

The church, the state and the issue of national reconciliation in Namibia*

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Abstract

The Church in Namibia, from its birth until today, has often been criticised for its ties to the governing powers.¹ While much of the critique has been justified, the realities were often far more complex than portrayed by the critics. This article scrutinizes the relationship between the Church and state before and after independence and in particular the significant but sensitive issue of national reconciliation in Namibia. It has been suggested that the Church could have played a more prominent role as a promoter of unity and reconciliation, but that it has been hampered by its own tradition of fighting for justice alongside the liberation movement, in particular SWAPO, rather than independently. The Namibian Church and state have generally opted for stability, fostering prosperity and local relations rather than working towards an improved climate for discussion on a national level, i.e. they have opted for the comfort of silence rather than the inconvenience of a reconciliation process. But it is also suggested that there have been genuine attempts, within Church and society, at presenting alternatives to silence.

The church, the state and liberation

Of Namibia's almost 2, 2 million people roughly 90 per cent are Christians. Over half of these Christians are members of one of the three Lutheran Churches: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) with 706,664 members, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) with 420,000 members and the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELKIN-DELK) with 5,200 members. The Catholic Church of Namibia has approximately 375,000 members, the Dutch Reformed Church in Namibia 23,000 and the Anglican Church in Namibia 11,000 members.² Apart

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¹ I am referring to the German and Finnish mission societies' relationship with the German colonial authorities before WW1, the Dutch reformed and partly also German churches ties to the government during South African rule and, as will be seen in this article, the (black) Lutheran, Catholic and Anglican churches bonds with SWAPO after independence.

² Lutheran World Federation (LWF), "2011 World Lutheran Membership Details", *Lutheran World Information*, (LWI), 2012, 1, Geneva; Statistical information from the Anglican Church/Diocese of Namibia, www.anglicanchurchsa.org (23.11.2012) and Dutch Reformed Church in Namibia (Clem Marais, pers. communication, October 2011); Roman Catholic Church, Namibia, www.rcChurch.na (23.11.2012).

from the Churches mentioned above numerous smaller denominations exist. Among these are a growing number of charismatic Churches. It is assumed, that many of these have hundreds of followers or even more, but exact figures are not available. Moreover, a majority of their followers are (still, at least formally) Lutherans or Catholics.

Generally the churches in Namibia trace their roots back to European missions. ELCIN originated from the work of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) among Ovambo and Kavango people in the north, ELCRN is a continuation of the work of the Rhenisch Missionary Society (RMS) among Herero, Damara and Nama of central and southern Namibia. The Catholic Church was established by a few Catholic missionary orders and Anglicanism is rooted in British missionary efforts among soldiers and civilians in Namibia during the First World War. Of these churches, two are remarkable: the German Lutheran Church in Namibia and the Dutch Reformed Church in Namibia. The former was founded as and has remained a German-speaking Lutheran Church among Namibia's German immigrants and their descendants, while the latter has been the Church of the (almost exclusively white) Afrikaans-speaking population.

When the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) launched its armed resistance against South African occupation of Namibia in 1966, the churches in Namibia were divided. Both the occupying power and the liberation movement demanded the support of the Church in the struggle. Most churches in Namibia, however, chose a diplomatic, non-violent middle course — a path which impressed neither the South African authorities nor the liberation movement.³ Mbuende reflects on the position of the Church as follows:

The Church has often tried to strike a balance between the interest of the state and that of the popular forces which constitutes its membership. Such a balance has, however, proved difficult to strike in Namibia because of the state's oppressive nature. The Church had to ally itself either with the state or with the popular forces.⁴

1971, as Mbuende points out, was a turning point in Church involvement in the struggle.⁵ In the wake of the ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in favour of Namibia's independence, the two largest Lutheran Churches in Namibia — the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church (ELOC, today ELCIN) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in SWA (ELK, today ELCRN) — joined forces.⁶ In an open letter to the Prime Minister of South Africa, John Vorster, Bishops Leonard Auala and Paulus

³ See for instance Siegfried Groth, *Namibische Passion: Tragik und Größe der namibischen Befreiungsbewegung*, Wuppertal, Hammer, 1995: 157f. For more on the Churches and the liberation war, see Gerhard Töttemeyer, *Church and State in Namibia. The Politics of Reconciliation*, Freiburg, Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut, 2010: 96-105.

⁴ Kaire Mbuende, "Church and Class Struggle in Namibia", in: Peter Katjavivi, Per Frostin, and K. Mbuende, (eds.), *Church and Liberation in Namibia*, London, Pluto Press, 1989: 27-47 (33).

⁵ Ibid.: 35. See also Gerhard L. Buys and Shekutaamba V. V. Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia. An Introduction*, Windhoek, Gamsberg Macmillan, 2003: 325.

⁶ Peter Katjavivi, "The Role of the Church in the Struggle for Independence", in: Peter Katjavivi, Per Frostin, and Kaire Mbuende, (eds.), *Church and Liberation in Namibia*, London, Pluto Press, 1989: 3-26 (12f.).

Gowaseb declared that South Africa had failed to respect human rights and stressed their wish that South Africa comply with the UN demands and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, according to which, South Africa had no right to be present in Namibia.⁷ A short time later, the Catholic and Anglican Churches expressed strong support for the letter.⁸ A further step in the cooperation between the Churches, and a development, which according to Pityana, was instrumental in the struggle towards independence, was the founding of the ecumenical umbrella organisation Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) in 1978. Through the CCN, according to Pityana, Namibians

maintained a unity of perception of the social reality of Namibia. Not only was it being demonstrated that there was no dichotomy between the gospel and politics but it was shown by the example in CCN projects and staff who were active in the liberation movement either as SWANU or SWAPO.⁹

The CCN offered “legal aid, support for the dependants of political prisoners and educational assistance”, by organising “seminars for nurses, clergymen and teachers about the role of the Church in the struggle for national liberation as well as after independence.”¹⁰ All mainstream Namibian churches, with the exception of the DRC, were members of the CCN.¹¹ While the CCN’s (peaceful) involvement in the struggle generally took place in Windhoek, the situation was different closer to the Angolan border in the north. Many Lutheran pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church found themselves surrounded by a guerrilla war. Some became actively involved in the struggle by secretly assisting guerrillas (members of their congregations)

⁷ International Court of Justice, *No. 71/10. The International Court of Justice delivers its Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences for States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia (South West Africa) notwithstanding Security Council resolution 276 (1970)*, The Hague, 1971; Leonard Auala and Paulus Gowaseb, *Open Letter to His Honour the Prime Minister of South Africa. 30 June, 1971*, online: http://kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/50/304/32-130-6E-84-african_activist_archive-a0a6n3-b_12419.pdf (21.11.2012).

⁸ Seppo Kjellberg, *Finsk mission och apartheid i Namibia: En översikt av Finska Missionssällskapets inställning till rassegregation i Sydvästra Afrika*, Åbo, Institutet för ekumenik och socialetik vid Åbo Akademi, 1972: 41f.

⁹ Barney Pityana, “Foreword”, in: Peter Katjavivi, Per Frostin and Kaire Mbuende, *Church and Liberation in Namibia*, London, Pluto Press, 1989: vii-xii (x). Conway accentuates this further in writing that “the CCN acted more as an arm of SWAPO than as an independent moral force within the colony” (Paul Conway, “Truth and Reconciliation: The Road not Taken in Namibia”, *The Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, Tabula Rasa Institute, 2003: 66-76 (68)). This is also supported by Groth (*Namibische Passion*: 167f.) and by Trehwela who (from a Marxist perspective) sharply criticizes the CCN for its ties to SWAPO (Paul Trehwela, “Swapo and the Churches: An International Scandal”, *Searchlight South Africa: A Marxist Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1991, 2 (3): 65-88 (67-72)).

¹⁰ Mbuende, “Church”: 38.

¹¹ According to Katjavivi the CCN was made up of six Churches: ELOC (later ELCIN), ELC (later ELCRN), the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Anglican Diocese of Namibia, the Methodist Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). The German Evangelical Lutheran Church had observer status in the CCN, but soon accepted full membership, before withdrawing altogether in 1987 “accusing it [the CCN] of being too politicized” (Katjavivi, “Role”: 14f.). Since independence several other Churches have joined the CCN, including the Dutch Reformed Church.

of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN).¹² The Dutch Reformed Church, for obvious reasons, supported South African policy, whereas the German Lutheran Church in Namibia adopted a middle position between the Reformed Church and the two other Lutheran Churches.¹³

As a consequence of their widely varying positions regarding the liberation struggle, the relation of the Namibian Churches to SWAPO and the SWAPO Governments since independence has also varied greatly. While the Lutheran, Catholic and Anglican Churches have enjoyed good relations with SWAPO, the situation has been quite the opposite for the Reformed Church. Over the years, Government representatives have in many public contexts drawn attention to the low standing of the Dutch Reformed Church in Namibia due to its (and its members') history of legitimatising the South African Apartheid regime. Logically the opposite has been the case for the churches which supported the freedom struggle. In 1976 the president of SWAPO, Sam Nujoma, described the Church leaders as "freedom fighters just like ourselves [...] doing it from a different angle but all our actions are aiming at achieving freedom and independence for Namibia." The SWAPO leader further noted that "certainly SWAPO will include the religious leaders as well as other Namibian patriots who are fighting for the liberation of the country in the Namibian delegation."¹⁴ Nujoma, who was elected Namibia's first president in 1990, has been true to his word. He has repeatedly stressed that SWAPO recognises only the three Churches which participated in the struggle for liberation: Lutheran, Anglican and Catholic.¹⁵ As SWAPO has been in power since independence this has also been the position of the Government. The charismatic churches, among others, have also been criticised publicly several times as insincere, improper or unwelcome by high ranking politicians.¹⁶

Recognising only three Churches, on the basis of their involvement or non-involvement in the independence struggle, may seem strange. Firstly, categorising churches in this

¹² Interview: Nambala. Cf. Groth, *Namibische Passion*: 159 and Veikko Munyika, "The North under Military Rule", in: Colin Leys, Susan Brown, (eds.), *Histories of Namibia: Living Through the Liberation Struggle*, London, Merlin, 2006: 55-62.

¹³ Töttemeyer thoroughly examines the relations of the Dutch Reformed and German Lutheran Churches with the South African Government on the one hand and with the black majority Churches on the other, see Töttemeyer, *Church*: 46-67. He notes that whereas the Dutch Reformed Church terminated the only agreement it had had with the previously Finnish and Rhenish Mission Churches in 1969, the same Church made attempts in the 1970s to "re-establish ecumenical relationship with the Black Churches through UELCSWA [the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa, an umbrella organization including the three Lutheran Churches], such efforts were to no avail. UELCSWA considered the DRC as a front organization of the South African Government" (ibid.: 59). The German Lutheran Church, on the contrary, joined the UELCSWA in 1977, but terminated its membership in 1989 (cf. ibid.: 55-65). The reasons for both failures were that one side condemned Apartheid while the other side failed to do so.

¹⁴ Interview with Sam Nujoma, quoted in Mbuende, "Church": 39f. and in Groth, *Namibische Passion*: 156.

¹⁵ Ignatius N. Shixwameni, *Open Letter: Do not discriminate against any Church or religion*, Congress of Democrats, 7 May 2003; Shixwameni, 7 May 2003; interview: Ndeikwila.

¹⁶ Theron Kolokwe, "Church responds to Nujoma's attacks", *Namibia Economist*, 29 May 2009; Oswald Shiwute, "'Fiendish' events continue to plague village in North", *The Namibian*, 23 January 2006.

way excludes a considerable proportion (maybe up to one third) of Namibia's population. It is not only the religious map which has altered in the past decade in Namibia. At the same time as the established churches have been facing an increasing challenge from a growing number of charismatic churches, SWAPO's monopoly in the political arena has also been challenged by a rising number of freethinkers, some of whom have chosen to vote for the new opposition party Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP). This is hardly a momentary development.¹⁷ Although SWAPO and the Lutheran, Catholic and Anglican Churches continue to enjoy overwhelming popular support, their monopoly may soon end. The reaction of the SWAPO leadership to these developments is therefore understandable. Yet, maintaining a relationship with some churches on the basis of their active support for the liberation struggle and excluding others can hardly be considered an effective, long-term approach to maintaining or winning support in an increasingly pluralistic Namibia.

Secondly, SWAPO's recognition of these three churches seems to be rhetorical rather than consistent. Since independence, the Lutherans have enjoyed more respect in the Namibian leadership than the Anglicans and Catholics. A ranking within the Lutheran block is also obvious. As the greatest support for SWAPO has always been among the Ovambo people in the north, ELCIN has tended to enjoy the best relations with the Government. Most Government officials and ministers are Lutherans from the Ovambo ethnic group and much of the armed struggle took place on ELCIN soil. The sister church, ELCRN, has also enjoyed warm relations with the Government (though it is not equally represented in terms of Government officials' and ministers' church affiliation) while the German Lutheran Church, by virtue of its colonial past and its ambivalent position in the struggle for liberation, has to this day not been particularly close to the Government.¹⁸

Finally, the insider-outsider tendency in Church-State relations in Namibia may be interpreted as a sign that Namibia is yet not ready to write its own history. The fact that some churches are in the good books with the SWAPO party while others are not, probably says more about the political party (its identity and self-image) than the Church. Yet it can hardly be denied that Namibia, in many ways, is still in the process of defining itself. It has not yet come to terms with its past. One of the reasons for that is that the past has never been openly and thoroughly discussed. Without such a discourse, I believe, it will be difficult for Namibia as a nation to achieve a

¹⁷ In fact it is not a new development either. SWAPO unity was already being challenged in exile in the 1970s and 1980s. As, for instance, Robinson points out, "Nujoma and the leadership in exile developed a political culture that discouraged spontaneity and debate, increasingly defined criticism as disloyalty, and eventually focused considerable energies on maintaining security. This restrictive political climate aimed to silence criticisms of the leadership and to derail calls for democratization, accountability, and reform" (Frank W. Robinson, "Nujoma, Sam (1929-) – First President of Namibia", <http://patachu.com/nujoma-sam-1929>, 21.11.2012). Cf. Groth, *Namibische Passion*: 60-62.

¹⁸ Töttemeyer, *Church*: 161; several interviews.

comprehensive, unified (if ever possible) Namibian, and thus representative, view of its history.¹⁹

The church – a muted conscience?

Twenty years after independence it seems to be a widely-held opinion in Namibia that the Church should act as social conscience, as a prophetic voice in society. What that means, however, varies greatly. Some emphasise that the Church should act in a constructive manner, by helping and guiding the SWAPO-led Government, so that it would make the right decisions. Others stress the need for a Church independent of party politics, with a more radical message and responsibility, which could also involve criticism of the country's leadership. It is also argued that a truly prophetic Church should not take on an adviser's role, as had long been the case in Namibia.²⁰

Many Christians in Namibia hoped after independence that the CCN would continue as before as a common voice for the Church. In 1989 and 1990 the CCN, under its general secretary Abisai Shejavali, offered its assistance as a mediator between returning detainees from SWAPO internment camps and SWAPO leaders. This was an effort to provide a neutral space for discussions between individuals who wanted answers as to why they had been detained and tortured, and those from the leadership who could provide answers. This attempt, however, failed. As indicated both by Groth and Shejavali the ex-detainees demanded more than the CCN had expected, and more than the SWAPO leaders were willing to concede. One of the wishes of the CCN had been to see these talks lead to some kind of reconciliation. The ex-detainees, however, demanded that "‘reconciliation’ should be used correctly, so that we should be given an opportunity to talk about what had happened and that the liberation movement should comment on it."²¹ Overwhelmed by accusations of the ex-detainees (who seemed to have little appreciation of the positive political development in Namibia), the SWAPO representatives decided to withdraw from the talks.²²

The CCN played an important role as a common ecumenical voice before and also, to a certain extent, after independence. Hunter discusses the role of the CCN as a voice for the voiceless and she seems to suggest that the launch of the English translation of Siegfried Groth's *Namibische Passion (The Wall of Silence. The Dark Days of the*

¹⁹ As late as August 2012 the issue of Namibia's view on its history made itself visible in the newspaper *The Namibian* which reported Government plans to remove the Reiterdenkmal (a statue of a German soldier on horseback in the war against the Herero and Nama (or Herero and Nama genocide), 1903-1907) and instead erect a statue of the first president Sam Nujoma. The Reiterdenkmal was moved for the first time in 2009 when it gave way to the new independence museum (Selma Shipanga, "Reiterdenkmal makes way for Sam Nujoma", *The Namibian*, 1 August 2012).

²⁰ Several interviews (in some cases I have opted to let the informants remain anonymous).

²¹ Siegfried Groth, *Namibia. The Wall of Silence. The dark days of the liberation struggle*, Wuppertal, Hammer, 1995: 164.

²² *Ibid.*; Tötemeyer, *Church*: 115f.; interview: Shejavali and Ndeikwila.

Liberation Struggle) marked a change in the CCN's role as a unified voice. The CCN chose not to participate in the launch in April 1996 – according to Töttemeyer this was due to intervention by President Nujoma – but planned to organise a conference of its own on the ex-detainee theme later in the year.²³ Although the conference never happened, the CCN and its member churches launched a reconciliation programme under the title *Year of God's Grace*. The council was criticised by SWAPO and, in particular, by President Nujoma who decided to boycott the reconciliation programme altogether. As a result of substantial political pressure the programme never took off the ground.²⁴ The unity which had characterised the CCN until then began to weaken and it became clear that the members had different views on the role of the council. Instead, the CCN increasingly emphasised the individual responsibility of its member churches. As its role diminished, it became increasingly logical for the CCN not to become involved in the member churches' business. As a consequence, the CCN started to return the ball to the courts of the individual member Churches' and in particular to those of ELCIN and its two bishops, at least when it came to sensitive political issues.²⁵ Thus the ELCIN bishops found themselves in a key position in the dialogue with the Government.

As discussed above, the political climate in Namibia has not favoured the participation of church leaders in political matters. Moreover, participation in political debate has tended to depend on factors such as political affiliation, seniority within SWAPO and, above all, the individual's or the body's role in the independence struggle. Many past and present pastors and church leaders (in ELCIN in particular but also in other churches) committed themselves politically during the struggle for independence, and, indeed, this has been a prerequisite for being taken seriously by SWAPO.²⁶ Yet, all in all, few clerics have held high positions in the SWAPO hierarchy and therefore their influence on policy issues has been modest. Moreover, the bishops with good contacts to the country's leadership, or who are members of SWAPO or with a past in politics under SWAPO have tended to avoid conflict with the party. Following the examples of their predecessors, the recently retired bishops Thomas Shivute and Johannes Sindano, as well as the ELCRN bishop Zephania Kameeta, pursued a relatively SWAPO-friendly policy.²⁷ Their approach was

²³ Gustine Hunter, *Die Politik der Erinnerung und des Vergessens in Namibia*, Frankfurt, Lang, 2008: 204; Töttemeyer, *Church*: 116f.

²⁴ Hunter, *Politik*: 205. Cf. Conway, "Truth": 69f.

²⁵ Interview: Kapolo.

²⁶ Töttemeyer (*Church*: 101-104) discusses the involvement of a number of clergymen from the two largest Lutheran Churches (ELCIN and ELCRN), the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Anglican Church in the liberation struggle with a focus on spiritual care for the freedom fighters. He highlights the role of Bishop Leonard Auala of ELCIN and his successor Kleopas Dumeni, both of whom were "equally committed to the independence struggle and cooperated with SWAPO in exile" (ibid.: 102).

²⁷ This is not to say that the bishops have failed to touch upon burning societal issues, such as poverty, marginalisation, corruption and so forth (discussed in Töttemeyer, *Church*: 149-155 and confirmed in several interviews conducted for this study), but rather to suggest that the Church has tended to opt for cordial discussions rather than confrontation with the state, and as a result some sensitive issues may have been left unattended.

probably deliberate, and many Namibian Church members may question whether a more aggressive approach (possibly putting functioning and cordial cooperation at risk) would after all have benefited national reconciliation. As a result, however, the Church in Namibia has sometimes been perceived as toothless. While the Church was active during the Apartheid era, many believe that it has failed in its role as a social conscience after independence.

Many therefore saw it as a reinforcement of a long trend when the bishops of the three largest Churches – ELCIN, ELCRN and the Roman Catholic Church – failed to attend the launch ceremony of the *Church Leaders' Declaration on Elections in Namibia 2009*, which was an initiative aimed at promoting peaceful elections. Most other Christian Churches in Namibia were present. According to Dr Abisai Shejavali, the former general secretary of the CCN and chairperson of the steering committee, some Church leaders disagreed with parts of the message in the declaration.²⁸ There had been discussions on article five in the preamble which stated that the Church leaders “realised the failures of the Church in many instances since independence for not being obedient to God in raising a prophetic voice in search for a just society”. Without the active support of the three largest Churches the declaration lost much of its weight.

The issue of national reconciliation

In 1989 when the Constituent Assembly and its various committees started working on a draft constitution for the new nation the issue of how to unite the future Namibian citizens became a matter of utmost importance. The work for reconciliation, peace and unity was considered so crucial that it was enshrined in the preamble of the new constitution as a declaration stating that “we the people of Namibia [...] will strive to achieve national reconciliation and to foster peace, unity and a common loyalty to a single state”.²⁹ The issue of reconciliation, however, did not progress much further than this. In contrast to developments in South Africa no truth commission or public discussions were held in Namibia, no one (or at least very few) confessed their misdeeds, and many believe that there was no real reconciliation.³⁰ There were efforts on the part of some politicians to change this situation. In the first session of the Namibian Parliament, as Conway notes, Moses Katjiuongua proposed “the establishment of a Judicial Commission of Inquiry to probe into the detainee issue.”³¹ Katjiuongua’s motion led to a spirited debate and was defeated. A resolution was passed, however, leading to an invitation to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to conduct an investigation into cases of persons missing since the war. According to Conwell the work

²⁸ Church Leaders’ Declaration on Elections in Namibia 2009, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_16071-1522-1-30.pdf?090331222804 (23.11.2012); interview: Shejavali.

²⁹ Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing and the Namibia Institute for Democracy, (ed.), *The Constitution of Namibia*, Windhoek, 2002: 1.

³⁰ Interview: Kamho and Marais.

³¹ Conway, “Truth”: 68; Töttemeyer, *Church*: 156.

of the ICRC was difficult as it had a mandate only to “gather and document information about the fate of the missing that the Governments of South Africa, Namibia, Angola, Zambia and Botswana agreed to provide.”³² The report was published in April 1993, and despite major shortcomings, as pointed out by Groth, due to a lack of cooperation on the part of the Namibian Government, the same Government subsequently declared that the policy of national reconciliation had been accomplished.³³

Due, perhaps, to a combination of the preamble to the constitution, the ICRC inquiry and the numerous political speeches highlighting the importance of reconciliation, unity and peace, it appears that the opinion that the Namibian Government has worked quite hard to achieve national reconciliation and to foster peace and unity is widely held throughout the country.³⁴ According to Diescho, however, there was no generally accepted understanding of the words national reconciliation in the constitution, but the phrase came to acquire a complex set of meanings. Reconciliation, as seen by Diescho, was adopted as a moral policy, and he maintains that the first democratically elected Government managed to inspire people by preaching national reconciliation and by setting a good example. Reconciliation, however, did not translate into material benefits for any of the many disadvantaged.³⁵ Dobell similarly notes that the SWAPO Government was “understandably reluctant to define explicitly what was entailed by ‘national reconciliation’”. However, the policy was

tacitly understood and employed in three distinct ways: as *ethnic or racial reconciliation* (overcoming the legacy of Apartheid); as *social reconciliation* (healing the wounds of war); and as *economic reconciliation* (naturally interpreted by propertied classes as justifying the continuation of existing economic relations, and by non-propertied classes as requiring a redistribution of wealth).³⁶

It is apparent from both Diescho and Dobell, that the expression ‘national reconciliation’ lacks a clear definition in Namibia.

In fact, the concept of reconciliation in a political context is relatively new. It has only been widely employed since the 1970s through the first truth commissions. Reconciliation in this context has generally come to mean efforts towards restoration or reparation for historical injustices.³⁷ Given — at least in part — that the concept of

³² Conway, “Truth”: 68.

³³ Groth, *Namibische Passion*: 185; Conway, “Truth”: 69.

³⁴ Many (including leading Church and political leaders) have also wrongly believed (or at least claimed) that there is a policy document defining and dealing with national reconciliation (interview: Kapolo, Ndeikwila).

³⁵ Joseph Diescho, *The Namibian Constitution in Perspective*, Windhoek, Gamsberg Macmillan, 2007: 29f., 88f. Diescho highlights the need for tackling injustice and material compensation as an important part of the reconciliation process. He does not reflect further on other dimensions. It is notable that when Diescho wrote the book in 1994 the TRC in South Africa had yet not taken up its work.

³⁶ Lauren Dobell, *SWAPO's Struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by Other Means*, Basel, Schlettwein, 2000: 111 (my emphasis).

³⁷ Kjell-Åke Nordquist, “Vems sanning? Vems försoning? Om försoning som politiskt begrepp”, in: Hanna

reconciliation has strong roots in theology and psychology, the border between reconciliation and forgiveness has sometimes been vague. Hunter notes that a shift of focus has taken place in the way the word reconciliation is used, as it has been transformed from a theological concept to a term in political conflict resolution and domestic peace making.³⁸ But reconciliation is also connected to forgiveness. According to Nordquist the difference between reconciliation and forgiveness primarily lies in reconciliation being a process (and a goal for the same process) requiring at least two actors, whereas forgiveness rather indicates an act of will by a single party in a conflict. While it would be unfair, in Nordquist's view, to turn forgiveness into a political concept, reconciliation as a relational concept can be used as a tool in nation-building.³⁹ And whereas forgiveness, to further elaborate on Nordquist's thoughts, shines in its unilateral determination often involving a considerable degree of sacrifice and forgetting, reconciliation should, perhaps, rather be seen in terms of bilateral or multilateral processes towards a broadening of understanding and inclusiveness.

Recognition – or struggle for recognition – has been deemed one possible vehicle for reconciliation. According to Taylor, recognition in the public sphere has two implications. On the one hand it involves a *politics of universalism* where dignity of all citizens is equally respected. In some societies the politics of universalism has come to influence civil and voting rights only, while in other settings it has materialised also in the socio-economic sphere. Yet, the obvious sign of failure, in Taylor's view, is the existence of first and second-class citizens. Recognition in the public sphere, on the other hand, also involves a *politics of difference*, whereby every individual or group should be recognised (as opposed to being ignored or glossed over) for his, her or its unique identity. Assimilating this distinctness into a dominant or majority identity is, as per Taylor, the cardinal sin against authenticity.⁴⁰ By deepening mutual recognition we (or former enemies) may overcome ethnocentrism and achieve a "wider understanding [or, also according to Taylor, a *fusion or sharing of horizons*] which can englobe the other undistortively".⁴¹ And this (wider understanding and liberating of the others) can, in a sense, only be achieved through comparisons or contrasts which let the other be, i.e. when we can "identify and articulate a contrast between their understanding and ours,

Stenström, *På Spaning: Från Svenska kyrkans forskardagar 2009*, Stockholm, Verbum, 2010: 167-190 (167-172). Cf. Kameeta who stresses the role of the Church in peace-making and reconciliation in Namibia, not only due to Christianity's strong foothold in Namibia, but also because he sees the Church as a more neutral agent than political parties (Zephania Kameeta, "Response: Peace-Making and Reconciliation in Namibia – The Churches' Role", in: P.M. Krishna, Z. Kameeta, S. Fowler, and S.M. Nyirenda, (eds.), *Reconciliation in Africa*, Potchefstroom, Institute for Reformational Studies, 1993: 10-14).

³⁸ Hunter, *Politik*: 135.

³⁹ Nordquist, "Vems sanning?": 167-172. Cf. Hunter, *Politik*, 135.

⁴⁰ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition", in: Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1997: 225-256 (233f.).

⁴¹ Charles Taylor, "Comparison, History, Truth", in: Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1997: 146-164 (151), my emphasis.

thereby ceasing in that respect just to read them through our home understanding, and allowing them to stand apart from their own".⁴²

Schaap does not share Taylor's optimism about the possibility of reconciliation through a struggle for recognition. Indeed, he acknowledges recognition as a rough ground for an "ethical encounter between former enemies", but rather advocates for *agonistic model* of reconciliation that would "*affirm the non-identity* [or difference] of the other" while indefinitely postponing the moment of positive recognition.⁴³ In Schaap's own words the end of political reconciliation as a result would

not be to arrive at a common identity that could encompass former enemies. Rather it would be to make available a space for politics within which citizens divided by memories of past wrongs could debate and contest the terms of their political association. Instead of looking to politics to secure a common identity, reconciliation would depend on founding and sustaining a space for politics within which the emergence of a common identity is an *ever present possibility*.⁴⁴

Taylor's and Schaap's models do make sense. The problem with Taylor's reasoning, however, is that it may be difficult to achieve in a setting where there is little discussion or interaction of any kind between previous enemies. Namibia can point to the successful abolition of segregation, the introduction of equal rights and even in some measure to the acceptance of uniqueness, but it fails to stand out as a nation with any kind of discussion leading towards a deepening of relations (of recognition). Perhaps Taylor's and Schaap's models complement each other, and they might be more appropriate if the order were reversed. Schaap's antagonistic model appears to stand out as a more realistic starting point for a nation still suffering from the trauma of oppression and war, as is the case in Namibia, where various groups are quite simply too far apart to understand, acknowledge and build on their differences.⁴⁵

It should not be denied that some crucial political measures – or steps towards recognition – have been taken in Namibia. Conway notes that from the very start of Nujoma's administration Namibia's Government was

committed to a declaratory policy of reconciliation. The new Constitution [...] guaranteed that, "persons holding office on the date of independence shall continue to hold such office [...]". That controversial clause meant [that] many white officials who previously supported Apartheid would retain their jobs. The new president also promised to provide a document that would account for

⁴² Ibid.: 150.

⁴³ Andrew Schaap, "Political Reconciliation through a Struggle for Recognition?", *Social & Legal Studies*, 2004, 13 (4): 523-540 (523, 525), my emphasis.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 538, my emphasis.

⁴⁵ Töttemeyer seems to suggest a similar model for Namibia. Drawing on John de Gruchy (2002) he emphasizes how import it is that the character of the process of reconciliation is open-ended. Though he views admission of guilt and forgiveness as "cardinal to reconciliation" he also states that: "If [...] forgiveness is made an absolute precondition in a reconciliation process, it can be destructive. It can even bring the whole reconciliation to a halt" (Töttemeyer, *Church*: 43).

roughly 11,000 who were missing and last assumed to be in SWAPO's care. The idea of open hearings in a broad national inquiry was widely discussed.⁴⁶

In general the political atmosphere around independence was, as Diescho notes, characterised by openness. People were encouraged to change their attitudes and “for the first time in Namibia, black people and white people listened to one another: under the banner of national reconciliation attitudes changed”.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the first Government focused on stability rather than social transformation and, as Diescho points out, the policies implemented by the Government served to appease the wealthy white section of the population, most of whom were South African citizens.⁴⁸ Hunter correctly states that the “politics of reconciliation” implied “a difficult balancing act between avoiding an exodus of the wealthy and to live up to the expectations of the disadvantaged majority.”⁴⁹ Quoting Diescho, she notes that the majority's politics of reconciliation implied a great deal of patience and tolerance, whereas this was taken for granted by the white minority in many instances (i.e. nothing new, sustained privileges, control etc.).⁵⁰ Tötemeyer touches upon the same issue in noting that the white churches in Namibia “did not have the courage to confess and repent”. He continues that “[f]eeling guilty of violating human rights, facing the truth, applying ethics, condemning the reigning suppressing ideology of Apartheid, to repent and reconcile, was not part of the vocabulary of the White Churches.”⁵¹ At the end of the day most Whites accepted SWAPO's formal handshake and decided to stay in Namibia, but, despite initial positive signs, little changed in terms of unity. The white minority in Namibia carried on as before (i.e. focusing on their own interests rather than on societal issues in the new nation), SWAPO was too preoccupied learning how to interpret the constitution and run the country to focus on something which did not seem all that crucial (i.e. deepened unity) and the large black majority was relieved, *knowing* that the country was in good hands.⁵²

Naturally there are several reasons for the apparent failure of the endeavours at reconciliation and unity. Firstly, many Namibians were unimpressed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and its (disputed) outcome.⁵³ There seems to be a rather widespread fear in Namibia that choosing the path which South Africa chose is like opening a can of worms: the outcome is unforeseeable. This is a view held also by presiding bishop S.V.V. Nambala. Instead of “forcing painful and embarrassing confessions upon the Namibians” (many of whom may not want to know who killed or

⁴⁶ Conway, “Truth”: 67.

⁴⁷ Diescho, *Namibian Constitution*: 88f. Cf. Hunter, *Politik*: 144.

⁴⁸ Diescho, *Namibian Constitution*: 89. See also Dobell, *SWAPO's Struggle*: 111f.

⁴⁹ Hunter, *Politik*: 138 (my translation).

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 144. Cf. Kameeta, “Response”: 13.

⁵¹ Tötemeyer, *Church*: 66.

⁵² Interview: Kamho.

⁵³ Interview: Nambala, Kapolo, and Marais.

tortured their friends and relatives), Nambala speaks in favour of dealing with issues privately. He understands and supports the present direction in Namibia where reconciliation exists as a policy in the constitution without being taken much further than that.⁵⁴ Nambala and other like-minded persons struggle to see the benefits of digging up the past, pointing out that it will be impossible to find the truth anyway, that it will bring more problems than it solves, and that it may ultimately be wiser to accept (and perhaps forget) the past and instead rejoice at having achieved independence.⁵⁵ In a discussion on silence as opposed to truth, Nordquist states that

the political concern of the heads of state not to have their doings all that thoroughly scrutinised have walked hand in hand with the psychological need of the people to not only 'look back' in their lives but to turn their eyes and look ahead in life – for the sake of their own survival.⁵⁶

While Nambala clearly represents the people with a wish to look forward rather than backward, SWAPO has been criticised, by those in favour of a more open discussion, for its fear of opening what it calls a Pandora's Box.⁵⁷ According to Clem Marais, the General-Secretary of the Dutch Reformed Church, his church is divided on this issue. While many white, Afrikaans-speaking Namibians were very uneasy about the way the past had been covered up, others were relieved. Many had been unaware of the atrocities which came to light in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and would feel uneasy about a similar process in Namibia. But reluctance among the white population to embrace reconciliation and unification has been further reinforced by recent developments in affirmative action and black empowerment policies in Namibia, which are seen as apartheid in reverse.⁵⁸

Secondly, the firm resistance in SWAPO circles to any kind of reconciliation process beyond policy level effectively discouraged all efforts to create a climate for open discussion. The CCN's attempt in 1996 to start a reconciliation programme was bitterly criticised by SWAPO. Not only was the ruling party unwilling to set up a commission in Namibia similar to the one in South Africa (and this became apparent when the Namibian Government rejected requests from South Africa for hearings in Namibia),⁵⁹ but it viewed *any* such attempts as a threat to national unity.⁶⁰ Moreover, it is apparent that SWAPO was worried by the prospect of a tendentious focus on the liberation struggle, i.e. a focus on SWAPO's mistakes. In trying to preserve a shining image of the liberation movement, SWAPO instead resorted to condemning as unpatriotic and thwarting any negative focus on the liberation movement during the struggle.

⁵⁴ Interview: Nambala.

⁵⁵ Interview: Nambala and Kapolo.

⁵⁶ Nordquist, "Vems sanning?": 173 (my translation).

⁵⁷ Several interviews.

⁵⁸ Interview: Marais.

⁵⁹ Conway, "Truth": 70.

⁶⁰ Hunter, *Politik*: 205. It is probably fair to assume that the failed talks with ex-detainees under CCN mediation in 1989 – 1990 convinced SWAPO to confine itself to reconciliation as (merely) a policy.

Thirdly, there are different views as to what reconciliation in Namibia would or should encompass. Finding answers to questions about offences committed by Namibians (with a past in the South African Defence Force (SADF), police or in the SWAPO spy-camps in Zambia and Angola etc.) would probably be possible.⁶¹ But, as highlighted by Hunter for instance, a Namibian truth and reconciliation commission would be rather toothless without extradition agreements with other countries.⁶² Focusing only on Namibian crimes would be wrong, as many of the evils date back to the South African apartheid regime as well as to the involvement of a number of players outside South Africa and Namibia. As all of this seems like an impossible undertaking it has been easy for Namibia to continue as before: i.e. to embrace national reconciliation as a principle but not in deed. Despite the fact that the policy of national reconciliation in Namibia was not clearly defined when it was laid down in the constitution, it has since been interpreted as involving not only political reconciliation (on a very general level) but also compensation or economic reconciliation. In an interview in 1999 the then Prime Minister Hage Geingob declared that political reconciliation had been achieved and that the second stage in the reconciliation process was to look at economic reconciliation.⁶³ While one could question what was meant by political reconciliation in this case, the Government has made attempts at tackling the increasing poverty in the country in recent years. This is where black empowerment comes in and this is where the previously privileged white minority disagrees. While many Whites would wish to be reconciled with the rest of the population they have often been criticised for failing to embrace economic reconciliation, i.e. not wanting reconciliation to involve financial concessions or compensation.⁶⁴ It is far from guaranteed that a plea for forgiveness without any kind of compensation will warm the hearts of those who feel that they have been wronged. This has become apparent in recent years through the dialogue and efforts at reconciliation between Herero and the German Government. It seems that all parties wanted the advantages but were reluctant to make concessions, and it is apparent, although the Prime Minister believed that political reconciliation had been achieved, that the whole reconciliation process either had (and has) not yet started or was a journey without a proper map.

Fourthly, for the majority of the Namibians, the situation turned out to be far better since independence than it was under South African rule. Although the independent Namibian press tended to be rather critical in its evaluation of the SWAPO Government, Namibians appeared to be quite satisfied with how things had turned out in the first decade of the 21st century: not only in terms of national independence, but also in terms of freedom of choice in so many areas of their lives, such as education and training, the freedom of

⁶¹ For this, see Groth, *Namibische Passion*.

⁶² Hunter, *Politik*: 146. See also Tötemeyer, *Church*: 157.

⁶³ Peter Mwaura, "Namibia: Making Democracy Work. After the political, economic reconciliation is now the 'second phase of our struggle'", *Africa Recovery*, 12, April 1999.

⁶⁴ Ibid.; Nampa, "White farmers 'sabotaged' land reform – Nujoma", *New Era*, 10 May 2012; several interviews.

movement, of speech and opinion and association, and so on.⁶⁵ The previously disadvantaged black community no longer felt (quite so) disadvantaged, and the fact that the previously advantaged white community frequently claimed that they had now become disadvantaged seemed to go quite unnoticed among the majority. Whether or not the SWAPO voters (and the black majority in general) thought of reconciliation in terms of political, ethnic, social or economic reconciliation there was little sympathy for the complaints of a minority which (still) possessed greater material wealth than the majority.

Fifthly, choosing to fight for human rights, a fairer society and reconciliation can also be politically motivated. Many critics of SWAPO have stressed, with a fair amount of frustration, that the political elite in Namibia focused too little on achieving reconciliation on any level, or democracy for that matter, and concentrated too heavily on achieving financial gain and covering up its own wrongs during the independence struggle. While many who left SWAPO have claimed that they only felt free (to have an opinion and express it) after leaving the party, others have criticised precisely these people for becoming politically active in other political parties instead and for focusing too much on SWAPO mistakes during the war instead of seeing the bigger picture.⁶⁶ The reconciliation discourse has often been encouraged by strong individuals with weak or non-existent ties to SWAPO.⁶⁷ Moreover, the reconciliation discourse has often come in a package with (or been secondary to) other issues considered controversial by SWAPO. Despite the legitimacy of many of the factual matters raised by these individuals the climate has never been conducive to a healthy discussion.

Sixthly, if Namibians genuinely need to make up with their past and reconcile – in whichever way – who should take the initiative? I believe that there are at least three discernible factions in the on-going discussion on past wrongs and future reconciliation and with genuine desire to move forward on these issues. The first group consists of the great mass of (previously and currently) disadvantaged black people who have, since

⁶⁵ This is contrasted by the situation for many of the ex-combatants who, as for instance Hunter points out, had little education or professional experience apart from as soldiers and consequently struggled to find their place in society after independence (Hunter, *Politik*: 140f.), but also by alarming reports on low public awareness of democracy in Namibia and on a deteriorating health and school sector, cf. Henning Melber, "Limits to liberation. An introduction to Namibia's postcolonial political culture", in: H. Melber, (ed.), *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture since Independence*, Uppsala, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2003: 9-24 (21f.) and Kim Stefan Groop, "Spirit Attacks in Northern Namibia: Interpreting a New Phenomenon in an African Lutheran Context", in: Bettina E. Schmidt and Lucy Huskinson, (eds.), *Spirit Possession and Trance – New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, London, Continuum, 2010: 151-170 (152-154).

⁶⁶ Several interviews; Samson Ndeikwila, "A Visionary without Illusions", in: Barbara Becker, *Speaking Out – Namibians Share their Perspectives on Independence*, Windhoek, Out of Africa, 2005: 6-11 (10f.); John S. Saul and Colin Leys, "Lubango and After: 'Forgotten History' as Politics in Contemporary Namibia", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2003, 29 (2): 333-353 (337).

⁶⁷ For instance the RDP included national reconciliation in its Election Manifesto in 2009, promising that a "RDP-led Government would formulate a genuine National Reconciliation policy whereby past mistakes and wrong doings are to be openly admitted and forgiven" believing that "this is the only way to bring about true reconciliation" (Rally for Democracy and Progress, *Election Manifesto*, 2009: 24).

independence, witnessed a general decline including a deteriorating school system, growing HIV prevalence and increasing poverty.⁶⁸ Four years after independence Diescho singled out this group of people calling upon the Government to “translate this good policy into real necessary progress with justice and based on democratic principles before the majority of the population loses faith in it”.⁶⁹ This is hardly the group to bring about reconciliation in a public sphere. But this is a group of people which may consider voting for other political parties, should their voices fail to be heard for much longer, in the same way that many previously loyal members of the traditional Churches have secretly joined the charismatic churches. The second group consists of individuals within a number of Christian churches and to a certain extent the organisations they represent.⁷⁰ The first reconciliatory initiatives were taken on a political level and materialised in the Preamble to the Constitution. Some church leaders have pointed at the failure of the Church in Namibia to promote and encourage reconciliation calling it a shame that the Church had to be shown the need for reconciliation by a secular government.⁷¹ When the lack of political commitment and capacity to move the issue forward became apparent, the Church could have stepped in. As was already pointed out, the CCN in 1989 and 1990 made attempts to mediate between conflicting groups (ex-detainees and the SWAPO leadership). In fact, Ngeno Nakamhela who acted as general secretary between 1992 and 1999 wanted to make national reconciliation a key task and responsibility of the CCN but these attempts met substantial resistance not only from SWAPO but also from the ELCIN and ELCRN bishops. As a result the CCN barely touches upon national reconciliation in its constitution, in stating among its objectives to “promote and foster the Churches’ concern for the development of a culture of peace”.⁷² Attempts were made again in 1996, under Nakamhela, to make the reconciliation issue a key concern of the Church. When this attempt foundered on the rocks of the ruling party’s intervention, the CCN and its member churches were no longer a united force for unification and unity in Namibia. As a result the individual churches largely came to minister to their own people and often failed to see beyond their borders. Furthermore the leadership of ELCIN, ELCRN and the Roman Catholic Church sometimes preferred not to jeopardise their political relations and were therefore reluctant to get too involved. While the reconciliation concept internationally became increasingly common in conflict resolution and developed (or diverted) from its, at least in part, Christian theological foundations it became clear that the Church in Namibia (at least after 1996) did what it had done before 1971, i.e. it opted for a more classical

⁶⁸ Groop, “Spirit”: 165.

⁶⁹ Diescho, *Namibian Constitution*: 90.

⁷⁰ Töttemeyer (*Church*: 157) is clear on this issue in stating that “[t]he Church in Namibia is predestined to perform such a task [a body or forum that addresses the injustices of the past]. It should take the initiative in cooperation with NGOs and civic organisations to elaborate on the possibility of having a truth-finding and reconciliation body established.”

⁷¹ Interview: Marais.

⁷² Council of Churches in Namibia, *Constitution*, 1992/1994; interview: Ndeikwila.

Christian (non-confrontational) interpretation. It focused on forgiving, forgetting and on turning the other cheek. Unlike in South Africa, the Church in Namibia has to this day failed to become a key player in the fight for justice and national reconciliation.⁷³ The third group consists of human rights organisations and the individuals behind them. Many of these have been viewed with suspicion by SWAPO but have enjoyed respect and financial support from international organisations and foreign embassies in Namibia. One organisation which has explored the question of reconciliation in greater depth is Forum for the Future (FFF) and in particular its director and former CCN employee Samson Ndeikwila. In 2004, Ndeikwila and the FFF published a booklet titled *Towards National Reconciliation in Namibia*. In this publication national reconciliation is defined as follows:

National reconciliation is a defined framework that encourages harmonious interactions among the citizens emerging from a conflict situation. It entails a process of empowering the citizens to overcome the barriers that prevent them from moving together into the future. In the case of Namibia, such a process requires information leading to a shared memory and rectifying past mistakes. The process calls for critical and constructive ideas how to create a non-racial, democratic and united society. National reconciliation will strengthen Namibia's democratic constitution and contribute to the realization of the goals of Vision 2030.⁷⁴

What the FFF was attempting to do was to present a model of how reconciliation in Namibia could be achieved.⁷⁵ It was designed with the hope that it be brought to Parliament to be discussed and amended into a policy document. It is apparent that Ndeikwila and the FFF interpret reconciliation both as a Christian concept and as a more political, secular concept. Reconciliation, as per the FFF, involves confession and forgiveness, but this constitutes only one major element in an extensive process. Although reconciliation is seen as demanding participation by the whole society, the FFF does not elaborate further on possible vehicles for a reconciliation process, but rather aims at setting proper foundations. Under the present circumstances, this (ten-step or

⁷³ Töttemeyer emphasises the need for a reorientation: "What has become unavoidable is a reorientation of the Church's relationship with the State particularly related to reconciliation. The issue at stake is how the Church can secure its credibility and mission as a professing Church in an independent, secular state. The Church, if it wants to sustain its trusted standing in society, cannot afford to foster a culture of silence. It must practice commitment and prophecy. [...] It is essential and fundamentally important that the Church should have a clear understanding of its role in society. Role expectation includes the Church's active contribution towards credible and acceptable reconciliation" (Töttemeyer, *Church*: 112f.).

⁷⁴ Samson Ndeikwila and Forum For the Future, *Towards National Reconciliation in Namibia*, 2004.

⁷⁵ The proposed model for National Reconciliation in Namibia (in short): 1) Leadership (i.e. an earnest leadership with vision, character, competence, charisma and willingness to serve), 2) Unity in Diversity (i.e. equality of all human beings irrespective of sex, tribe or race), 3) Mediation (i.e. preparedness to handle differences of opinion and conflict situations), 4) Confession & Forgiveness, 5) Democracy, 6) Trauma Healing (i.e. a preparedness in society to render assistance to those showing signs of trauma), 7) Narrowing of Poor-Rich Gap (in order to ensure future peace, reconciliation and stability in Namibia and for the sake of economic justice for all), 8) Interdependence (i.e. realizing the need to hold hands and support each other), 9) Loyalty (to the constitution, the state and each other), and finally 10) Hard Work (irrespective of ethnicity or cultural background).

ten-pillar) model for reconciliation in Namibia may seem like aiming for the moon and it has so far failed to reach the Namibian Parliament. At the same time as it stands out in all its sincerity – intended to be “non-threatening to any individual Namibian or community” – it is apparent that it exposes a number of shortcomings by recent governments, and painfully enough, also by the churches in Namibia.⁷⁶ However, it serves as a good starting point for discussion and as an example of Namibian preparedness to and capability of dealing with the painful reconciliation issue.

Conclusions

The issue of national reconciliation is highly complicated. Although it can be disputed to what extent (if at all) reconciliation can be achieved on a national level in Namibia and elsewhere, it is clear that it (or the lack of it) involves a multitude of complexities, such as hope for redress, fear of losing position, (frustrations over) ethnocentrism, religious ideals and political competition. The early governments managed to provide Namibia with the peace and stability which the nation so badly needed after independence. It is, however, clear that Namibia is in need of intensified and impartial discussions on how to preserve and improve unity and it is also clear that Namibia is a country, which still bears deep wounds from the struggle for liberation, which may well take generations to heal. What then is the position of the Church (or the churches) in the whole reconciliation discussion? The churches were split throughout the struggle through the various roles they played either as legitimising agents of or opponents to apartheid – or as something in between. At the same time the very core message of the Church *is reconciliation* and as long as reconciliation has not been achieved, be it on any level, the Church has a mission.

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⁷⁶ Interview: Ndeikwila.

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