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When Piety Is Not Enough: Religio-Political Organizations in Pursuit of Peace and Reconciliation in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: In post-independence Zimbabwe, religion has been associated with piety and acquiescence rather than radical confrontation. This has made it look preposterous for religious leaders to adopt seemingly radical and confrontational stances in pursuit of peace and reconciliation. Since the early 2000s, a new breed of religious leaders that deploy radical and confrontational strategies to pursue peace has emerged in Zimbabwe. Rather than restricting pathways to peace and reconciliation to nonconfrontational approaches such as empathy, pacifism, prayer, meditation, love, repentance, compassion, apology and forgiveness, these religious leaders have extended them to demonstrations, petitions and critically speaking out. Because these religious leaders do not restrict themselves to the methods and strategies of engagement and dialogue advocated by mainstream church leaders, mainstream church leaders and politicians condemn them as nonconformists that transcend their religious mandate. These religious leaders have redefined and reframed the meaning and method of pursuing peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe and brought a new consciousness on the role of religious leaders in times of political violence and hostility. Through qualitative interviews with religious leaders from a network called Churches in Manicaland in Zimbabwe, which emerged at the height of political violence in the early 2000s, and locating the discussion within the discourse of peace and reconciliation, this article argues that the pursuit of peace and reconciliation by religious actors is not a predefined and linear, but rather a paradoxical and hermeneutical exercise which might involve seemingly contradictory approaches such as “hard” and “soft” strategies. Resultantly, religio-political nonconformism should not be perceived as a stubborn departure from creeds and conventions, but rather as a phenomenon that espouses potential to positively change socio-economic and political dynamics that advance peace and reconciliation.

Keywords: peace and reconciliation; religio-political nonconformism; Zimbabwe; mainstream churches; piety; politics

1. Introduction

Since the early 2000s, a new breed of religious leaders that deploy relatively radical and confrontational strategies to advance peace and reconciliation has emerged. Rather than restricting pathways to peace to nonconfrontational approaches such as empathy, pacifism, prayer, meditation, love, repentance and compassion, these religious leaders have extended them to include demonstrations, petitions and critically speaking out. In doing so, they have redefined and reframed the meaning and method of pursuing peace in Zimbabwe and brought a new consciousness of the role of religious leaders in times of political hostility, especially that being radical and confrontational is not merely a stubborn parting from conventions but an approach that can bring new ideas and directions in the search for peace and reconciliation. This article argues that religious organizations operating outside

the jurisdiction of the mainstream churches have challenged the view that there is a contradiction between hard, radical and confrontational approaches, and soft, piety and acquiescence approaches in pursuit of peace and reconciliation by religious leaders. In what follows, I give a brief overview of the socio-economic and political context out of which the religio-political nonconformist organization under study emerged. I proceed to discuss the approach of the mainstream church leaders, pointing out what the religio-political organization pointed out as the weaknesses of the mainstream religious leaders which paved the way for their emergence. Subsequently, I unpack and discuss the culture, organization and operations of the religio-political organization concerning peace and reconciliation.

2. Whither the Socio-Economic and Political Situation in Zimbabwe

Churches in Manicaland emerged in the early 2000s due to the socio-economic and political instability and violence that befell Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe was born on 17 April, 1980 after a protracted war of liberation. However, despite the reconciliation speech by the late former President (Prime Minister at the time) Robert Mugabe at independence, in which he urged former warring parties, blacks and whites to bury the past and focus on peace, reconciliation and the stability of the country, it never experienced true reconciliation. Instead, Zimbabwe has accumulated an array of conflict points which make the quest for peace and reconciliation imperative (Huyse 2003, p. 34). The conflicts were due to the contest for political and economic power between political parties, which created negative beliefs, attitudes and emotions, encouraging ordinary people to rise against each other on political grounds, thereby destroying the tapestry of relationships that formerly existed (Tarusarira 2016).

The decade beginning in the year 2000 came to be known in policy circles and scholarship as the crisis decade. It was characterised by degeneration of the country into violence, a sacrifice of the rule of law, a militarisation of the state and a collapsing economy. Resultantly, opposition politics increased in response to the political crisis, which was attributed to bad governance. Citizens blamed the constitution of the country for failing to stop the rot that was in government. The constitutional discourse thus set the oppositional political mood of the decade. After consensus in the country that there was a need to write a new constitution to reform governance, a civic organization called the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) emerged to advocate the development of a people-driven constitution. The government feared that the move to change the constitution and the emergence of the NCA was going to paint it in a bad light since the elites in government were allegedly benefitting from the shortcomings of the existing constitution. To counteract the initiatives of the NCA, the government instituted its Constitutional Commission (CC), which produced a draft constitution that was rejected by the people in a referendum in the year 2000. This seemed to confirm the government's fears and was the first overt sign of people's disgruntlement with the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) regime and an unprecedented defeat of the ruling party since independence in 1980. Action was needed quickly to mobilise and coordinate support by whatever means as there were impending elections. Some ZANU PF war veterans invaded commercial farms under the guise of a land reform programme. The land was the only remaining rhetorical source of mobilisation for ZANU PF (Dorman 2003, p. 848). Unruly gangs occupied the land, destroyed crops, confiscated livestock and equipment, and forced farm owners and their workers to flee during the preludes to the elections of 2000, 2002 and 2005 (Sachikonye 2011; Tarusarira 2016). The banning of the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) from campaigning characterized the election periods. Electoral violence and state-sponsored militias which harassed, intimidated and murdered MDC candidates and supporters became the signature of elections (Bratton and Masunungu 2011, pp. 23–24).

The regime introduced draconian laws. Cases in point include the Broadcasting Services Act, which was promulgated in 2001 to control electronic and print media. It claimed that its mission was to "provide world-class quality programmes and services that reflect, develop, foster and respect the Zimbabwean national identity, character, cultural diversity, national aspirations and Zimbabwean

and pan-African values” (Chiumbu 2004, p. 30).¹ Because the state feared insurrection, it introduced the Public Order and Security Act on the 22 January, 2002 to empower the state to “regulate” public gatherings, making it difficult for opposition movements to organise. Yet another law, the Access to Information and Privacy and Protection Act, was promulgated in 2002, allegedly “to make public bodies more accountable to the public and to protect personal privacy”. In practice, it served to silence critical media and increase the influence of the Minister of Information (Chuma 2004, p. 134). Journalists and media houses were required to register, and foreign media were banned. Public media metamorphosed into a full-blown propaganda instrument, limiting public discourse to themes approved by the ZANU PF elites and “inventing traditions” (Tarusarira 2016). “Invention of traditions” refers to “a set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature which set out to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983, p. 1; 1994, p. 76). The Mugabe regime resorted to advancing political ideologies through patriotic history, manipulating history and nationalism in its favour. The regime’s patriotic history’s nationalist narratives exclude the voices of some political leaders from the history of the liberation war (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2008).

The military—the heads of the army, police, air force, intelligence and prison charged with the mandate to protect national security—became an unofficial decision-making board reporting directly to Mugabe, thus able to act independently of cabinet decisions. Consequently, militaristic approaches became the default mode of governing the country. A case in point is Operation *Murambatsvina*, codenamed Operation Restore Order, which the regime implemented under the guise of cleansing cities of illegal business dealers and settlements in 2005. It left 700,000 urban Zimbabweans homeless (Tibaijuka 2005, p. 7). Sometimes people were forced to demolish their dwellings or source of income in winter. A major motive was allegedly political retribution against sectors of the urban population who had voted MDC as well as the desire to ward off possible urban uprisings (Sachikonye 2011, p. 27). Operation *Maguta* (having enough to eat) transferred the management of food production from the ordinary civil service to the army, partly to ensure that the troops themselves remained well-fed (Bratton and Masunungure 2011, pp. 26–27). The government launched Operation *Mavhoterapapi* (for whom did you vote?) after the presidential run-off in 2008, sacrificing democracy, the rule of law and the independency of the judiciary. It denied rights to information, freedom of association and minority rights. State officials ceased to be accountable, and elections lost credibility. Communities destroyed the tapestry of relationships that existed.

3. Whither Mainstream Churches: Negative and Passive Peace-Making

Against the deteriorating socio-economic and political environment, the historic mainstream churches and their apex bodies, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference (ZCBC), the Zimbabwe Catholic Churches (ZCC) and the Evangelical Fellowship Zimbabwe (EFZ), attempted several times to facilitate behind-the-scenes talks between the main political parties, ZANU PF and the MDC. In the language of social movements, the mainstream refers to a set of authoritative institutions that can and do maintain public order, dominate economic activity and justify exercising power and authority. Cases in point include upper layers of governments, corporations and religious institutions (Lofland 1996). The backchannel efforts by the mainstream church leadership are necessary to initiate political peace-making processes upon which social peace-making builds. While political processes may stop direct violence, that is, the physical violence that can be observed with the naked eye, such as bombs exploding or people being physically attacked with machetes, they do not address societal transformation. The mainstream churches were also rocked by divisions and ambivalent positions regarding their response to the crises. “Because of the lack of strong ecumenical cooperation, the ZCC,

¹ At the time of writing these laws are set to be replaced by new ones, under the guise of political reforms.

ZCBC and EFZ and other church bodies have not been influential in the formulation of government policy" (Makwasha 2011, p. 236).

This is not to sidestep some of the initiatives mainstream churches have undertaken in civic matters in the country. They participated in the constitutional process of 1999 and have issued fearless pastoral statements, which irked the ZANU PF government (Chitando and Manyonganise 2011, pp. 83–86; Ruzivo 2008). Such pastoral letters include "God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed", in which the Catholic bishops were "blunt and to the point" (Chitando and Manyonganise 2011, p. 84) regarding the crisis of leadership in the country. The pastoral letter provoked a ferocious response from President Mugabe. The ZCC issued a statement following the formation of the inclusive government in 2008, bemoaning the manipulation of democratic space and selective application of the law. The grouping Heads of Christian Denominations issued a statement in 2005 asking for people's freedoms to be observed (Chitando and Manyonganise 2011, p. 85). The point is that these bodies are not grassroots-based. They are far removed from the people. Their offices are located in big cities and inaccessible to ordinary people (Dube 2006, p. 46). Besides, the extent to which the pastoral letters trickle through to the common people in the workplace, families and even the local Christian communities is very limited (Chitando 2005, p. 143). By preferring backchannel negotiations, and issuing ritualistic pastoral letters, mainstream churches distance themselves from the people. They only realize negative peace, understood as the absence of direct violence rather than an affirmation or achievement of fairness, justice and social redistribution, the latter of which represents positive peace (Galtung 1996, p. 3). Peace incorporates feelings of well-being and a sense of flourishing (Wolterstorff 1983).

4. Enter Religio-Political Nonconformist Organizations

Religious nonconformists refer to those religious organizations that operate outside of the mainstream religious landscape, such as sub-groups of mainstream denominations, independent Christian congregations, minority denominations and religious socio-political organizations (Ganiel and Tarusarira 2012). The mainstream political establishment defines the reality claims of nonconformists as improper, implausible, immoral, false, threatening, corrupting, seditious, treasonous, blasphemous, despicable, or in some other way not respectable or deserving serious consideration (Lofland 1996, see Ganiel and Tarusarira 2012). Resultantly, nonconformists develop "a systematic counterculture, a modus operandi associated with those estranged from the centres of power and communication" (Comaroff 1985). The moment they develop a counterculture, they adopt a modus operandi that is "hard" rather than "soft". Hard approaches become necessary because politicians in Zimbabwe seem to have gotten used to the routine that at some point the mainstream church leaders will issue out pastoral statements condemning violence (soft approach), to which they (politicians) pay deaf ears (see Togarasei and Chitando 2011). They seem not to be moved by the pastoral letters. When this has happened, mainstream church leaders have not taken any further radical actions such as demonstrations. Religio-political groups like Churches in Manicaland (CiM) in Zimbabwe seem to expect radical and confrontational approaches from the mainstream churches, the absence of which has irked them.

This paper takes a case study approach to study CiM, which defines itself as an ecumenical gathering of church leaders representing Christian denominations and organizations in the province of Manicaland. At its inception, it had 40 churches and church-related organizations affiliated to it. These included the Catholics, Anglicans and Lutheran churches, the Apostolic Church of Pentecost, the Elim Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Assemblies of God, the United Apostolic Faith Church and the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God (ZAOGA), to name a few. It aimed to bring together as many Christian organizations as is possible (Manyonganise 2015). CiM is based in Manicaland Province. While other platforms such as Churches in Bulawayo and Churches in Masvingo have adopted its outlook, they are not its branches. Bulawayo and Masvingo are also provinces, like Manicaland. They, however, share notes on how to participate in civic matters as religious actors. Middle-aged religious males dominate the platform. Woman and youths are underrepresented. Manicaland is one of eight

provinces in Zimbabwe. Situated in the east of the country on the borders with Mozambique, it has a population of approximately one and half million people. More than half of this number are Christians linked to different churches. Mutare is the capital of Manicaland and has a population of approximately 250,000. As of 2018, Zimbabwe has an estimated population of 14 million people. Of these, “86 percent claim to be Christian, 11 percent reports no religious affiliation, less than 2 percent adheres uniquely to traditional beliefs, and less than 1 percent is Muslim”. Of the total population, 37 percent is Apostolic, 21 percent Pentecostal, 16 percent other Protestant, 7 percent Roman Catholic and 5 percent other Christian. Many Christians also associate themselves with traditional practices, thus syncretism is rife. There are also small numbers of Greek Orthodox, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Baha’is (U.S. Department of State 2018).

5. Methodology

To study this organization, I adopted a case study method to profile the beliefs and practices of CiM. I conducted eight semistructured interviews with its members, guided by questions and themes that revolved around its ideology/culture and organisation as well as how it negotiates the environment to challenge the mainstream ethic. The length of the interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to one hour. To recruit my interviewees, I relied on snowball sampling. Interview partners referred me to their fellow members. This was the best method of recruitment considering that the security of the interviewees was of concern since they were challenging political elites as well. To guard against undue homogeneity, I used other methods such as a review of grey literature. I also interviewed other people who were not members of CiM. At the beginning of the interviews, I explained to the interview partners that I was the only one who would access the interview recordings and transcripts, and I was going to keep them safe. The transcripts were strictly for academic purposes and nothing more. The interviewees were free to withdraw from the interview without any consequences, had the right to refuse to answer any questions, and their responses would remain anonymous. I proposed to use pseudonyms since the topic of research was politically sensitive. I also deployed the snowball sampling from different angles to be able to be directed from different ways and have a heterogeneous sample of respondents within the organization.

While this article relies heavily on the interviews, my analysis was influenced by other research methods as well. I had email communication with some of its key members, who provided me with background information. I consulted grey literature, which included press statements, publications and booklets. Grey literature helped me to trace the genealogy of CiM, gather information about its official positions, reconstruct its development and acted as a canvass against which to understand the general discourse within which it operates. I also gathered data from online social media such as Facebook, which provided unexpected data. To analyse the data, I systematically coded it according to preset and emergent major themes or codes.

The analysis of the data showed minimal disagreement regarding the ideology and practice of CiM. This can be accounted for by the fact that members studied CiM before committing to it. Absence from participating in some activities demonstrated some of the disagreements. CiM had room for this. A case in point is when some members of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa (ZAOGA) who did not subscribe to the radical and confrontational approaches of CiM, such as demonstrations and distributing pamphlets with civic materials at bus termini, chose to take a lead in activities that centred around humanitarian aid, prayer and worship. One of the three prominent Bishops who were part of CiM jumped ship at some point and joined those who supported the ruling regime.

The Discourse and Practice of CiM in Pursuing Peace and Reconciliation

The mission of CiM was to challenge both the mainstream churches’ culture of silence and the violence that had engulfed the Zimbabwean political field. CiM is an “ecumenical” gathering of members from Christian denominations and organisations in the eastern province of Zimbabwe called Manicaland. It was formed in 2000, at a time of great uncertainty, intimidation and violence ahead of

the elections. It claims that it aims to “seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in taking action to promote tolerance in society, to give direction to public decision-makers and to enable our people to live Gospel values and principles” (Churches in Manicaland 2006). The use of the word “churches” does not refer to the institutional churches but to individual Christians, who would otherwise not be able to speak at high-ranking platforms such as those of mainstream bodies (Mkaronda 2003, p. 30). We see that the organization does not want to divorce itself from the traditional and recognized churches entirely, hence strategically retains the word “church” in its name. CiM describes itself as “strictly non-partisan regarding party politics and . . . available to all for counselling, pastoral care and the building of a Christian vision for . . . society” (Churches in Manicaland 2006). An official said:

CiM is a platform of church leaders, laity and clergy who come together to see how best they can intervene in situations that need intervention, especially when we look at the political terrain in Zimbabwe. It started in 2000 during the height of political violence. Manicaland was also very much affected, so the church leaders thought it wise to come together and try to intervene . . . We focus on human rights. Hence even where there is an unfair distribution of resources, we try to see how we can intervene and talk to the powers that be.

The formation of CiM centred on direct intervention in response to the cries of the victims of political violence. A founding member of CiM described to me how the original group of 14 religious leaders came together, assisted by the World Council of Churches, to begin the process of reflecting on the Zimbabwean crisis. Because these clergy felt they needed high-profile people to gain some legitimacy, they approached Bishop B of the Anglican Church and Bishop C of the Roman Catholic Church to be part of the organisation. The founding member noted that starting to talk about political violence was not easy after a long time of avoiding the topic within religious circles. Eventually, there was consensus that there was a crisis and the churches in Manicaland had to intervene, she asserted. They called together as many churches as they could, regardless of denomination. Their next meeting had about eighty people. They started these meetings against the background of rumours that the Chinese, who have warm political relations with the Zimbabwean ruling regime and carry out many government technical and infrastructural projects, had mounted big satellites with which they could, on behalf of the ruling party, see everyone’s vote.

Regarding their motivation to become members of CiM, some asserted that they felt that they had a biblical mandate to participate in issues that affect their lives. Others joined through the encouragement of already participating members. Some said that the desire to pursue peace and justice issues was inborn. As one respondent told me, “I would see myself since childhood trying to advocate for other people, when I feel that injustice was being done, hence when I heard about CiM and was invited to a meeting, I just clicked in.”

To justify its radical and confrontational approach to peace, CiM members say they feel compelled to react to socio-economic situations, and in that process, they make their faith relevant. Unlike what might be called secular civil society organisations, CiM draws upon both the Old and New Testament texts and figures. Bishop B of CiM had the following to say:

You look back to the time of Micah, Hosiah, and Amos. State religion was there; the Pharisees were there; they had lost the vision, so God had to keep on sending his prophets to tell the Pharisees that what they were doing was wrong. The prophets are not condemning ordinary people; they are condemning the King and his cronies, so it is that kind of prophetic ministry that will make some people look redundant.

CiM members also deploy scriptural texts to argue that they do not separate the religious, the social, the economic and the political. For them, the spiritual is entangled with the socio-economic and political, so they need to deal with life holistically. In the same way that the Old Testament prophets condemned not only religious prostitution but also social and political institutions, so do

they. They mention prophets like Amos, who was concerned with trade, for instance, manipulating trade scales, that is, economic issues. Prophets were concerned with political issues, notably about how kings were using or abusing their power, so they argue. Politicians have admonished them for their stance, who have argued that as religious leaders, they should leave politics to politicians.

“No, we can’t. There is no way you can separate the two. The problem comes when the church becomes partisan and supports a particular party”, remarked a respondent. The relationship of religio-political nonconformist organizations like CiM with the political system contrasts with that of the mainstream churches, the latter of whom are silent, silenced, co-opted or sometimes express outright pronouncements of legitimation in the face of political violence. The mainstream churches seem compromised by bureaucracy, conservatism and proximity to political power. The emergence of organisations such as CiM confirms that in the face of a crisis, dissenting leaders from within may emerge and forge alliances with outsiders. It also shows that “in whatever sort of political system, widespread and profound disaster reopens the question of legitimate authority and the effective leadership in the conduct of the church leadership” (Fields 1982, p. 353).

CiM, as I pointed out above, describes itself as strictly nonpartisan regarding party politics (Churches in Manicaland 2006). My observation was also that it had easy access to non-ZANU PF (ruling party) politicians, thereby casting doubt on its nonpartisanship claim and weakening its criticism that mainline churches court ZANU PF politicians. A case in point is when Bishop B spoke at an opposition MDC campaign rally in 2013. He was reported in a Facebook post of the MDC to have

urged all Zimbabweans from all walks of life to rally in commitment behind President’ Tsvangirai (the late leader of the opposition). He also noted that we need humble people with love to lead us into a new Zimbabwe, saying that an open palm (the symbol of the MDC) is used to rebuild compared to a closed fist (the symbol of the ruling party ZANU PF) which is used to destroy. He thanked God and called upon Him to usher our nation into a new Zimbabwe which we all need. (MDC Facebook Post 2015)

Surprised by this position of a prominent figure of CiM, I asked one of the founding members about this, and he emailed:

It does not sound like him. Is it possible that he did not say this but someone is deliberately misquoting him? If he did say it, I would not agree with his approach. If (Bishop B) did say what he is quoted as saying, he could be asked to give reasons as to why he adopted this approach. It seems to be out of character with the person that I knew.

This might suggest that principles and action do not always agree, or that while in general there was much agreement amongst the members of CiM, there are cases when there were differences. Above we saw members of ZAOGA deciding to participate only in prayer activities, and here we encounter Bishop B participating at an event of an opposition party. My email correspondent shows disagreement with Bishop B’s approach.

6. The Discourse and Practice of CiM in Pursuing Peace and Reconciliation

Peace and reconciliation are central to the mission of CiM. What is significant and in line with the argument of this article is that not as expected of religious leaders in Zimbabwe, CiM takes radical, confrontational and grassroots-based approaches to pursue political objectives. It defines reconciliation as “dealing with pain and resentment, hurt and anger leading to healing” (Churches in Manicaland 2006, p. 11). Some members of CiM feel that contrition or repentance is of paramount importance in the process. Bishop B describes reconciliation as a process of “re-remembering” with the political other(s) after losing membership through committing atrocious acts:

Genuine reconciliation includes contrition, being inwardly sorry, and if you do not demonstrate that contrition, there is no reconciliation. I can't say, 'Forget about it, it was child's play.' It is warding off the problem. Reconciliation means a person has to swallow his or her pride. It demands a lot of humility—giving oneself on the table and asking to be helped to be 'one of us again' because he or she is no longer one of us. That is when for me reconciliation begins.

In his account of what reconciliation entails, Bishop B accentuates a demonstration of contrition. He emphasizes contrition and being sorry. For him, without an apology, there is no reconciliation. His emphasis on contrition and being inwardly sorry intersects with what I have elsewhere called transformative apology, understood as an apology that comes from deep within the wrongdoer's heart and mind, one that ruptures ideas, narratives and ideologies that made the wrongdoer see it justified in the first place to commit the wrong (Tarusarira 2019). Bishop B is thus against instrumental apologies which guarantee neither the rupture of the epistemic bedrock of wrongdoing, nor that the same wrongdoing will not be repeated to another person.

In Zimbabwe, there is a tendency to separate religious approaches to peace and reconciliation from political ones. It is upon this distinction that religious approaches to dealing with violence and its legacies are classified as "soft", thus possessing soft power (Haynes 2012) and characterised by piety, while political approaches are categorised as "hard" and not bent on piety. The distinction between soft and hard approaches resonates with the concept of religious soft power which was developed by Jeffrey Haynes in discussing how religion affects foreign policy (Haynes 2008), as an extension of Nye (1990) concept of "soft power". Soft power refers to the ability of ideas to make an influence or appeal to a targeted audience without using "hard power" that is often associated with state power. These ideas shape the values and norms of international and local institutions. The concept of soft power was introduced by Nye (1990) to show that hard power is not the only way to achieve political goals. Power is about influencing others towards desired goals. This can be done through the use of sticks, carrots or attraction. Soft power is thus defined as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments." Its power lies not necessarily in influence, but in attraction of the culture, ideas, policies or principles. It thus appeals and does not force. It is about persuasion and encouragement. It is contrasted with the notion of "hard power", that is, military or economic influence, involving overt leverage and/or coercion (Nye 2005; Haynes 2009). Religious soft power should include cultural (including religious) actors who seek to influence foreign policy by encouraging policymakers to incorporate religious beliefs, norms and values into foreign policy (Haynes 2008.) It is when religious organisations seek to influence using religious beliefs, norms and values (Haynes 2009).

While CiM is not opposed to religious soft power, which it also deploys since it is an organisation founded on certain ideals and values, it does not limit itself to it. Religious soft power is connected to piety, but as Bishop B has shown, that is not enough. Nye (2005) acknowledged that soft power works in situations where there are willing interpreters and receivers. We have seen already that this is not the case in Zimbabwe where politicians are not willing interpreters and receivers, but pay deaf ears to the soft power of mainstream churches. Furthermore, soft power tends to produce a diffuse effect, creating general influence rather than producing early observable specific action, which is required in times of violence, like the context under discussion in Zimbabwe. Related to this is that soft power is relevant for what are called "milieu goals", like shaping an environment conducive to democracy, but less relevant to immediate goals like preventing an attack and violence, as we see in the Zimbabwean context in the 2000s. Confronted with these limitations of soft power, CiM appreciates what might be called "hard power", which in this case is represented not by guns, bombs and heavy artillery, but by radical and confrontational demonstrations and petitions.

CiM challenges these distinctions and bridges the religious and socio-political dimensions of reconciliation (see Porter 2003). Unlike in the past when the resolution of the conflict was discussed mainly in political terms of democracy, justice, equality, freedom, rights, stability and the rule of law, today there is an increasing recognition of the importance of terms such as healing, repentance and forgiveness, which were once largely restricted to the religious domain. This intermingling marks the recognition of reconciliation as a political and cultural priority. In describing reconciliation, my CiM informant spoke of “contrition”, “inner sorry”, “humility”, “repentance” and “forgive me”. “Forgetting” was ruled out as an option having been associated with the Christian concept of forgiveness in Zimbabwe through the dictum “forget and forgive” at independence in 1980, which I alluded to earlier. Bridging the religious and socio-political dimensions addresses the fear that reconciliation might be no more than a cheap religious, specifically Christian, process which seems to make a necessary connection between apology and forgiveness.

CiM members emphasize that reconciliation is not only political but societal as well. Political reconciliation, which tends to be associated with the top religious, political and military leadership of society or what is called Track 1 diplomacy, does not necessarily translate to the restoration of broken relationships in communities. Yet, communities provide the cement for sustainable reconciliation in society. Thus, CiM members advocated a platform that would facilitate a nationwide process of national healing. They believe that there must be a system that gives perpetrators of violence no option to avoid telling what happened. They argue that, in the context of Zimbabwe, a politically led process is not productive, because the powerful will protect themselves. Rev. D said:

As long as there are people who have power and are unreachable, because they are so powerful, the process will not get anywhere. What we would like to see happening is the formation of an ‘independent’ body to spearhead this process, which would consult or bring onboard political players. Those who have been perpetrating violence for years seem to be influencing from behind. I would have loved to see independent people like heads of churches and perhaps lawyers for human rights.

Mrs A echoed his sentiments: “what is needed is not a composition of appointed personalities”, but “a process that takes on transparency and people feeding in and saying what they want”. It was clear that the call for an independent body and the suggestion for church leaders to lead the process was influenced by South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation (TRC), which was dominated by religious leaders, prominent among them being Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Rev. Alex Boraine, the Chair and Deputy respectively. It must be noted, however, that the dominance of religious leaders in South Africa’s TRC was not without concerns from representatives of other religious traditions who felt that they were not represented. CiM respondents did not suggest traditional leaders, presumably because the traditional leaders had lost moral credibility because they were co-opted by the ruling regime. Notable here is that CiM members do not mince their words and are not “soft” with the process of peace and reconciliation, as demonstrated by its members’ “hard” stance regarding the politicians whom they argue should not be allowed to get away without telling the truth of what they did during the periods of violence. Instead of only dialoguing and continuously engaging them, as would be advocated by the mainstream churches, CiM’s nonconformist character mandates it to take robust approaches that compel politicians to be accountable for what they might have done.

Truth-telling was pointed out as a precondition for forgiveness. While truth-telling is generally agreed to be an indispensable element of the reconciliation process, it is not straightforward; it is delicate, sensitive and complicated. The caution would be that it needs not to be taken as a way of escaping justice, especially in cases where truth is exchanged for freedom, as was the case in the South African TRC, where truth-telling was traded for amnesty. No wonder Prof. A said, “Is it possible to just ask people to forgive each other? It will not work because the truth is not out. Truth and justice create healing and reconciliation... subjecting that truth to justice, then you get healing and you get reconciliation.” This truth must be gathered from the grassroots people around the country, the majority

of whom are victims of the contest between the political elites. Rev. Dr A affirmed the need to hear the stories of ordinary people, saying “We need people *vakadimurwa maoko* (who had their hands cut off) to tell their stories and what they want, we need people from Matabeleland massacres in the early 1980s to tell their stories.” Truth-telling, healing, reconciliation and forgiveness were linked by Bishop A:

There is no way that there is going to be peacebuilding and national healing without truth-telling because only when one tells the truth even before anything happens that brings about some sort of mutual healing. After the truth, we then look at healing and after justice people can then talk about forgiveness and reconciliation is likely to follow.

Mr A confirmed this position: “It is important for the perpetrators of violence, who were involved in destroying property and people’s lives, to own up to their actions and acknowledge they were wrong and that they are seeking to turn over a new leaf.” Repentance and reparations are possible in cases where stolen goods can be returned or compensation made for destroyed property. Mr B said that the perpetrator should be able to say “I am sorry, what should I do?” The truth involved here comes from the victims and the perpetrators of the abuses. (Tutu 1999) calls this social truth, that is, truth gathered from social interaction, discussion and debate. CiM, therefore, calls for a comprehensive and rigorous process of reconciliation rather than a mere cheap and pious process that covers up for perpetrators.

7. Repentance, Apology and Forgiveness

In the discourse of reconciliation, influenced by Christian ethics, repentance is connected to an apology. When the offender demonstrates sorrow and assumes responsibility, the victim may feel drawn, if not pressured, to offer forgiveness. In South Africa’s TRC, clergymen such as Desmond Tutu were criticised for pushing for forgiveness from the victims (Tutu 1999). There is a concern that forgiveness was emphasised much more than justice and accountability (Shore 2012). CiM members linked justice, truth-telling and forgiveness. Rev. D said:

We want justice. We want people to be able to confess, tell us the story, how they got involved, why they got involved and that they are sorry to have been involved, and then those who have been hurt and those who have been inflicted and suffered and have lost will then say okay, we realise this happened yesterday, so we accept that you are asking for forgiveness.

Perpetrators need to acknowledge their wrongdoing, argued Fr B, and it is expected that the victim will accept the apologies offered by the perpetrators (see also Waziweyi 2011, p. 96). This expectation, however, as we will see below, puts pressure on the victim to forgive without taking into consideration how much the victim feels hurt and how much time he or she needs to heal (Tarusarira 2019). This expectation to forgive should not be another way of saying that the victims ought to forgive, it just means that more often than not victims forgive when an apology has been offered. Apologies well-received by the wronged person can influence a shift in attitude and may inspire forgiveness (Tarusarira 2019.)

Fr B, thus, perceives truth-telling and justice as preconditions for forgiveness because victims want to know for what they are forgiving a person and for that the perpetrator of violence has to describe the wrong they did (see Tutu 1999). Were the victim to forgive without knowledge of the truth, they would remain haunted by unanswered questions, and this can stifle healing. They could remain in what Philpott calls “wounds of ignorance”, where the surviving victims suffer from ignorance about what happened to their family and friends violated during the violence and how that happened, for instance who pulled the trigger that killed one’s relative (Philpott 2006). Only truth-telling by the wrongdoer can adequately address this form of woundedness. The characterization of reconciliation by the respondents features “soft” words such as repentance, contrition, healing and forgiveness. However, they do not hesitate to invoke “hard” terms such as accountability, justice and confrontation when need be, thus challenging that religion is always about piety.

What is instructive from the respondents' position regarding forgiveness is that it goes beyond its therapeutic dimension or its implementation as a practice of faith. Forgiveness is generally understood as the "willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment and indifferent behaviour toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love towards him or her" (Enright et al. 1998). By connecting forgiveness to justice, Fr B concedes to the abandonment of one's right to resentment, but also leaves room for the victims to exercise that right as well. Mainstream churches would not see the two coexisting. CiM perceives reconciliation as both individual and societal, with the individual embedded in the social dimension (Tarusarira 2019). This is telling considering that often victims are advised to let go and forgive even without having received justice or knowing the truth. To forgive and let go is presented as standing on high moral ground. Some have argued that forgiveness is meant to free the victim from being held hostage by anger and resentment (see Lennon 2009). Thus, to forgive should not be dependent on anything. Zehr (2005, p. 47) has argued:

Forgiveness is letting go of the power the offence and the offender have over a person. It means no longer letting that offence and offender dominate. Without this experience of forgiveness, without this closure, the wound festers, the violation takes over our consciousness, our lives. It, and the offender, are in control. Real forgiveness, then, is an act of empowerment and healing. It allows one to move from victim to survivor.

The respondents challenged the understanding that the victim will transcend their victimhood and psychic preoccupation with a perpetrator. It is a slippery slope on which the focus might shift from the victim to the perpetrator. In the final analysis, forgiveness will serve the perpetrator, who will appear to be wounded and begging to be readmitted into the realm of moral humanity. The burden of rehumanizing the perpetrator falls on the shoulder of the victim (see Saunders 2011).

8. Justice and Reparations

The balance between retributive and restorative justice often puts CiM members in a bind. Retributive justice tends to be associated with the liberal secular critique, rather than with religion whose members are expected not to focus on punishment or retribution. Fr B expressed the dilemma that sometimes ensues amongst the members regarding restorative and retributive justice:

Restorative justice is good, in that we are trying to restore what has been destroyed. But again, some things cannot be restored. If a family loses a member, there is no way we can restore that though again punitive justice can act as a deterrent, because in Zimbabwe the culture of impunity has gone on for too long. And it's now very difficult to deal with that, so some form of punitive justice, especially for serious crimes like murder, rape, I would say let's go for punitive justice.

Fr B concurred that some form of restorative justice concerning people who lost property and their livelihood due to political violence must be done. Demands for compensation are understandable where people are struggling to eke out a living. While CiM emphasises restorative justice, retributive justice is not ruled out as a deterrent measure against a culture of impunity (Waziweyi 2011, p. 66). It is here that it accentuates retributive justice in a way that mainstream churches do not do.

Regarding retributive justice through reparations, Bishop B referred to the Old Testament: "In the OT reconciliation meant that if you stole my cow, for genuine reconciliation to occur, you have to pay four, not one." Asking for compensation for what one has taken or making up for a crime committed is biblical. Fr A had great respect for the African tradition, in this case, specifically the Shona religion. He remarked, "I am arguing that even traditional leaders can play a part. If I took your chicken, I can go to the traditional leader and say, I took his chicken and I want to give it back. We can resolve that at that level." This resonates with Waziweyi's assertion that among the Shona, the wronged used to spell

out what he or she wanted (*kubata makuku*) as payment if they were brothers or relatives, and *kuripa* as compensation if not related (Waziweyi 2011, p. 65). In this way, judiciary costs are lowered. Restitution is, however, easier to deal with when only one side is wrong, but not when both or all sides in the conflict have lost property. Who will compensate whom, and what about those permanently injured, let alone those who died, becomes the question.

What we see here is that while CiM comprises Christian members, they do not underestimate the role of African philosophy and culture. *Kubata makuku* and *kuripa*, outlined above and along with others, are summarized in the African philosophy concept of *ubuntu/unhu*—a person is a person with or through other people (see Mbiti 1969, pp. 108–9; Tutu 1999, pp. 34–36). *Ubuntu* facilitates seeing oneself in another person. This approach thus changes the perspective of dealing with the conflict. While not opposed by the mainstream churches, most of the time the mainstream churches promote Christian values of dealing with the conflict and tend to be silent on African philosophical and cultural values. CiM foregrounds African philosophy and culture's connection to both retributive and restorative justice and truth-telling.

9. CiM's Approaches to Peace and Reconciliation

CiM organises several activities to create spaces for peace and reconciliation. These activities include workshops with pastors, in whom they have an interest because they have access to many people through their churches. They also engage the chiefs, who are expected to embody the societal values of peace and reconciliation. The majority of CiM members happen to be pastors and church people who share some values, even though they may differ on strategies of putting them into practice. It has also been the mission of CiM to change the perspective of other pastors that politics belongs only to politicians involved in partisan politics. To this end, CiM organises public meetings around the prayer worship idea, where different churches are invited for an ecumenical prayer event.

At the height of the violence, CiM created rapid response teams to back up local churches by reacting to reports of incidents of violence. It also created race relations (considering the tensions that had developed between the war veterans and white commercial farmers), youth and research teams. It engaged in direct services such as providing comfort, food and shelter to victims of the crisis (Mkaronda 2003, p. 39). In cases of injustice, they deployed the justice and peace commissions to facilitate litigation. For the brutalised and violated, it provided medication and counselling. To advocate a change of policies, it engaged politicians and other authorities in dialogue meetings. For instance, it contacted the Governor of Manicaland province and asked her to make a statement against violence, invited the chief of police and the Electoral Commission to issue public statements on security and electoral processes, respectively. It also delivered its publications and statements to the Governor of Manicaland, political and administrative heads and Members of Parliament, and sent delegations to discuss issues with national political leaders who came from Manicaland Province. It talked to MPs after elections to outline the expectations of communities.

As an organization, CiM issues several pastoral letters and press statements such as the compendium *The Truth Will Make You Free* (2006), which addresses various issues in the political sphere. Rev D shared that they deconstruct their pastoral letters and statements and take them down to the grassroots level, discussing them with the people (see *Churches in Manicaland 2006*, p. ii). Cases in point include the distribution of leaflets and pamphlets with civic information during elections, at public bus termini for travellers to take with them to the remotest places of the country. Such activities have not been witnessed amongst those undertaken by the mainstream churches. They would not be perceived as activities to be undertaken by religious leaders, but instead by political enthusiasts. But here we see a different *modus operandi* that links secular and religious approaches, creating a resourceful archive that caters for Zimbabwe's population, which for the most part does not distinguish between the religious and the secular. Analysing the interviewees' responses and perusing their grey literature shows that CiM's theoretical and practical tools close the gap between being a merciful, peaceful and forgiving religious person, and demanding that perpetrators of atrocities face justice, the

truth of past atrocities be told, reparations be made and apologies be expressed. Instead of just dealing with the individual suffering of victims, the respondents advocate systems and structures that address the perpetrators of atrocities and safeguard reconciliation. This is not to intimate that mainstream churches do not call for justice and truth. Mainstream churches' para-organizations like the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), which were radical during the liberation struggle and the early years after independence, vigorously challenged political violence. But the situation has since changed. In a personal email communication, an attaché to the CCJP wrote to me:

The Zimbabwe Catholics Bishops Conference (ZCBC) seems to be tightening its grip on CCJPZ activities. The process (of issuing press statements) is more bureaucratic. A press statement for print media has to be approved by at least three bishops before it is allowed in the public domain. Given the tight schedules of most of the bishops, some press statements are approved late when the information on them is no longer relevant.

To be noted is that CCJP in the 1970s enjoyed relative autonomy from the Catholic Bishops' Conference and its opinion did not have to be viewed as the official position of the bishops (Gundani 2001, p. 72). It spoke with an independent voice, sometimes at odds with that of the bishops (McLaughlin 1996, p. 4), thus could afford to be nonconformist. This allowed the organisation to be quicker and more effective than it arguably is now. It possessed qualities of a religio-political nonconformist organisation, and the popularity it attained can be attributed to that.

10. Conclusions

This article set out to argue that the pursuit for peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe has been taken to another level by religious leaders operating outside the jurisdiction of the mainstream churches in a move that I have called religio-political nonconformism. While upholding the importance of religious soft power (Haynes 2008, 2009), its limitations, which resonate with those of soft power in general (Nye 1990), have prompted religio-political organizations such as CiM in Zimbabwe to invoke hard power, in the form of radical and confrontational approaches. The tendency to accentuate the soft power of religion might obscure the potential and necessity of hard power from religio-political organisations. Instead of sticking to only to the soft approach in pursuing peace and reconciliation, which is associated with religious actors in Zimbabwe, the nonconformist groups have gone for radical and confrontational strategies. This has influenced the public's understanding not only of how religion operates in the public sphere, but also shown that the dynamics of reconciliation such as apology, forgiveness, truth-telling and justice can be pursued in a nonconformist, radical and confrontational way when need be. Furthermore, their approaches have indicated that these dynamics of reconciliation are neither cast in stone nor waiting out there to be discovered. By calling for truth-telling and justice as prerequisites, they redefined and shielded reconciliation from abuse by those in power. The ruling party has a history of burying the truth. A case in point is when the government refused to make public the report that was produced by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace on the massacres that took place in the early 1980s in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe[1997] 2008). Truth-telling is taken beyond its therapeutic use by the victim to being a foundation for justice as well. The nonconformists redefine reconciliation as more than being sorry, forgiving and forgetting. They have as well redefined key elements of reconciliation such as apology and forgiveness so that they do not make reconciliation cheap, a charge levelled against Tutu (1999) forgiveness during the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In so doing, they have call for transformative apology and forgiveness. In general, nonconformists have problematized approaches to peace and reconciliation, and the article argues that the approaches are discursive and variegated, multiple and can appear to be inconsistent. They are contingent on and constructed according to circumstances. So are the pathways to pursue them, they are not fixed but context-specific. The upholding of tradition and culture, which are different and dynamic, through Ubuntu philosophy demonstrates this point. To understand the dynamics of religio-political

organisations, we should not only consider the beliefs and values which define them, but also their practical actions, because adherents to religions do not always follow the dictates of their religion. Restricting analyses to beliefs and creeds will obscure the lived religion dimension of religious agents. Ultimately this article has shown that hard approaches are not a stubborn departure from the established conventions, but have the potential to positively influence and change socio-political dynamics in the pursuit of sustainable peace and reconciliation.

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