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Everyday Literacy: How Handwriting and Printing Presses Make Power in the South African Nazaretha Church

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In the 1930s, Isaiah Shembe, the early twentieth century founder of the South African Nazaretha church, gave a sermon in which he likened his community of believers to written texts, asserting that their longevity as a church was because *they* themselves were heavenly, and hence enduring, texts. This sermon, like many others Isaiah gave to his community of faithful at his religious settlement of Ekuphakameni north of Durban, was recorded by one of his scribes and preserved for believers' devotional use. Isaiah's sermon was entitled, either by him or his scribe, as 'the Parable of the Book'. He told his congregation this:

> You are a book, not written in ink, but with diamonds which cannot be erased and is read by all people. It is not written on flat stones. Rather it is written in your hearts. When the people of the system (ie the govt) will come and take these books from which the children at Ekuphakameni are singing, they will say, 'You see, all that Shembe was preaching has come to an end.' Then even a child of Ekuphakameni can say 'These things which were spoken at Ekuphakameni are written in the hearts of the people who love God.'

Isaiah's sermon described the Nazaretha congregation as an enduring 'book', one written with 'diamonds' on the 'hearts of the people who love God.' Through typing the church's followers as a book, Isaiah affirmed the power of the written word to bolster Nazaretha community in the face of the state's hostility, 'the people of the system'. For believers of the last hundred years creating texts was a means of ensuring the survival of their communal life as a church, and as we shall shortly see, a means for the leaders of the church to consolidate their authority over their believing constituencies. But these texts were very different to those of the African Christian elite of the day – the kholwa (or 'believers') – who espoused an ethos of rational progress towards 'civilization'.

Isaiah's sermons emphasized the importance of Nazaretha literacy as a *miraculous* power which inscribed words upon 'hearts' with a 'diamond' as a pen rather than ink.

Studies of African nationalism have shown us how texts as varied as newspapers, pamphlets, biographies, autobiographies, cultural histories and grammatical lexicons have assembled writing and reading publics. In the next 45 minutes or so I want to look at how the sacred texts of the South African Nazaretha church have knitted together a very different sort of public life: the religious constituencies of the amaNazaretha, who have – at least, publicly - defined themselves as a polity whose membership belongs in heaven rather than amongst the calculations of earthly politicians and statesmen.

The paper broadly charts the changing form of textuality in the South African Nazaretha church over the past hundred years. I argue that the leaders of the church have drawn upon a range of technologies of literacy – from hand-writing scribes to the printing press – to summon up communities of pious, loyal believers. Church laity and leadership have variously understood literacy itself as spiritual virtue and bureaucratic exercise. I suggest that the changing technologies and perceptions of literacy used by church members have enabled the leaders of the amaNazaretha to argue for varying degrees of centralized authority over their constituencies. Different modes of literacy build different sorts of religious community.

This study of the ways in which Nazaretha believers' textual practices have constituted religious community seeks to re-address scholarly depictions of the church as a largely oral community. Scholarship on the Nazaretha church has maintained that their religious innovation hinged around oral culture rather than print. Studies have emphasized the church's interest in oral performative culture: dance, song and religious dress. Literacy's intrusive 'Western' power is depicted as subsumed within an oral performance culture. This line of argument has been reiterated in a number of studies on the broader phenomenon of African 'Independent' Churches which have undertaken symobolic analyses of the rich ritual life of these churches, and in particular, their rites of healing. A recent monograph on an Independent, or Indigenous, church in Zimbabwe – the Masowe Apostles - has claimed the church explicitly rejected the power of the written word in Scripture, instead preferring a 'live and direct' experience of the sacred, unmediated by textual objects.

These studies justifiably seek to correct a view of African orality as embarked upon an invariable path towards rational, modern literacy. However, new stereotypes are discernable. These re-readings of the oral-literate encounter handle orality as a homogenous world-view that all non-literate peoples inhabit. A study of literacy in early twentieth-century Gikuyuland by Derek Peterson asserts that the encounter of literacy with local oral traditions needs to be evaluated within the contingencies of particular historical moments.

Further, African agents themselves drew upon the unique 'textuality' of texts. Rather than merely 'oralizing' texts (although doubtless this did occur, as a study of oral historical narrative in a Tswana chiefdom has demonstrated), early twentieth-century African Christians sought also to harness the power of literacy through the use of distinctive technologies of reading, writing and storing texts. These communities appropriated print technology as an augmentation, rather than a negation, of their cultural possibilities. The possession of vernacular literacy did not necessarily entail apostasizing from local traditions.

And, further, the evidence we shall shortly examine of Nazaretha literacy and textual production serves to highlight that African literates were not all on the same page. The textual forms of the Nazaretha church set it apart from the region's educated, Westernized elite's practices of creating newspapers, books and pamphlets in order to summon up new forms of public life. Through creating a reading public around their newspapers, books and pamphlets, this educated elite invited Zulu citizens into a public sphere built around rationality, education, progress and the pursuit of nationalist politics. But as we have seen through Paul la Hausse's study of disputes within this elite strata, not all Zulu nationalists were agreed as to what sort of texts they should be producing. Further, South African literates could also perceive reading and writing as magical, or spiritual, gifts, rather than secular instruments of modern, civilized progress. Particularly in the days of Isaiah Shembe, Nazaretha believers did not receive texts produced from on-high by a literate, political elite; rather, they creatively co-constituted texts as heavenly record books and spiritual instruction manuals, rather than as secular charters for political mobilization.

And even in later decades of the church's life – when texts were understood in a more centralized, bureaucratic fashion – Nazaretha believers used texts to bolster up the integrity of their spiritual polity, rather than advocate for membership in the secular state. Tracing the history of the church's textual production over the past hundred years illuminates how African literary activity extended beyond the provenance of an educated political elite; it also demonstrates that this elite were not the only ones to use their texts to summon up new forms of public life.

I will argue here for the mundane, often domestic, processes by which Nazaretha believers – both the leadership and the laity - have made their own texts – an 'everyday literacy' - often outside of the public sphere of nationalist writing, but with a comparable aim of summoning up cohesive, governable constituencies of people.

Isaiah Shembe's 'Miraculous' Literacy

Isaiah Shembe and early twentieth century Nazaretha created texts which helped to set their new religious community apart from the highly visible African Christian culture of the day. This *kholwa* elite – a vocal and public community of readers and writers - characterised themselves by their espousal of Westernization, education, Christianity, civilization – in other words, their production and consumption of texts signalled their progress to modernity. By contrast, Isaiah and the vast majority of the early twentieth century Nazaretha believers were formally unschooled. A part of the turn-of-the century prolific emergence of regional independent African Christianity, Isaiah's following in Natal and Zululand was largely rural, uneducated and espoused a strongly 'traditionalist' stance.

Natal's tightly knit *kholwa* establishment ridiculed Isaiah for his uneducated, 'traditionalist' status. He was referred to disparagingly in the pages of *Ilanga* – the Zulu-language newspaper of the day - as a wearer of skin hides, *ibeshu*, and an Ilanga report of 1929 commented snidely, that 'the children of the amaNazaretha are being encouraged to pierce their ears, as it is considered a way of worshipping the Almighty.' Prominent kholwa educator and statesman, John Dube's preface to his 1936 biography of the prophet began with a description of the 'unusual and unorthodox things' Isaiah did,

commenting that 'some criticize him for having said that young maidens and women should abandon the practice of wearing European style of clothing and wear instead traditional attire.'

Isaiah's early years did indeed set him apart from his educated *kholwa* peers. In the late nineteenth-century, his father found work as a labour tenant for an Afrikaans farmer and built his house upon his farm. Instead of attending school, Isaiah and his brothers worked for the farmer, shepherding cattle and goats. Isaiah remembered that he was allowed to spend time with the family in the evenings whilst they ate their meal. In later years, Isaiah recalled that during this period, although he heard the Bible being read aloud, perhaps daily, he had 'never been told about the Bible, but the Boss sometimes talked about God's word.' In later years, Isaiah described his employer's Bible used to be placed in the 'sitting room…covered with an antimacassar and a vase of paper flowers.' He described how he used to be fascinated with the book, which 'the natives in the kitchen told him was the work of God.' One day, Isaiah 'dared to open it and take a peek.' But he found that 'he couldn't read it.' Hence in Isaiah's memories of the period there is a strong sense of the Bible as the property of this Afrikaans farming family. Isaiah's only access to scriptural texts was second-hand, through listening to his employers reading it in a foreign language.

Perhaps as a response to the 'closed' Bible of his childhood, Isaiah's later renditions of this period of his life award a central place to the idiom of the spoken voice. In later life, Isaiah described how as a young boy praying alone he was often visited by an unknown 'Voice' which defended Isaiah against a hostile outside environment. In later years Isaiah would describe how he continued to be guided by the Voice, including his decision to leave his wives and undertake celibate ministry. And in Isaiah's hymnal compositions, the metaphor of the spoken/heard 'voice' predominated, rather than that of writing.

But Isaiah's interest in the moral resources of 'tradition', and his lack of formal education, did not preclude an equally strong interest in the value of textual production to define the new Nazaretha community. Isaiah learnt to read and write almost entirely through practices of communal readings of Christian scriptures. At some point during the 1890s, when Isaiah was a young man in his twenties, he moved to the nearby town of Harrismith, and here linked himself to a local community of African Methodists, and with them learnt to read, and perhaps write a little. He began to 'pray every night that he might read one day…he used other native boy's books, and committed signs and symbols to memory.'

Isaiah understood his possession of literacy as a heavenly 'gift' rather than the rational, scientific instrument of progress that the kholwa understood education to be. When interviewed by the travelling Native Economic Commission of 1932, Isaiah told the Native Economic Commission that 'I have not gone to school and I have not been taught by White people…I have not been taught to read and write, but I am able to read the Bible a little bit, and that came to me by revelation and not by learning. It came to me by miracle.' Both by his own definition, and in the opinions of those around him, Isaiah was experimenting with a different type of literate technology to that used by the dominant Zulu public elite. One of his scribed pronouncements from the 1930s implicitly addresses itself to this critical Zulu literati. In it he states that 'If you had educated (Shembe) in your schools, you would have taken pride in him. But that God may

demonstrate his wisdom, he sent Shembe, a child, so that he may speak like the wise and learned men.'

In a manner similar to contemporary kholwa reading and writing publics, Nazaretha believers were knit together through their production and consumption of their own texts. Yet corresponding to Isaiah's view of literacy and texts as miraculous, revelatory skills and documents, so was the community summoned up by these texts a spiritual ecclesia rather than a secular political public. One of the earliest Nazaretha texts was presented to the community as a celestial register book, knitting together alternative, heavenly, constituencies. This was the 'Book of Life', instituted perhaps as early as 1916. Early members of the church remember that Isaiah would travel around on his missionary journeys with a large hard-covered notebook, quill and ink pot. The names of Nazaretha were written in this book, a system still in use today. Roberts describes a book she was allowed to see in Ekuphakameni named 'the Book of Life Registration of Nazarites in the Lord's Name'. Inside the book was hand-written:

My child, I do hereby agree that the name be written in the Book of Eternal Life. Enter thou, then, into the joy of the Lord. Be not worthy of censure and meet thy debts while alive.

On one level a pragmatic accounts record (some accounts suggest the Book of Life recorded which followers had paid their membership dues), believers understood the volume as a record of a community 'inscribed' in heaven. Ecclesial record books did not only register already-existent earthly communities, but also worked to assemble new communities of the saved. Dhlomo remembers that Isaiah said that the Book 'attests that your name is written before the saints in heaven. Even if you committed a sin, which had not yet been settled on earth, it will be settled by the archangel Michael, who defends the children of men.' In the 1930s Isaiah reprimanded ministers of an outlying temple in the Msinga region of Natal for not entering new members' names into the Book, for 'how will they enter Ekuphakameni (here understood in its heavenly sense) after their death?' Nazaretha sermonic tradition has a rich vein of sermons and parables dealing with the theme of arriving at the heavenly gates. One meets Isaiah at the gates, holding a heavenly Book. If fortunate, the deceased will find their name inscribed within in. If one's name is not 'written' in heaven, there is no possibility of entry. Clearly, Isaiah well appreciated literacy's power to regulate entry, circumscribe membership and conjure up imagined communities.

In addition to the Book of Life, Isaiah and his community of early believers used a wide range of texts to identify themselves as a distinct religious community from mission Christian culture, possessing their own sacred conventions and practices. The earliest decades of the church saw fierce opposition from the established mission churches. Isaiah used texts to define the Nazaretha as an independent body. By the early 1920s, he began to commit to writing a new, Nazaretha, corpus of written liturgical texts. Primarily, these were his hymns and prayer liturgies for services. By the time of Isaiah's death in 1935, there were 'six large books in which (Shembe's) clerk had written at his dictation parables, addresses and paraphrases of the Bible.' Amongst these were his own marriage and funeral services. Isaiah would read out from the books during services, and perhaps the act of reading from a book lent the church an air of establishment gravitas.

Sacred texts such as these were a means for Isaiah to summon up the unique form of his religious community amidst hostility from other churches, but they also enabled him to maintain control over his followers. This is evident in a number of Isaiah's letters preserved by one of his scribes. For one, the contact afforded by letter-writing enabled

Isaiah to supervise the welfare of his communities: in a 1933 letter to a member of Bhekazitha temple, he gave detailed instructions for the distribution of sacks of maize flour to the widows and orphans of the community; in another, undated, letter he advises a course of action for a believer in trouble with the police. Through letter-writing, Isaiah could also admonish, accuse and discipline errant congregations and ministers. Letters were the medium through which he attempted to bring his former right-hand minister back into the fold (he directed his scribe to pen these words to Mlangeni: 'Jehovah will cause you to perish!'). One of his letters to a straying congregation contains a list of fifty names of the offending individuals, creating a quasi-legal record of wrong-doing. Isaiah seems to have considered the physical object of the letter to be significant. He ordered one recipient of the letter to keep the pages as proof of his words for other, doubting, ministers.

Far flung believers could also connect themselves with the religious metropolis of Ekuphakameni through letter writing; one missive from a female follower is a mournful lament upon Isaiah's absence but through the medium of the letter, the believer forges a connection with her geographically far-away 'Baba': 'Baba, please remember me, my Nkosi (Lord), remember me Baba…Remember me, Baba, when you pray for the sick, my Nkosi that I love.' Letters both written, via scribes, and received by Isaiah created an epistolary network, connecting him and his followers in exhortation, instruction, discipline and prayer.

As well as linking Isaiah with his followers, these early believers seem to have thought that letters could connect their community with God. The church archivist preserved 'letters' addressed not to an earthly recipient but to 'Nkosi' himself (Lord, here meaning 'God'). On many occasions Isaiah encouraged his followers to write such celestial missives. For example, Elijah Shange describes how while his parents visited Isaiah at Ekuphakameni in 1932, he stayed at home to tend the cattle, but was bitten by a poisonous snake. Elijah was driven to his father at Ekuphakameni who immediately 'reported' to Isaiah what had befallen his son. Elijah reports that upon hearing this,

> Shembe told my father to go to the store and to buy writing paper. My father brought the paper to the Lord, and Shembe said, "Write the name of your son down together with these words: Nkosi, May Elijah Shange, who was hit by a snake at Umbumbulu, be healed, and may the poison of the snake go out and kill this snake." My father wrote these words down. Then the Lord said, "Bring this paper to Paradise (an area within Ekuphakameni) and call the pastors that they may read out this prayer, which is written on the paper." And indeed I was healed'

Finally, Isaiah recognized texts' ability, amongst others, to secure his community's continued existence, not only amidst opposition from contemporary kholwa believers, but also the persistent opposition of the state. In response, to the persecution of the Native Affairs Department in the church's early days, Isaiah invoked literacy as a tool in establishing enduring Nazaretha presence. In 1931 the Native Affairs Department ordered him to abandon several temples that he had established on land granted to him by a number of Zululand chiefs. Church tradition has preserved a letter which Isaiah wrote to his law firm in August of 1931 requesting permission to 'write my presence in stone in these places that are to be dismantled.' Inscribing the temples' names in stone at the demolished site would ensure that in future years, if a 'ruler' is coming who 'will reinstate all these places', he 'would want to know all their names'. The written trace of the destroyed temples meant that in future years the church might succeed in reasserting its presence. An intriguing Nazaretha idiom describes the sacred dancing of the church as

'writing a letter': dancing is an act of such power that it leaves an indelible trace of Nazaretha presence in the area in which it was performed. A tradition still told in the church today relates Isaiah's arrival in the Maphumulo district, and the opposition he faced from the local chief. The chief ordered Isaiah to leave the area; before he did, as an act of defiance, Isaiah ordered his small Nazaretha following to perform a sacred dance before they left the area: 'so that we will write a letter for the chief'. Nazaretha believers interpreted both literal and metaphoric writing as able to create enduring spiritual records in the face of opposition.

I have argued here that instead of signaling a trajectory of 'progress' towards Western-style civilization, for Isaiah and these early twentieth century Nazaretha, literacy represented a spiritual gift, gained through their exposure to sacred scriptures, and donated by God to the reader and writer through revelation rather than through mission school education. Corresponding to this view of a spiritual, revealed literacy, these Nazaretha believers understood texts to be magical documents that knit Nazaretha community together amidst opposition from both hostile mission churches and a persecutory state. Documents such as the Book of Life acted as a heavenly register book, counting out the citizens of Nazaretha community, whilst prayer-letters opened channels of communication between this community and heavenly powers. Instead of the secular, 'civilized' polity identified by the reading publics of kholwa newspapers and books, early twentieth century Nazaretha texts proclaimed a heavenly community, and a celestial citizenship.

I shall now discuss briefly how these texts' very means of production also set Nazaretha reading and writing practices apart from contemporary kholwa culture. The 'technologies' of Nazaretha textual production –in addition to the actual documents produced – were an important means through which these early believers knit themselves together into cohesive bands of believers.

Communities of Scribes

To a far greater extent than Nazaretha believers, kholwa readers and writers accessed the formally printed texts of newspapers, books and pamphlets through individual acts of reading. This public of individual readers was addressed and fashioned by an elite, select set of authors. By contrast, I suggest here that early twentieth century Nazaretha reading and writing were democratic, participatory activities, enabled through alliances of mutual help between believers of varying literate abilities. Nazaretha believers did not individually consume centrally-produced texts issued from above by the literate elite; rather they 'wrote' their own texts through producing hand-written copies of prayers, hymns and sermons. Further, the low levels of formal literacy amongst the early Nazaretha community meant that their 'reading' and 'writing' were only possible through the widespread use of scribes. These were key literate individuals whose reading and writing skills were drawn upon by the entire religious community. These scribes did not have access the printing presses that their mission-station contacts afforded to kholwa writers such as John Dube, Magema Fuze and Petros Lamula. Nazaretha scribes hand-wrote their documents, and copies circulated amongst believers only through laborious acts of copying out by hand. Nazaretha writing and reading 'publics' were tightly knit together through the intimate, face-to-face network of relations between congregations

and their scribes. This 'writing' and 'reading' were collective works of self constitution, rather than the invention of the literate elite of the day.

Isaiah himself set the precedent for the use of scribes. He frequently drew upon the literate skills of young school-going members of the church for assistance in creating his texts. In the early years of the church, one such scribe was Nazaretha member Sangiwe Magwaza who attended the American Zulu Mission girl's school, Inanda Seminary, bordering Ekuphakameni. As an adult, Sangiwe continued to work as a scribe for Shembe. A female convert woman of the 1930s describes how 'Sangiwe Magwaza, who worked as a secretary and wrote the receipts, she also recorded the messages of the angels from heaven…she wrote down everything.' A further afield scribe was Petros Dhlomo from northern Natal who converted to the church with his family in the late 1920s. Dhlomo was interested in recording stories; as a boy he 'had already the ability to listen, when somebody said something, to remember it and not to forget it.' In a sermon preached in the early 1990s, Dhlomo's sister, the elderly Gogo MaDhlomo, told the listening congregation how Shembe would make use of her brother's ability to write during his missionary journeys to their home area:

> One day Babamkhulu (Isaiah Shembe) said to Petros (Nyaweni), 'Write!' He told Nyaweni to write. And Babamkhulu kept saying 'Write this.' And Nyaweni wrote. And he said, 'Write'. And Nyaweni wrote. So it took time. The time came and then Babamkhulu said 'Bring it to me, my child. It is fine now, thank you my boy.' Then Babamkhulu sang from that paper which had been written. Then he sang Hymn 200. (Gogo MaDhlomo sings)

For pious scribes such as Sangiwe and Dhlomo, their reading and writing established networks of service and mutual assistance amongst the community of believers. Being selected as Isaiah's scribe was a mark of personal favor, and conversely, writing on behalf of their prophet was a virtuous act of spiritual devotion. The process of scribing created a complex relation between narrator and audience; literate members of these communities acted as scribes, 'bouncing back' written accounts of what they heard. This may be akin to the 'dialogue' between oral performer and a responsive audience. This complex of narrator –audience relations could only emerge within the context of a localized, face-to-face, community. Reading and writing were socially embedded practices rather than acts of individual expertise.

These practices of scribing located Nazaretha texts within an intimate network of social relations. Hand-written texts were necessarily limited in number: unlike the rapid replicated of mechanically printed documents, creating handwritten documents and copies of them was a laborious process. Hand-written texts were strongly tied to the individuals who produced them, and the church communities to which they belonged: these texts were never set free in the world, available to a wide anonymous readership. The social value embedded within these texts meant they were treasured hand-made possessions, regarded as prized spiritual possession and carefully preserved by their authors and their families. At his funeral at Ekuphakameni in 1935, amongst the only items Shembe had requested to be buried with him were his hard-covered books created during his lifetime by his scribes.

These social acts of reading and writing – mediated through scribes – meant that texts became more accessible for the largely uneducated early twentieth century Nazaretha congregation. Through scribes, oral recounting could be transformed into written texts, which would in turn re-enter oral circulation through being read aloud to the wider community. Nazaretha practices of scribing also created texts that were

affordable and accessible to all. During the 1920s and 1930s financial constrictions meant that it would have been unusual for church members to own their own Zulu-language Bible. But any member who was literate could own a notebook, could draw upon scribes to produce their own written texts, or could access a codified body of Shembe's hymns, prayers and sermons through recourse to the technology of handwritten copying. These texts did not belong to the elite realm of the formally literate, but the intimate domain of individuals, families and communities.

Nazaretha believers considered their scribing practices to represent a radically egalitarian approach to the ownership of texts. This was elaborated upon by Isaiah in a sermon he delivered in 1933 (recorded in writing by Dhlomo for the church archives) which proclaimed to the congregation that copying texts effected spiritual liberation. Referencing the missionary control of biblical texts, Dhlomo's record of Isaiah's sermon describes a Bible that is 'in the house of the Pope… (and) kept under lock by him and only read by himself.' Two children, working as servants in the house of the 'Pope', find the Bible unlocked one day. They read it, and realised that 'their nation which had been demolished so badly by war could never be restored unless they would get a book like this one.' The children decided to buy a 'copybook' and copied the whole Bible into it by hand. The children then 'went from home to home and preached about this book.' Although the children were eventually caught and 'put to death', their hand-copies of the Bible served to liberate their whole community. The sermon proclaims Isaiah's view (and most probably Dhlomo's as well) of the significance of personal 'copies' of sacred texts. A copied text was a 'liberated' one: it could proliferate freely within a community, and indeed set the community 'free' through creating access to sacred writings.

The activities of scribes during Isaiah's day signalled a further manner in which texts freely proliferated. Within regional temple communities, literate believers acted as congregational clerks, producing hand-written notebooks which chronicled the histories of their local congregations. One of the richest examples of these notebooks (translated and edited by Gunner) is that of believer Lazarus Maphumulo, who was part of the Edendale temple, outside Pietermaritzburg. Throughout the 1930s he handwrote 'in decorative squiggles…as well as a firm boxlike hand' a local history of the Edendale congregation. Congregational scribes meant that not only the goings on at the religious metropolis of Ekuphakameni were recorded; they also committed regional believers' stories to writing.

As we saw in the preceding section, early Nazaretha believers understood literacy to be a heavenly gift, and created texts such as the Book of Life which summoned up celestial citizenship. I have attempted to show here how the actual technologies by which Nazaertha texts were produced were also significant: scribing sacred texts was a spiritual discipline which operated along networks of religious commitment, forging tightly-knit spiritual communities. Isaiah and his followers' use of scribes created a distinctive Nazaretha community assembled around the production and consumption of sacred texts as a collaborative, democratic enterprise. Through these distinctive practices, Nazaretha communities of this early period defined themselves separately from the 'progressive' reading and writing kholwa publics of the day. Instead, through a participatory type of literacy, they formed themselves as a heavenly community assembled around the practice of reading and writing as spiritual virtues rather than educated accomplishments of an African elite.

Johannes Galilee: 'The Coming Lord is Very Learned'

Isaiah's son and successor, Johnanes Galilee, used a different language of literacy to that of his father. No longer was literacy characterized as a heavenly, miraculous capacity; rather Johannes typed literacy and education as rational, progressive skills. This understanding of literacy accompanied the emergence of a more centralized, top-down production of texts. Johannes employed a church secretary in charge of all official scribing, opened a church 'office', and issued a formally printed church hymnal. The era of scribes' participatory hand-coping of hymns and prayers was replaced by codified, centrally-produced official documents. I argue here that, in contrast to the democratic, participatory scribing communities of Isaiah's day, the emergence of formally printed, codified texts produced a more centrally-constituted and hierarchical type of religious community.

In part Johannes was driven by necessity as he sought to create bureaucratic institutions that the apartheid government would recognize, and credit. He was also asserting a new kind of centralizing power over Nazaretha converts, a power that his father had never claimed, or needed to. The fast growing size of the Nazaretha community, coupled with early contestation of the legitimacy of Johannes' leadership, meant he was faced with the pressing need to exert centralized power over the Nazaretha. A rational conception of literacy, and a centrally-produced church 'bureaucracy', enabled Johannes to withstand the apartheid state's suspicion, as well as bolster himself against internal dissent.

Where Isaiah had described his literacy as a miraculous gift, rather than rational acquisition, his son, Johannes, drew more heavily upon contemporary kholwa notions of literacy as a marker of progress and modernity. And whilst Isaiah had been marginalized by contemporary kholwa community, Johannes was a firmly established member of this elite group. This was something Isaiah himself was ensured, by sending both Johannes Galilee and his younger brother, Amos, to John Dube's neighboring Ohlange School for their secondary education. Johannes' final three years of secondary school (1923-1926) were at Adam's College on the coast south of Durban. Adams had been founded in 1853 by the American Board Mission for the purposes of training young African men for teaching careers and the ministry, and was one of the preeminent African educational institutions of the day. Johannes then went on to gain a BA at the country's only African university, Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape. After graduating, Johannes returned to Adam's, this time as a teacher. His several years teaching at Adam's placed him amongst the literate African elite of the day: leading *kholwa* public figures such as John Dube, George Champion, Chief Albert Luthuli, Z.K. Matthews were all teachers there during the first decades of the twentieth century.

In contrast to his father's marginal status amongst the kholwa elite, Johannes' reputation was as an educated, 'modern' prophet. A sermon delivered by Isaiah towards the end of his life identified his son, Johannes, as the 'Coming Lord', who will 'come with his secretaries, pastors and preachers…the Coming Lord is very learned. In an interview with Sundkler in 1969, Johannes contrasted his father's manner of composing hymns through hearing heavenly 'voices', with his own process by which he would 'see

the new hymn written on the blackboard of the mind, lowered down before his eyes. Then he had to write down the verses straight away.'

Johannes' efforts to create a formal textual orthodoxy for the church was inextricably linked to his life-long quest to gain government recognition for the church. The increasingly bureaucratic Native Affairs Department of this period meant that documentary permission had to be sought for virtually every aspect of its religious life, including permission to undertake its annual pilgrimages to the nearby Mount Nhlangakazi, proof that members had submitted to smallpox vaccination and permission to erect temple sites. Without government 'recognition' churches could not obtain sites for churches and schools in the African Reserve areas, its ministers would be unable to act as Marriage Officers, and would not be eligible for concessions for railway travel, a crucial privilege given how many the work of many African ministers, including Johannes' own, involved extensive travel across the country. In the early 1940s, the government initiated a stringent crackdown on a number of important Zululand temples, built on Reserve land and controlled by chiefs who belonged to the church. The state pulled down the temples, claiming that, as an unrecognized body, the Nazaretha church was un-entitled to occupy church sites on Reserve land.

A key criteria for government recognition of African-run churches was the organization's ability to demonstrate its standing as a literate and bureaucratic institution. Successful churches would have to demonstrate a high level of 'training and qualification of ministers', and in particular, the Native Affairs Department stipulated that 'no minister should be recommended for a license who has not passed Standard VI or some equivalent educational test.' The vast majority of Nazaretha ministers were formally unschooled: in Johnanes' first attempt at applying for recognition in 1946, he wrote to the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) that 'our ministers are nearly all old men who were appointed during my father's lifetime…they are not educated people.' The CNC refused this application, as he would similarly reject numerous further attempts by Johannes over the years. During his leadership he pushed for appointing educated ministers, as well as attempting to provide existent ministers with formal theological training. But despite Johannes' efforts to encourage education amongst the Nazaretha, however, the average level remained low. In 1981, in an interview conducted with a sample group, 23% of Nazaretha believers had no education whatsoever, and of the remaining proportion, the average educational attainment was Standard 3 and 4, equivalent to the last years of primary school. Johannes re-applied unsuccessfully many times; the church only received recognition in the mid-1980s. Johannes' failure to achieve recognition was not atypical. In 1948 Bengt Sundkler estimated that out of the roughly 800 African-run churches in existence in South Africa in the late 1940s, only eight of these had been granted recognition by the government.

Johannes realized that presenting the church to the state as a bureaucratic institution with its own array of 'official' texts would also increase the church's chance of gaining recognition. Key to this process was his appointment of a church secretary who would be responsible for the creation of centrally-produced and formally- printed texts. This role was filled by the same Petros Dhlomo of the Msinga district whose writing skills Isaiah had drawn upon in committing his hymns to writing throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In 1949 Johannes requested that Dhlomo leave his job as a migrant worker in Johannesburg and take up the full-time job of scribing believers' memories of Isaiah

Shembe, and centrally archiving texts already created by local scribes. Johnanes gave Dhlomo a type-writer, and installed him in a church office. Dhlomo's niece remembers how she moved to Ebuhleni to assist her uncle in his archival and secretarial work, as well as cooking and cleaning for him. She remembers how her uncle spent

> Most of his time in the office…he was doing things like certificates, those who were baptized he made certificates for them, and those who were getting married he made certificates for them. And then the hymn books, they are the ones who wrote them and bound them. They would type them and they became what they are today.

In addition to being centrally collated, Johannes realized that formally printed texts were an important marker of an 'established' church. Soon after assuming power in 1935, he used a local publisher to produce a formal single volume of the hymnals and prayer services in place of the informal handwritten circulation of material that had characterized his father's reign. These volumes were highly popular: 5,000 copies of the hymnal were produced at several reprints throughout the '40s, '50s and '60s.

As well as emulating the textual canons of established denominations, Johannes' production of church texts also echoed the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. More frequently than in the sermons of Isaiah's era, the idiom of the Book of Life as a 'pass book' that circumscribed entry frequently appeared in Johannes' sermons. Believers who transgressed against church law were threatened with being 'signed out of the Book of Life in the name of Shembe.' Johannes also instituted membership certificates, signed and dated by himself, for the possession of every believer. New arrivals to Ekuphakameni were expected to report to the archivist, Petros Dhlomo, to be issued with a certificate stating their legitimate residence within the settlement. Believers of Johannes' period also made frequent use of imagery of train 'tickets' to describe their heavenly membership. The testimony of a believer described how he had a dream where he saw 'our great father driving the train…and giving out tickets to all who entered the train…nobody could enter this train unless he had been given a ticket by the Lord.' Quasi-official documents such as the Book of Life, train tickets and membership certificates mimicked the bureaucracy of the Native Affairs Department while simultaneously proclaiming a higher, heavenly, written economy. Western bureaucracy might have rejected the church, but the church appropriated for itself the power of the written word, and created a celestial bureaucracy. As one Zulu clergyman said in 1943 – after having failed to gain government recognition for his church – 'the main thing is whether our names are written in heaven, not whether they are written in Pretoria!'

As well as enabling the favorable depiction of the church in the eyes of the state, Johannes found that texts were also useful tools within internal church disputes over authority and legitimacy. Johannes used the power of print to bolster his authority amongst the Nazaretha believers. An important factor in his need to exercise control over the Nazaretha community was the huge growth of the church during Johannes' reign, and the corresponding difficulty in maintaining control over a large congregation. When Isaiah died in the 1935, the Nazaretha congregation was estimated at about 30, 000; by the time of Johannes' death in 1976, there were 250 000 believers. More directly, though, there was also at least one actual contestation of his leadership by a rival. In 1939, a faction led by his younger brother, Amos Shembe, attempted – unsuccessfully in the end - to overthrow him.

Johannes sought to consolidate his own position as guardian of his father's legacy through, quite literally, 'editing' him. The 1940 hymnal established Johannes as the

authoritative redactor of his father's hymnal and prayer corpus, and hence the only truly legitimate leader of the Nazaretha. Although Johannes later composed many of his own hymns, the first 1940 edition of the hymnal contained only his father's compositions. The hymnal was prefaced by an introduction by Johannes in which he underscored the divine provenance of the hymns, and hence the spiritual standing of his father: 'the majority of these hymns came with messengers of heaven.' As well as affirming his father's piety, Johannes was also underscoring his exclusive role as the legitimate redactor of Isaiah's legacy. In a different context, Johannes' desire for sole editorial control was seen in his rejection of *kholwa* John Dube's biography of his father. Johannes' disclaimer to the biography claimed that there 'were many things' in the text that were 'false', and 'damaged my father's good name.' Petros Dhlomo was called to his work by Johannes' pronouncement that he did 'not like that the work of God should be done by unbelievers'. Controlling the production of written words was key to Johannes' authority as his father's legitimate successor.

Along these lines, Johannes also undercut the unregulated circulation of scribes' hand-written notebooks which had characterized his father's period. After Dhlomo's appointment in 1949, Johannes called for all scribes to deposit their notebooks at Ekuphakameni for preservation. Instead of congregations using their scribes to engage in unregulated writing, Johannes encouraged all believers to travel to Ekuphakameni to narrate their testimonies, and the spiritual histories of their local temples, to church archivist Dhlomo. Dhlomo typed these histories out and carefully stored them in filing cabinets at the Ekuphakameni 'church office'. Through the regulating power of the typewriter and the archive, believers' local histories were brought under Johannes' centralized power.

Through using the type-writing skills of his archivist, Dhlomo, Johannes also produced new texts with which he positioned himself as the final arbitrator of Nazaretha orthodoxy. During the 1960s and 1970s, Johannes and Dhlomo typed-up and informally published several catechisms which supplied a definitive code of Nazaretha practice, creating for the first time an explicit textual criteria for evaluating membership within the church. In 1963, Johannes and Dhlomo published a booklet containing the Nazaretha 'catechism', or *Mngcwabo*. This was a compilation of his father's prayers and teachings (or 'counsels'), and integrated material that would probably have been contained in the circulating hand-written notebooks of Isaiah Shembe's era. A second version of the catechism appeared in 1970, with added material that Johannes himself had authored. Included in this new catechism were Johannes's written pronouncements on the correct conduct of ministers, virtuous comportment for young girls within the church, the importance of 'hygiene', and the order for Nazaretha liturgical life, including marriage, funerals, baptism and daily prayers. The appearance of the catechisms indicated both the church's numerical growth in the 1960s and 1970s, and the increasing range of new and ever-growing churches – including Zionists, Apostolics and Pentecostals - during this period. A formal textual statement of Nazaretha belief allowed believers to distinguish themselves from other, rival, churches, as well as enabled Johannes to assert his authority as an 'editor' of virtuous religious comportment.

Still in use today, the catechism is a textual script for virtuous Nazaretha life, the criteria for which were determined by Johannes. The catechism was understood as a type of instruction manual for believers' success in a virtuous life – a type of supplementary

'Book of Life'. One of the 'questions' asked towards the end of the catechism was 'Does this book (ie the catechism) teach us to stop committing the sins we are committing?' The believer would answer: 'This book is of great help to people who do not want to enter the prisons….life is in the words in this book; those who apply them, heal themselves in the flesh and in the spirit.' A number of the catechism's texts were records of Isaiah's 'counsels', parables and prayers which frequently find their way into Nazaretha discourse.. A record of a sermon Johannes delivered in January 1976 documents how he interspersed his words with readings from 'the book' (the catechism) of prayers composed by his father. The catechism text was part of the life of the church: both formally performed as a holy 'script', as well as constituting an informal repertoire of sermon, speech and exhortation.

In moving beyond the era of freely circulated hand-written notebooks, Johannes' centralized 'script' for Nazaretha conduct involved editing out textual traditions he considered inauthentic. Johannes, Dhlomo, and perhaps an editorial committee, exercised judgment over which material was deemed sufficiently 'authentic' for inclusion in the catechism. In the aftermath of Isaiah Shembe's death, there was a proliferation of both copies and original accounts of Shembe's history and teachings. Some of these texts may have been rejected on the grounds of imperfect transcription, others because they resisted seamless integration into the existent corpus.

In the first half of this paper I argued that high levels of formal illiteracy amongst Isaiah's early Nazaretha community meant that texts were produced as social practices, generating de-centralized, participatory communities. By contrast, after Isaiah's death, the hymnal and catechism's nature as formally printed text assured his son's centralized authority as church leader. Through hand-writing, any believer who was either literate, or had access to a scribe, could be the 'author' of their own texts, potentially undercutting Johannes' attempts to style himself as sole editor of the church's texts. By contrast, only educated and relatively wealthy elites – a group within which, thanks to Johannes' early education, he comfortably sat - could use the mechanized printing press to produce texts. And while the technology of hand-written copying ensured a degree of individual interpretation and appropriation, the centrally-printed and mass-distributed 1940 hymnal and later catechisms eliminated any sense in which the text was the believer's own creation. Further, mass-produced hymnals and catechisms now had to be bought, further underscoring the transition from handwritten notebooks as hand-made personal creations to textual commodities. These later documents eliminated the need for scribes to produce hand-written texts of hymnals, prayers and sermons for communities and individuals own use. Johannes' authority as the sole definitive editor and redactor of his father's religious legacy was strongly affirmed.

Finally, I want to suggest very briefly that, despite Johannes' move towards codified print forms, Nazaretha textuality still continued to be characterized by the free circulation of locally produced handwritten texts. Despite the later shift to a bureaucratized mechanical textual production, throughout the twentieth-century and indeed to the present day, Nazaretha texts continue to be produced by, and simultaneously shape, local communities. The bulk of believers have continued to use existent print culture as well as new forms of electronic media to continually re-imagine the ecclesia; and, at times, to challenge the hegemony of church leadership.

For one, despite Johannes' attempt to have all handwritten notebooks lodged at Ekuphakameni, such notebooks continued to circulate in local communities throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In 1967, a visitor to the church noted that during Johannes' sermon on the Sabbath, 'several men and women were taking notes in order to be able to report to their people at home what the prophet told them.' I have seen records of Johannes' sermons from the 1970s, produced independently by a Nazaretha congregation in the Mooi River district of Natal for use of the local congregation.

An important innovation of the 1970s which continued this egalitarian de-centralized production of oral *texts* was the introduction of tape cassette technology. Nazaretha believers began to buy and use hand-held portable cassette recorders to record sermons, delivered both by Johannes, and local ministers in home temples. Indicating their growing popularity, Johannes and Dhlomo's catechism of the 1970s attempts to regulate the use of this technology; one of the catechism's 'laws' stated that: 'there are machines that capture speech. It is necessary that they be handled with reverence, because through them the words of God speak to us amaNazaretha.' Gradually replacing the practice of notebooks, believers accumulated personal collections of tape cassettes, an aural archive of years of numerous sermons listened to and recorded. Up to the present day, a common sight in a Nazaretha household is a collection of carefully marked tape cassettes, consisting of recordings of numerous sermons – both from the local temple community, as well as aural records of sermons delivered at the church's big annual meetings. Often, these tapes would be re-played within the context of family devotional life. More recently, entrepreneurial believers have begun make and sell DVD recordings of sermons at large church meetings. Church leadership has frequently disapproved of these initiatives – perhaps partly because of the loss of centralized control over textual production they represent.

Evoking the hand-written notebooks of Isaiah's era, believers' records of sermons in tape cassettes were their personal, self-made creations; they themselves exercised judgment over which sermons to record and at which point to stop recording. Further, creating and listening to tape-cassette sermons was not a passive act of receiving top-down pronouncements. Rather, Nazaretha believers considered, and still consider, the act of listening to cassette recordings of sermons to be a spiritual discipline, an exercise in ethical self-improvement. Listening to stories of Shembe's miraculous deeds – the main substance of Nazaretha sermons - was a means for believers to train themselves in the virtues of faith and obedience to the church's teachings. Alongside Johannes' attempt to create a centrally authorized canon of church texts, believers from a range of local temples have continued to accumulate their own personal archives, more recently employing electronic media to do so.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Isaiah Shembe's own peripheral position with respect to the African literate elite shaped the form of his literacy as well as his resultant textual production. The ability to read and write, as well as the texts he and his scribes produced, were understood as spiritual disciplines, and sacred objects. Through the mediating presence of scribes, all early Nazaretha converts – regardless of their actual possession of literacy – were invited to co-constitute the church's texts. The relatively small Nazaretha

community of Isaiah's day was knit together through these participatory, intimate acts of communal reading and writing. By contrast, Johannes Galilee, the 'very learned' Lord, was at ease within the contemporary world of African writers and readers – an elite which frequently drew upon mechanized print technology to produce their texts. Correspondingly, Johannes attempted to consolidate Nazaretha autonomy – both in the eyes of the state and in the face of internal dissent – by creating a centrally printed, codified textual canon. The free production and circulation of church texts of Isaiah's day was largely replaced by a more autocratic ensemble of official documentation. But not entirely. Believers of Johannes' period still continued to independently scribe their own records of sermons. The emergence of new tape cassette technology in the 1970s enabled members of the church to shape their own spiritual subjectivity through disciplines of electronic recording and repeated listening. Throughout this period, texts could be put to a variety of uses; both to establish centralized bureaucracies and as the medium of less regulated, local-level spiritualities. The past hundred years of Nazaretha life have displayed laity and clergy's creative use of texts to shape religious life. Doubtless, years to come will continue to evince the church's fresh uses of the *word* to knit people together.