the price to offset massive white emigration and, as such, a sign of government weakness and pandering to white interests. While others argued that reconciliation should not necessarily be taken as a sign of government weakness, it was they, nonetheless, who shouldered the burden of reconciliation. Early on, a reader of the 'In Memoriam' columns had asked: '[I]s it only the African side of the tug of war which is expected to reconcile and forget the past?'⁴⁹ Critical comment became increasingly persistent:

It appears that reconciliation is extended by blacks and blacks only as if we are apologising...They [whites] are supposed to apologise to the blacks for what happened during the colonial era. They are the ones who should have responded positively when the policy of reconciliation was extended.⁵⁰

To date, despite belated calls from members of the black majority to do so,⁵¹ white leaders have failed to acknowledge the crimes of the Rhodesian era. An apology, as an expression of genuine regret, would perhaps have contributed to conditions necessary for meaningful reconciliation. The appearance of amity and consent between the formerly colonised and the colonisers, so desired by Mugabe at independence, could also have gone some way in establishing grounds for white inclusion in the moral community (Tavuchis 1991:7, 22). For these things to be possible, however, former colonisers must be willing to examine and accept unfavourable facts about their history. The South African experience suggests that public hearings and confessions made to the TRC have been significant in opening the eyes of many, and a prerequisite for developing a collective history (Hamber 1997:6; Ndebele 1998:20).

49 'Reconciliation: is this the way?', *The Herald*, 16 September 1980, p. 4.

50 *Parliamentary Debates*, 18 February 1997, col. 3415.

51 'Saved by the government', *Sunday Mail*, 27 September 1998, p. 10; 'Queen, Smith must apologise', *The Herald*, 19 February 1999, p. 10.

Back in Zimbabwe, only a small number of whites were prepared to take stock of the past, and this was not encouraged in the early days by Mugabe as the architect of Zimbabwean reconciliation, beyond calls for their personal transformation in the interest of developing a new national identity. One who recognised that some re-evaluation, or processing, of the colonial record was missing, noted, however, that at independence he had hoped, as a 'good white', conscientious objector and Rhodesian Front critic, to be accepted as a member of the new nation. But this did not prove as easy as imagined. Reflecting upon this and Zimbabwe's amnesty in light of the role subsequently adopted by South Africa's TRC, the man believed that the hearings had the capacity to 'give freedom'. Truth telling, confession, repentance and ultimately forgiveness are cathartic experiences for the perpetrators of violence. Willingness to participate and account for one's actions indicates some commitment to recognise and right the wrongs of the past. These steps were not taken in Zimbabwe and, in light of this, another white activist wrote that 'white guilt is collective'. While whites 'are tolerated, we are not free because reconciliation without confession cannot give freedom'. This means that even those who stood opposed to the previous regime, such as this man, are 'implicated in a history we could not stop'.⁵² To politically minded blacks, however, these arguments were fundamentally flawed. Proponents overlooked their own privileged position and failed to recognise that, in spite of good intentions and deeds, the beneficiaries and victims of Rhodesia's colonial era were the non-African and African populations collectively. As Karen Alexander (2004:203) points out, whites do not countenance how separate their experience has been from the black experience of Rhodesia.

While Zimbabwe's blanket pardon might have been necessary in order to make a start with problems of national development, by 'forgetting' and 'drawing a line through the past', silence was imposed on former protagonists in the name of reconciling the nation. Mutual distrust and suspicions harboured during the war went unfettered. A representative of Zimrights, a civil rights group launched in 1992, said that 'dialogue has been missing since 1980. When Mugabe reconciled, the whites did not publicly say anything. To date blacks do not know whether they accepted reconciliation.'⁵³ While seeking government reassurances for themselves, whites had generally not appreciated that the black majority also required some demonstration, or assurance, that signalled whites' preparedness to reconcile (Maveneka 1981:2). Instead, through complaint and refusal to face up to historical issues, they adopted a defensive and ultimately disempowering stance. De Waal rightly questions whether, in fact, the policy of national reconciliation asked too little of whites. 'They tend to think that nothing is required of them, that they do not have to make much effort to alter their attitudes' (De Waal 1990:122). As the former colonialists, however, whites

52 'I want my Nuremberg', *The Financial Gazette*, 20 October 1994, p. 4.

53 'Racism continues to haunt Zimbabwe', *The Chronicle*, 28 May 1996, p. 4.

are set apart from all other minorities in Zimbabwe. Not only did they remain economically influential, but independence had to be wrested from white hands. As such they have a special obligation to learn to be Zimbabwean (Vekris 1991:13). It is in their interest, as it is for the white Namibians, 'to walk an extra mile to reconcile with the wronged' (Melber 1993:25). In this regard, De Waal and Vekris argue that the white community, having failed to play an active role in creating 'the new man' or developing a shared future for all Zimbabweans, has allowed a significant opportunity to slip past them.

Reconciliation and human rights

The country's first major challenge to the policy of national reconciliation came not from the racial minorities but in the aftermath of dissident activity in Matabeleland between 1982 and 1987. The State's deployment of the exclusively Shona Fifth Brigade to the region in 1983 led to gross violations of the civil and political rights of the Ndebele people (Alexander 1998; Auret 1992:147–66). Former ZIPRA soldiers, always wary of integration and with a sense of exclusion and repression within the ranks, now defected from the National Army (Bhebe and Ranger 1995:19; Alexander 1998:150, 156). The *Gukurahundi* (the spring rains or 'the rain that washes clean') massacres ceased with the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987 and the appointment of Joshua Nkomo⁵⁴ as the second Vice-President. Alexander et al. (2000:Ch. 11) describe in some detail local attempts made since 1988 to deal with this violence, to commemorate its victims and heroes and to heal and cleanse the land and the populace from its effects. Suffice here to point out that while reconciliation as political accommodation might have occurred at the level of party leadership, it failed to embrace the common person, for ZANU PF has neither acknowledged responsibility nor paid compensation for these human rights violations. During fieldwork, simmering anger and the desire for revenge were evident at the grassroots level in Matabeleland and Midland Provinces (Amani Trust 1998:6).

With hindsight, civil rights leaders believe that by leaving in place a culture of impunity the 1980 amnesty compromised reconciliation. Through its failure to acknowledge past atrocities, the amnesty discouraged the development of a human rights culture such that violations like *Gukurahundi* could not be concealed or condoned in the future (Parry 1995:86). The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP and Legal Resources Foundation 1997), developing

54 In addition to bringing Nkomo back, Mugabe took several other members from Nkomo's ZAPU party into his government of national unity. However, with Nkomo's increasing frailty and subsequent death in 2000, the Accord appeared under threat, with calls for it to be renegotiated. While Nkomo had been portrayed as the Ndebele leader, he was in fact from a Shona subgroup, the Kalanga. The Kalanga are closely culturally affiliated with the Ndebele and together they make up 20 per cent of Zimbabwe's population.

its 'watchdog' role of the 1970s, played a central role in collecting testimony and publishing reports of the Matabeleland atrocities. The commission and other civil rights groups have called for government accountability and an apology as steps towards healing and reconciling the bitterness that remains. These organisations conceived reparations, in the form of justice, compensation and rehabilitation for the victims of organised violence, to be fundamental to reconciliation. In the light of ZANU PF's continuing refusal to acknowledge the atrocities its forces committed in Matabeleland, a broad spectrum of Zimbabweans believed the ruling party lost the moral authority it had enjoyed at independence to reconcile the nation. Notwithstanding the State's own problems with historical remembrance and accountability, the President continued throughout the 1990s to espouse the idea of reconciliation. It was a principle deployed to support ZANU PF's political platform, and racial and regional minorities were cajoled and threatened to respond. For many, however, including positively minded whites, the discourse had soured within just a few years of its introduction.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the argument was put that, at independence, the State's discourse of national reconciliation represented an attitude of ethical openness, aimed at engendering feelings of belonging in all Zimbabweans in the interest of their peaceful coexistence and national reconstruction. The official discourse opened a dialogic space to settlers, offering a way out of the colonial racial binaries by theorising identity as a production, always in process, and as much a part of the future as the past (Hall 1990:222, 225). Incorporating ideas about transformation towards a new national identity and commonality of interests, national reconciliation provided a potential site of innovation and creativity in race relations at the end of the colonial era.

Dialogue conducive to the emergence of new forms of thought and action failed, however, to emerge. There were a number of reasons for this. Zimbabwe's amnesty discouraged critical reflection of Rhodesian-era hostilities and proved insufficient to the task of building some consensus about the nature of a new and morally just society. Competing ideologies regarding the place of minority rights and the nature of the economy also proved disruptive in the decade after independence. Further, through its refusal to accept culpability or address the role of the armed forces in Matabeleland, the State obstructed the development of a human rights culture, thereby exacerbating enduring regional antagonism. These factors worked against the building of trust and repairing of relationships, which would perhaps have allowed former enemies to move forward and work together for a better future. In time, reconciliation as the State's discourse of enablement and minority accommodation gave way to

constraint and discipline. It was perhaps too early in 1980 for the President to call for amity and togetherness across racial and regional lines when Zimbabwe's continuing asymmetries of socioeconomic power—the structural inequalities behind the liberation war—persisted unaddressed for another decade.

In the meantime, the recovery of a previously suppressed history received the State's attention. Although Rhodesia's hierarchically connected territorial spaces had been de-racialised in 1979 and political sovereignty was achieved a year later, the Rhodesian imprint still lay like a mantle across the country. The next two chapters examine the decolonisation of the national landscape and the memorialisation of 'the people's history' as the new government made good Mugabe's promise that 'independence will bestow on us' not just a 'new sovereignty, a new future', but 'a new history and a new past'.⁵⁵

55 'Address to the nation', *The Herald*, 18 April 1980, p. 4.