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POWER IN THE HOUSE
Performing succession in the Nazareth Baptist Church (South Africa)*

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ABSTRACT. In the Nazareth Baptist Church (NBC), a large South African indigenous church, leadership is based on hereditary charisma. Ever since the death of the Church's founder, Isaiah Shembe, in 1935, his male descendants have claimed his extraordinary spiritual quality. However, conflicts over these claims have led to a major church split and several minor fissions. In this article, I employ the extended case method to analyse the contested succession of Vimbeni Shembe, the founder's grandson, in light of earlier successions in the history of the NBC. In terms of Victor Turner's model of social drama, multiple actors have attempted to redress the crisis – the death of the charismatic leader – through legal and politico-ritual processes leading to contradictory outcomes. Focusing on church assemblies, I argue that the performance of a chief who framed succession in terms of the house politics of polygamous homesteads convinced a majority of Church members to acknowledge one candidate as their new leader rather than his rival, who had won the case in court. Ritualized performance produced charismatic authority and established the new leader in social practice. In Max Weber's terms, the routinization of charisma relied on traditional rather than legal authority, and African realignments ensured continuity of charismatic rupture and rapture in the NBC.

On 27 March 2011, Vimbeni Shembe, the head of the majority branch of the Nazareth Baptist Church (NBC), died. At his funeral, local chief Mqoqi Ngcobo declared, 'Your leader is from the house [Zulu: *indlu*] of the Moon, he is not from outside […] I have the full right as a chief of the people [*inkosi yesizwe*] to do this. Your leader, Nazarites, is Mduduzi Shembe'.[1] While the chief's claim that his position empowered him to announce the successor was rather questionable, his declaration pre-empted the announcement of Vela Shembe, whom Vimbeni had named as successor in a Deed of Nomination, by the church's lawyer.[2] Against Vela's legal claim, the chief positioned Mduduzi within the house politics of the Shembe family.

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1 Ngcobo (2001a). Nazarites speak Zulu in Church. All quotations from Church proceedings are translations of transcripts of DVD recordings sold in Church. My thanks to Brilliant Mdedu and Sicelo Mpungose, who transcribed and translated them.

2 Ngcobo is the chief of the Qadi, the group on whose territory the funeral took place. As such, he was supposed to greet the guests of honour right at the beginning of the proceedings, and he used the opportunity to announce Mduduzi as new leader. I will elaborate on his position in church politics below.

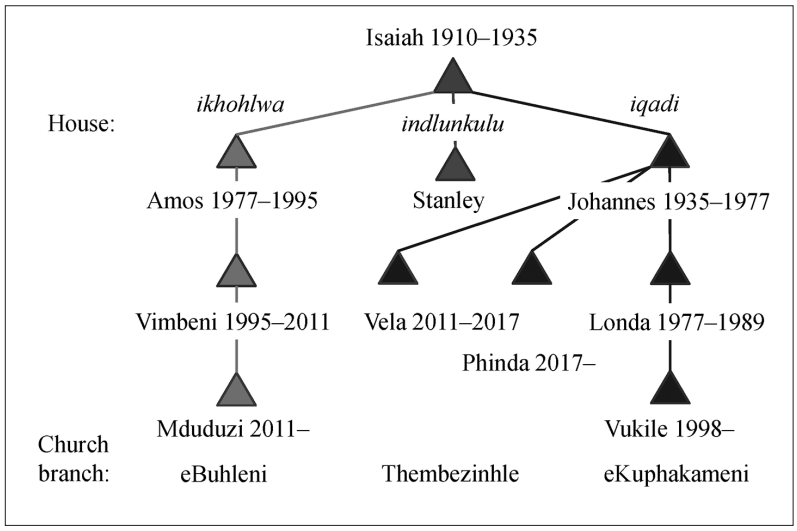
After the death of Isaiah Shembe, known as 'Opener of the Way' ('uMqaliwendlela') in the Church, his son Johannes Galilee, called 'Sun' ('iLanga'), had become the leader of the Church.[3] This followed the logic of house politics because he was the son of a high-ranking wife, and hence house, within Isaiah's polygamous homestead (*umuzi*).[4] After the death of Johannes, Amos, called 'Moon' ('iNyangayezulu'), a son of a lower-ranking wife of Isaiah's, established a breakaway branch and built a new Church centre called 'eBuhleni' ('place of beauty'). Again this followed the logic of house politics, as the sons of minor houses tended to establish break-away homesteads of their own. However, the majority of Nazarites followed Amos to eBuhleni, only a minority staying with Londa, a son of Johannes, within the house of the Sun at eKuphakameni (place of elevation), the original headquarters established by Isaiah. The split was violent, and the church's branches have lived in enmity ever since, with Nazarites regarding the rival leader as an apostate, wrongly claiming to have inherited Isaiah's divine mission and spiritual power. Mduduzi, son of Vimbeni and grandson of Amos, was from the house of the Moon, and hence the legitimate new leader of the eBuhleni branch of the NBC – that was the core message of the chief's speech. Vimbeni had nominated Vela, and the lawyer presented written proof at the funeral, but Vela was the son of Johannes and hence from the rival house of the Sun. At the funeral, the conflict over the succession entered the public stage.

Leadership in the NBC is based on hereditary charisma, conceptualized in form of the spiritual Shembe, a singular, eternal entity thought to be present in the current leader.[5] While this ensures continuity, it does not solve the question of who should inherit this extraordinary, charismatic quality. The fact that a chief and a lawyer represented the claimants at the funeral calls to mind Max Weber's (1978:248) idea that the hereditary routinization of charisma leads 'in the direction either of traditionalization or of legalization'. While charisma as a personal quality has long been reframed as the product of social relations (Bourdieu 1987), Weber's ideal types of authority and the problem of routinization have remained crucial points of reference (Schoon and West 2017). In recent works on African Christianities, which often focus on Pentecostal-Charismatic

3 As part of the Zulu system of respectful behaviour (*ukuhlonipha*), wives have to avoid the names of their father-in-law, as well as similar sounding words. In the NBC, leaders are never addressed with their personal names, but with their church names, or their titles: Father (*baba*), Lord/King/Chief (*inkosi*) or Lord of Lords (*inkosi yamakhosi*), like Jesus in the Bible (Rev. 17:14). In addition, members avoid the leader's personal name. For example, my research assistant Mduduzi Buthelezi replaced his personal name with a praise name of his clan, Shenge, once Mduduzi Shembe became head of the NBC.

4 Actually, Johannes was the son of the second ranked wife, but the son of Isaiah's great wife was considered unsuitable for the leadership. I will discuss the details below.

5 As Shembe is also the family name, there are many Shembes, but only one can be the carrier of the spiritual entity.



Shembe dynasty

churches, charisma has been linked to textual practices and legal or bureaucratic authority.[6]

In this article, I analyse the social production of charismatic authority in the performative practice of the funeral and other Church assemblies. By emphasizing the importance of traditional authority and house politics and hence African realignments, I follow Matthew Engelke's (2010:177) critique of the Pentecostal paradigm for over-emphasizing the 'break with the past' in African Christianities. For Joel Robbins (2003:224), the focus on Pentecostalism enables the development of 'an anthropology of rupture' as an antidote to the 'continuity thinking' he alleges dominates cultural anthropology. To illustrate 'unsophisticated continuity arguments based on incautious judgements of similarity', Robbins (2003:230) refers to Bengt Sundkler's comparison of African prophets with Zulu diviners. However, Sundkler, a scholar of religion and a missionary, not only compared Isaiah Shembe, founder of the NBC, with African diviners and chiefs, he also charged him with claiming messianic status. The combination of both the continuity of the African world-view and the messianic break with Christianity, led to his infamous theological judgement, according to which the 'syncretistic sect' leads Africans back to 'heathenism' (Sundkler 1961:297). Not least in reaction to that judgement, most recent scholarship on the NBC has emphasized the Church's continuity with Christianity and its break with African traditions.[7] In contrast, I argue that a messianic rupture established a new path to salvation that reverberates with Zulu

6 See Kirsch (2008), Spies (2017), and for the NBC, Cabrita (2014).
7 Cabrita (2014), Heuser (2003), Tishken (2015)

culture (Echtler 2020, in press), precisely because I attend 'carefully to the meanings people use in constructing their actions' (Robbins 2003:229).

The succession conflict following the death of Vimbeni in 2011 was the decisive event in the life of the Church during the time of my research, and it shaped my understanding of power politics within the NBC.[8] Drawing upon the extended case-study method of the Manchester School of Anthropology (van Velsen 1967), I link the conflict of 2011 with earlier successions. I treat 'each case as a stage in an on-going process of social relations' (Gluckman 1961:9) in order to capture 'how emergence and reproduction […] are generated continuously in social orders […] so often with quite certain yet quite unpredictable outcomes' (Handelman 2005:79). The death of the leader breached the order of the Church and initiated the crisis stage of a social drama in the form of a conflict over the succession, which various actors sought to redress by means of judicial, political and ritual processes. In Victor Turner's (1987:98) model, the existing 'cultural devices' of redress are 'subject to manipulation and amendment', while the outcome – reintegration or schism – remains an open question. Indeterminacy is also part of Jeffrey Alexander's (2006) model of social action as cultural performance, according to which performances fail unless the actors skilfully manage the stagecraft, set the scene and deliver their scripts convincingly, thereby fusing background representations and audience, extending cultural meanings and eliciting an emotional response.

In Alexander's model, the audience's interpretations are crucial for the success or failure of a social performance. In the social drama of the succession conflict within the NBC, different audiences, judges and Church members respectively made decisions in procedures for judicial and political or ritual redress. These procedures also differed with regard to the cultural representations mobilized in their performances. In judicial redress in court, scripts referred to legal documents and authentic signatures, whereas at Church assemblies, sermons recalled Church history and doctrine in order to determine the succession. In this politico-ritual redress procedure, the idea of house politics took centre stage. House politics refers to conflicts between half-brothers born to the different wives of the head of a homestead and hence to distinct houses, the term 'house' referring to both the segment within the patrilineal descent group and to the building within the polygamous homestead. Conflicts between houses introduce leadership dynamics into the wider descent groups, of which houses are the points of fission, hence house politics is crucial for understanding Zulu social relations as process rather than structure (Kuper 1993). In the NBC, the major Church split originated in the ri-

8 My research focused on the Church's assemblies. I participated in the assemblies at eBuhleni (July 2008), Dannhauser (August 2008), iNhlangakazi (January 2009) and Ntabankulu (March 2009). I missed Vimbeni's funeral, but travelled to Gospel in April 2011, and participated in the pilgrimage to iNhlangakazi cut short at Homies in January 2012 and in the assembly at the new holy mountain iKhenana, in January 2017. All church sites are located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, with the exception of Ntabankulu, which is located in Eastern Cape.

valry of two half-brothers, Amos and Johannes, and their houses within the homestead and Church of the founder Isaiah.

Finally, procedures for redressing the crisis of the succession differed with regard to their closure. In court, the judgement decided the succession, making Vela the legal head of the Church. In the Church assemblies, Church members acknowledged their leader ritually, displaying their subordination by kneeling in front of either Mduduzi or Vela (Rappaport 1979:199). They became 'persons of a certain kind, bearing specific commitments' to a specific leader (Lambek 2012:348). For Weber (1978:242), the 'recognition on the part of those subject to authority' decides the 'validity of charisma'. While this recognition 'is freely given', it is also the duty of the followers to recognize the leader's extraordinary quality as a 'matter of complete personal devotion'. As the vast majority of Nazarites chose to kneel in front of Mduduzi already in 2011, they made him the new Lord of the NBC.

Earlier successions

Isaiah Shembe was born around 1870. His parents held high rank in the Hlubi chiefdom, but Isaiah claimed Ntungwa identity for his patrilineal descent group, a statement that he was also 'of pure Zulu breed'.[9] After the British destroyed the Hlubi chiefdom in 1873, Isaiah's family fled the colony of Natal and became the tenants of a white farmer in the Orange Free State. There, Isaiah founded his own household and married four women (Papini 1999:268, 275). After the upheaval of the second Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, he left his wives and became a travelling preacher and healer. Associating first with a Wesleyan congregation and then with the African National Baptist Church, Isaiah moved back to Natal, where he founded his own Nazareth Baptist Church around 1910 (Cabrita 2014:93–97).

As 'Opener of the Way', Isaiah proclaimed a path to salvation that challenged both the African authorities and the missionaries. In Church liturgy and hymns, he explicitly criticized the sins of precolonial rulers, especially the Zulu kings, which called forth God's punishment and caused the desolation of colonial rule (Echtler in press:89–91). In the 1920s, Sabbath worship and sacred dances, increasingly in neo-traditional African uniforms, became the signature practices of the Church, as they were believed to open the gates of paradise. Both practices marked a break with mainline mission Christianity: proper Christians did not dance and wore European clothing; Sabbath worship was restricted to small, radical groups regarded as a threat to colonial rule (Echtler 2020:142–144). The very radical nature of this break lay at the heart of the controversy over Isaiah's ascribed or proclaimed messianic status, an issue that has shaped local

[9] Hexham and Oosthuizen (1996:1). See also Papini (1999:261–263).

discourse on the Church since the 1930s, as well as academic interpretations since the late 1940s (Echtler 2020:151–160).

Increasingly, Isaiah routinized his revolutionary charisma through traditionalization. Turning from a threat to patriarchy into its guardian (Echtler 2016:240–242), Isaiah established his own version of 'the conservative code of *ukuhlonipha*, or respect for seniors, elders, and political authorities' (Cabrita 2010:30; italics in the original). However, Nazarite morality centred on Isaiah, whose descent group God had chosen to redeem the nation the Zulu kings had gathered together and who possessed the biblical horn that was used to anoint the chiefs (Hexham and Oosthuizen 1996:2–3, 235). Rather than providing a 'cultural sanctuary' for 'old Zulu values' (Vilakazi 1986:54), Isaiah partook in the creation of a moral ethnicity that was intimately connected with the construction of a Zulu nationalist ideology (Lonsdale 1994, Wright 2008). Isaiah's charisma legitimized the patriarchal authority that had been compromised by colonial rule, while the NBC turned into an institution of patriarchal control of both ends of the migrant labour system: urban hostels and rural homelands.

Isaiah had three sons: Stanley, with his chief wife from the great house (*indlunkulu*); Johannes, with his *iqadi* wife; and Amos, with his *ikhohlwa* wife.[10] According to the colonial codification of the rules of inheritance, the great house provided the heir, followed by the *iqadi* house, whereas the sons of the *ikhohlwa* house never succeeded to the position of homestead head (Krige 1950:39–41). Before his death in 1935, Isaiah appointed his son Johannes as his successor. However, as he had not signed his will, a state court decided that 'Stanley, as the son of his chief wife', would inherit everything, even though he was 'mentally deficient' (Roberts 1936:26, 51). After the court's decision had left the Church without effective leadership, Isaiah's lawyer drew up a notarial Deed of Trust, Stanley surrendered his inheritance, and Johannes was appointed Titular Head of the Church and sole trustee of its property. The Deed also specified that an executive committee 'should elect a successor' from among those 'recommended by the late Titular Head' in the future.[11]

Thus Johannes Shembe became the legal head of the NBC, but he still had to establish his authority. While he claimed to have inherited the 'gift of healing' from his father (Roberts 1936:111), other charismatics challenged his exclusive claim to power, influential ministers strove to curtail his charismatic behaviour within the new bureaucratic structure, and his half-brother Amos tried to establish a breakaway church

10 Roberts (1936:26–27). In the ideal-type spatial layout of the Zulu homestead, the houses of the wives are arranged in horseshoe-shape around the central cattle enclosure. Looking up from the entrance located at the lowest point, the *iqadi* wife lives on the right hand side, the *ikhohlwa* wife on the left hand side, and the great house (*indlunkulu*) is located on top. If there are more than three wives, these are associated with the three sections, and, as each wife lives in her own building and founds her own segment within the descent group, each of the three sections will then consist of several wives or houses.

11 High Court of South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal Division, Pietermaritzburg [High Court] (2018:9)

(Cabrita 2014:192–194). Especially at the beginning, women were his most ardent followers, and they even used violence to secure his position (Jarvis 2014). At the same time, Johannes tried to establish 'a divinely ordained canon' through 'highly codified, centrally managed scriptures' (Cabrita 2014:188). A decisive step in that regard was the publication of the Church's hymnal in 1940. Hymn 220, written by Johannes in 1938, contains Isaiah's dying prayer, in which he asks God to '[r]aise up someone else in my house to lead your people […] My flesh is weary, it will lie in the grave, my spirit will rise and be clothed with a new flesh. I was born in eternity, at all times I shall be there' (Muller 2010:201). In this hymn, Johannes conceptualized hereditary charisma as a singular spiritual entity present in one of the descendants of Isaiah. The concept became the core of Nazarite faith, and Church leaders proved their charismatic authority through miraculous deeds as acknowledged in members' testimonies (Echtler 2020:145–148). Next to solidifying his charismatic authority, Johannes continued his father's policy of building alliances with the traditional authorities. The number of chiefs in the Church increased, as did the church sites built on chiefs' land. Johannes established a yearly cycle of Church assemblies and, like the Zulu kings, who 'established royal towns across the country, each under a specific wife' (Kuper 1993:479), he extended control over his domain by marrying 'many wives, building the homesteads of Shembe'.[12] Taking heed of Robbins' (2003:230) warning to avoid 'incautious judgements of similarity', I note that several Nazarite chiefs stated that Johannes had 'the status of a Zulu king' in Church and that he was 'called "King" (Nkosi) […] by all the chiefs in Zululand whether members or not' (Oosthuizen 1981a:27).

After his eldest son, who had been 'groomed to be his successor', was killed, Johannes did not appoint another successor (Oosthuizen 1981a:52). When he died in 1976, Amos, his half-brother, and Londa, one of his sons, both claimed leadership of the NBC. Amos acted as its head from Johannes' burial in January 1977 onward, was elected Titular Head by Church officials, and was acknowledged as leader with shouts of 'Amen' from the congregations at the assemblies in July and October 1977. Londa contested the decision in court, where he argued that the Church is not 'democratic' but a 'chief and tribe type of Church' (Oosthuizen 1981a:12). Being a son affiliated to the 'Great House' of Johannes, '[t]his alone, according to Bantu Law and Custom, should have been sufficient recommendation' for Londa (Oosthuizen 1981b:20). Accordingly, in 1982, the court declared him head of the Church and gave him control over eKuphakameni, the Church's headquarters (Tishken 2006:91).

Johannes' chief wife and several chiefs supported Londa's claim (Oosthuizen 1981a:20, 25–26), despite which Londa had far fewer followers than Amos, and his success in court did nothing to help him. According to one of Amos' supporters, Londa 'has no following, and each time this simple truth is demonstrated to him, he runs to the

12 Interview with Bhekinkosi (alias), iNhlangakazi, 22 January 2009 (transcript by Sicelo Mpungose, translation by Sinenhlanhla Mkhize)

white man's court, which as far as we are concerned is not competent to decide on the Shembe issue' (Oosthuizen 1981a:54–55). Gerhardus Oosthuizen (1981a:60, 69) argued that both contenders lacked charisma and that, choosing between 'ordinary persons', Amos as the elder and son of the founder 'became the choice for the largest majority who as traditionalists are paternalistic in their approach'. While the crisis was still unresolved, Amos started to move 'around the country posing as the Titular Head and wearing my late father's robes', as Londa complained (Oosthuizen 1981a:24). He took control of the Church's central stages, the assemblies, and his public performances were validated by the congregations, who ritually acknowledged him as leader, the Lord of the NBC. In his claim to the leadership, Amos was supported not only by a 'high-level coterie of ministers' (Cabrita 2014:325), but also by a number of chiefs, most notably Mzonjani Ngcobo, Chief of the Qadi, on whose territory eKuphakameni was located.[13] Members of the Qadi participated in the violent clashes between the different church factions on the side of Amos, while Mzonjani provided the latter with a site to build his own headquarters, eBuhleni, after the latter had been ousted from eKuphakameni (Oosthuizen 1981a:13, Cabrita 2014:331).

While Londa challenged Amos' claim to power as 'slavishly attached to western formulations' and as violating the Church's 'authentic Zulu tradition' (Oosthuizen 1981a:22), Amos succeeded in convincing the majority of Nazarites of his legitimacy, not least because he played the social game of succession according to the practical logic of house politics. In contrast to the codified rules of colonial law, precolonial house politics were what Bourdieu in another context calls '"regular" without being in any way the product of the obedience to rules' (1990:53). Rules of inheritance and the ranking of wives and houses were only one strategic resource, as the mobilization of followers offered the means to establish one's succession in defiance of the rules. As Isaiah's son by the *ikhohlwa* house, Amos had already tried to establish a breakaway branch of the Church early in Johannes' reign, but without success. Now, with Johannes dead and himself installed as temporary head of the NBC, he was in a much better position to try again. However, in order to become the true Lord of the Church, he had to establish the idea that he had now inherited Isaiah's charisma.

When Amos claimed that he 'sees and hears the spirits of the Prophet [Isaiah] and the late Johannes G. Shembe', only 'illiterate and superstitious' church members believed him, Londa stated in court in 1978 (Oosthuizen 1981a:23). Within a short time, however, members' visions validated Amos' spiritual unity with Isaiah and Johannes, and their testimonies proved his ability to work miracles. Moreover, a new hagiography of Isaiah, which circulated in the eBuhleni branch in the 1980s, re-wrote the story of his religious calling. According to the new version, heavenly voices ordered him to return to his wives to father both Amos and Johannes in order to ensure the future leadership

13 For the variable and heterogeneous composition of the chiefdoms, sometimes also called 'clans' or 'tribes', in Natal and Zululand, see Wright (2008).

of the Church, thus giving divine sanction to Amos's succession to Johannes (Cabrita 2014: 334, Echtler 2020:147–148). Amos broke away and established his own homestead, and the vast majority of Nazarites followed him, acknowledging him as their Lord, the true spiritual Shembe. He succeeded in doing what one of Londa's followers had already suspected, namely 'to shift the leadership from the house of Galilee [Johannes] to his own house' (Oosthuizen 1981a:55).

When Amos died in 1995, his son Vimbeni became leader of the eBuhleni branch. Nyathikazi, another son of Johannes, contested the succession, but failed to gather a following and lost his case in court. In this succession conflict, Vimbeni was hailed as the return of the founder Isaiah in a church service and was supported by Gqibokubi Shembe, regarded as the last surviving son of Isaiah in eBuhleni, who recounted how his father foretold the shift in leadership from the house of Johannes to that of Amos (Heuser 2007:93). This history of contested successions provided the background that actors selectively mobilized in their performances in the wake of Vimbeni's death.

The funeral

After his death on 27 March 2011, Vimbeni Shembe's funeral took place in eBuhleni on 3 April. For the public function a stage was erected for the guests of honour; in front of it, around 10 000 Nazarites, clad in their white church gowns, sat on mats on the ground, as they do in church services. Speakers included representatives of the Church, the All African Federation of Churches and the Swazi king, as well as Jacob Zuma, President of South Africa, Zweli Mkhize, Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, both from the African National Congress, and Mangosuthi Buthelezi, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party.

The first speaker was Mqoqi Ngcobo, who, as Chief of the Qadi, was asked to welcome the guests to his land. In a fifteen-minute address to the congregated Nazarites, he recalled the time of the Church split. He said that when Amos was chased away from eKuphakameni he fled to Mbeka, the homestead of the Qadi Chief, who provided him with land to build his own homestead, eBuhleni. Amos 'went with the Nazarites. You never left him. So I am saying that this homestead belongs to the Moon and his children' (Ngcobo 2011a). Ngcobo cautioned the Church authorities not to think

> that you can take it away, just because of your position, because you sit in front in church, because you are an important minister in church, that you can take away this home in the direction that suits you […] you cannot just do what you like in the land of the chiefs (Ngcobo 2011a).

He announced that he would do today what his father had done in 1977 when Amos 'was appointed by the Chief of the Qadi, my father Mzonjana Ngcobo' (Ngcobo 2011a). He urged the Nazarites to stay united, warned them about Vimbeni's lawyer, who want-

ed to cause a dispute and challenged those who disagreed with him to take him to court. He concluded with the announcement of Mduduzi's succession, cited above.

In his speech, Ngcobo used his oratorical skills to build up increasing momentum, leading the Nazarites towards the culminating announcement of Vimbeni's successor. His script marshalled the most controversial and emotionally charged event in the Church's history, the schism, and thus framed the succession in terms of house politics, that is, as a conflict between the respective houses of Amos and Johannes. He repeatedly emphasized that eBuhleni's homestead belonged to Amos' descendants, just as eKuphakameni belonged to the house of Johannes. Ngcobo's script made a link with his positionality. He wore the church gown of a chief, and he was not just any chief in the Church, but the Chief of the Qadi, the son of the man who appointed Amos, according to his own representation of the Church's history. He claimed the right to announce the successor as a chief of the people or nation. His claim rested on his position in the Church, as well as on his position as Chief of the Qadi, as the chiefs have controlled the former homelands, about one third of the territory of KwaZulu-Natal, through the Ingonyama Trust, since 1994. In his speech, then, Chief Ngcobo put the full weight of his traditional authority behind Mduduzi Shembe.

Responding to Ngcobo's announcement, about a third of the Nazarites present went to their knees and shouted 'Amen! You are holy!', thus acknowledging Mduduzi as the Lord of the NBC and the new vessel of the spiritual Shembe. Some started dancing, most notably Gqibokubi Shembe, the last surviving son of Isaiah and an honoured elder in the eBuhleni branch, who danced on stage in front of the guests of honour. When the commotion had died down, Minister Vilakazi, acting as Master of Ceremonies, cited hymn 220, the main expression of hereditary charisma in the NBC, and suggested that it spoke to what had just happened.

The third speaker was Zwelabantu Buthelezi, Vimbeni's lawyer. He stated that Vimbeni had appointed his successor in a Deed of Nomination in 2000 and that he had also written him a letter three weeks ago. He declared that anyone could see the letter to ascertain it was not a forgery, and that even though Chief Ngcobo did not want him to speak here, it was necessary to honour Vimbeni's wish, adding that, 'If I am lying before these millions of people, Shembe is here, he can even kill me' (Buthelezi 2011). He then read the letter, in which Vimbeni instructed him to declare at his funeral that 'the one to lead the Church of the Nazarites […] is Vela Shembe' (Buthelezi 2011). While Buthelezi wore a church gown at the funeral, he was there not as a member. When he announced Vela, son of Johannes, as the new leader, as nominated by Vimbeni and hence in accordance with the legal constitution of the Church, the assembled Nazarites reacted with silence.

Later in the proceedings, Makhosini Qwabe, Chief of the Qwabe, spoke on behalf of all chiefs in the Church. Referring to an earlier incident when Vimbeni was allegedly tricked into passing control of Church funds to Vukile, leader of the eKuphakameni branch (High Court 2018:37–38), Chief Qwabe recounted how Vimbeni turned to the

chiefs for help after he had been 'called to some tall buildings in Durban and was made to sign some documents he did not understand', and the chiefs confronted 'the lawyer, who was just here to announce another name', to set things straight (Qwabe 2011). With regard to Vimbeni's letter, he stated that when he visited him three weeks ago he was in no condition to write. Comparing former times, when nothing happened in the Church without the knowledge of the chiefs, with its present situation, he declared that 'we as chiefs in the Church wish that [the] Nazarite religion is not torn apart by these agreements' (Qwabe 2011). In his script, Qwabe questioned the authenticity of the letter and, by recounting past attempts to manipulate Vimbeni, he called into question the legitimacy of the Deed of Nomination, despite its formal legality. By linking Vela's nomination to the attempt at a hostile takeover by the eKuphakameni branch, he reinforced the framing of the succession conflict as house politics. In addition, he positioned the traditional authority of the chiefs as the force defending the Nazarite religion against the legalistic schemes of modern urbanites.

In fusing cultural representations, script, actor and audience, the chiefs were more successful than the lawyer, as numerous Nazarites acknowledged their candidate as the new Lord of the Church right away. One factor was the temporal order, as Ngcobo managed to announce Mduduzi before Buthelezi's announcement of Vela. Another factor were the actors themselves. Reflecting their social roles in the performance, the chiefs were longstanding Church members of the highest rank and were well versed in delivering Church oratory. In addition, the chiefs controlled the land on which a number of church sites were located, not least eBuhleni, where many Nazarites owned houses they used during Church assemblies. In contrast, the lawyer was an outsider, a representative of the legal system whose competence in deciding Church matters had been rejected when the eBuhleni branch of the NBC was established. It thus remains an open question what would have happened if Vela had been announced by a high-ranking Church official at the funeral or, even better, by Vimbeni himself at an earlier Church function.

The decisive factor in Ngcobo's performance was the mobilization of the frame of house politics, which rang true because of the concrete history of recent struggles within the eBuhleni branch and the contested successions in the Church as a whole. One faction within the eBuhleni branch had promoted better relations or even reunification with the eKuphakameni branch, and Vela had been accused of trying to unseat Vimbeni (High Court 2018:35). Another faction, led by the chiefs, thwarted these attempts, at least according to Qwabe, who interpreted Vela's nomination as another such attempt. Hence Ngcobo's support for Mduduzi was convincing to many in the audience, although his claims regarding the role of his father and his own right to appoint the Church leader could be called into question. As the projection of cultural meaning and emotional involvement depended on the audience's interpretation and judgement of the performance, the Nazarites invested 'their affect in the performance' of Ngcobe because of the 'shared memories' of living through the split and the ongoing enmity between the Church's branches (Alexander 2006:76). Sibongile, a women's leader born

in the 1930s, recalled how she witnessed the violence of the church split at eKuphakameni in 1977, how she followed Amos to the homestead of the Chief of the Qadi and then helped build the new home at eBuhleni, and how both her husband and her son were killed because they were followers of Amos. The new conflict over the succession pained her because she knew that 'these people search for those who are in favour of the Lord and seek to harm them'.[14] It would take more than a Deed of Nomination and a letter to convince her that the eBuhleni leader should come from the house of Johannes.

Mduduzi's performance at the funeral, where the contestants for leadership were revealed to the public, assured him a head start, but he had to expand and solidify his leadership. He still had to prove that he had indeed inherited Isaiah's extraordinary qualities. Charismatic authority is relational, based on the followers' recognition that is 'freely given' and 'a matter of complete personal devotion' (Weber 1978:242). For the performance of charismatic authority, the audience's reaction is decisive. Already at the funeral, a sizeable number of Nazarites had committed themselves to Mduduzi through the ritualized acknowledgement of kneeling and shouting 'You are holy!' This formed the basis on which Mduduzi had to establish his leadership of the eBuhleni branch of the NBC.

First Sabbath

The Sabbath service is the central communal worship in the NBC. Celebrated weekly in all local temples, it consists of a morning and afternoon service involving two hours each of readings of the liturgy, singing and preaching. Sermons delivered by male preachers, evangelists or ministers consist mainly of moral lectures and stories of the miraculous deeds of the leaders. Women lead groups of virgins or married women, but are excluded from the higher positions in the Church's hierarchy, and they preach on a few special occasions only. In the Durban region, many Nazarites attend the Sabbath service not at the local temples but at eBuhleni, especially when the leader is present. On 9 April 2011, the first Saturday after the funeral, the temple at eBuhleni was packed with about two thousand Nazarites.[15]

The Evangelist Mkhwanazi started the morning sermon with 'I choose the Lord of eKuphakameni', the standard opening of every sermon, and continued, 'Father, Lord of Lords Lightning [uNyaziyezulu, Mduduzi's Church's name], I am grateful being somebody for you, though I am nobody to others. We are holy people in bad times' (Mkhwanazi 2011). He then sang hymn 131, and the congregation joined in: 'Lord Father, hear

14 Interview with Sibongile (alias), Homies, 19 January 2012 (transcript and translation Sicelo Mpungose)

15 This is my estimate, based on watching a DVD of the event and my experience of many Sabbath services at the temple of eBuhleni.

us, protect your homestead, the village of eKuphakameni, and rout out all its enemies. […] Erase them, Lord, from the Book of Life' (Muller 2010:135).

Mkhwanazi thanked Chiefs Ngcobo and Qwabe, and stated that Church Officials were not 'inaugurated to point out the next Shembe' but nevertheless he told a story about how an ancestor had already appeared to him in March 2010 and pointed out Mduduzi to him as the next Shembe (Mkhwanazi 2011). For the remainder of the sermon he scolded the congregation for breaking the Sabbath laws, the men for cutting their hair and the women for inappropriate clothing and behaviour. He criticized the Church officials, reminding them that they will be held responsible for the sins of their congregations, and demanded respect for the ancestors, as the sins of the living will expel them from heaven. He ended as follows:

> Even when our Father [Vimbeni] was dying, he had to complain about us. Please, let us try that our beautiful young Father, Lightning, be well. Hey! Go! Then you will be ruined! Go with the paper! Holy people of the Lord, I thank my fathers who joined the heavenly beings that I should kneel here today (Mkhwanazi 2011).

In the afternoon, Minister Gcwensa asked both Vimbeni and Mduduzi to see him standing before them, and added: 'I thank you, Lord of Lords, for letting my eyes see you as you were born for the fifth time' (Gcwensa 2011). He started his sermon with hymn 34, which links Isaiah the redeemer with the biblical story of the coming of Christ (Muller 2010:73). He quoted from the Bible (Mal. 3:1): 'suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple', and asked, 'Is this not what just happened, Nazarites?' With reference to Joshua choosing to serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15), he asked everyone to make their own decisions and declared that 'I and my house we will go with eBuhleni' (Gcwensa 2011). He then told at length a story of three Nazarite men who went looking for Satan, not realizing that he was with them underneath their church gowns, and who finally killed each other over money. He concluded: 'You are now leaving eBuhleni just because of money. Let us stay here […] we will leave here when we are carried to the grave' (Gcwensa 2011). After the sermon, Mduduzi entered the temple and blessed the Nazarites. The whole congregation greeted him on their knees, shouting 'You are holy!'

In the Sabbath service, Mduduzi's followers took control of the means of symbolic production, that is, the temple of eBuhleni, the central stage for church performances. The main actors used their position as church officials to deliver sermons, a performative genre they were well versed in. Their scripts marshalled church hymns and traditions, as well as the Bible and personal visions, to present Mduduzi as the new incarnation of the spiritual Shembe. While Gcwensa emphasized the importance of personal commitment, and Mkhwanazi highlighted communal liability, both stressed the dire consequences of a wrong choice of leader. Salvation was to be had with Mduduzi at eBuhleni only; if Nazarites chose paper over ancestors, or money over biblical prophets, they were choosing to follow Satan to damnation. Although Mkhwanazi stated that Church officials cannot appoint a new leader, both used the performance to acknowl-

edge Mduduzi as the Lord of the Church, and they succeeded in projecting their interpretation to the assembled Nazarites, who likewise acknowledged Mduduzi.

Failed anointing

On the next Saturday, 16 April 2011, Mduduzi travelled to Gospel, where new NBC leaders are anointed. In contrast, Vela lacked control over the temples, and hence over the stages on which he could present himself as the Church's leader. Although his mother had sided with Amos and he had grown up in eBuhleni, he belonged to the house of the Sun, an identification he underscored with his choice of Church name, Sunrays (imiSebeyelanga). Without performative opportunities in the eBuhleni branch, Vela relied on his strong legal claim and obtained a court order prohibiting Mduduzi to proceed with the rituals of anointing.

When Mduduzi entered the temple at Gospel for the Sabbath service, the congregation greeted him as their Lord. As the trip to Gospel had been announced at short notice, fewer than a thousand Nazarites attended.[16] Minister Chiliza, the leading official in the region, started with hymn 139: 'He has arrived, who is followed by the nations. […] Acclaim him, you men, acclaim him, all nations' (Muller 2010:141). He pointed out that this service is different from all the others because Gospel 'is of heavenly gold' and 'our Lord comes out complete', and he emphasized that in church 'no one can become Lord unless he passes through this homestead and acquires the power of lordship' (Chiliza 2011). He refuted rumours that he had gone over to the new faction and told the story of how Isaiah had dedicated a white ox for the installation of his successor at Gospel, but would not reveal any details about the anointment because of spies seated in the congregation. Then it started raining heavily, and Mduduzi ended the service with hymn 7: 'The court case has been heard all over the earth; rest and be joyful all you people. […] The Holy People set off from the place of the Nazaretha; they left to meet their Lord, who came on the clouds' (Muller 2010:53, 55). The next morning, Mduduzi told the congregation that 'We respect the courts of this country, but God of eKuphakameni will conquer all' (Shembe 2011), and Minister Nzama stressed that they were not concerned because 'the Lord who descended from heaven to be a person sits amongst us' (Nzama 2011).

Mduduzi's trip to Gospel was a failure because the intended performance, the anointing, did not take place. Nevertheless, Mduduzi showed that he, rather than Vela, controlled the means of production, that is, both the stage and the actors necessary to perform the anointing. The Nazarites present, as well as local and regional Church officials, acknowledged him as their leader. Crucially, he proved his charismatic quality and divine mission by making it rain. In the oral traditions of the Church there are many

16 I was amongst them.

stories about Isaiah's rain-making, and in January 2012 Nazarites told me that the rain in Gospel had ended a severe drought in the region, with even white farmers thanking Mduduzi for the miracle of rain, which proved beyond doubt that he was indeed the vessel of the spiritual Shembe (Echtler in press:92–93).

Holy mountain denied

Following the cycle of assemblies, Nazarites gathered around Mduduzi at the important sites of the Church throughout 2011. Vela's reach, on the other hand, was largely restricted to the temple of Thembezinhle, after which his new branch was named. At the closing of the July assembly at eBuhleni, Minister Shozi told the congregation to post on Facebook that 'I and the house of my father, we belong to Lightning' (Shozi 2011) and asked 'What are you waiting for? Are you waiting for the result of the case? For us, it does not matter what the outcome of the case is, we will never turn from Lightning'. Mqoqi Ngcobo demanded commitment: 'Leave us alone if you still have doubts. The judge will change nothing, this here is the only Shembe, there is no other'. And he provided evidence: 'As I am speaking, the road from KwaMashu all the way here is jammed with traffic, so who is our Father if not Lightning' (Ngcobo 2011b)? Mduduzi controlled the Church's stages, his audience outnumbered Vela's by far, and important actors had committed themselves to him in public; but then he suffered a setback.

In January 2012, Mduduzi failed to ascend the holy mountain of iNhlangakazi, where Isaiah had made his covenant with God. Ignoring a court order, the eBuhleni branch had left for the pilgrimage, but halted at Homies, usually the last stop before ascending the mountain. In earlier years the different NBC branches had shared iNhlangakazi: first the Nazarites of eKuphakameni would stay on the mountain, then those of eBuhleni. However, in 2012 those from eKuphakameni did not leave. Rumours in Mduduzi's camp had it that they had sent their women and children home, were armed, and had actually shot at a car from eBuhleni. At the Sabbath service on 14 January, Mduduzi commanded that the rituals be performed at Homies, claiming that 'Whoever thinks I did not climb the iNhlangakazi mountain is just wasting his time. I am on top of it now. […] We are here at Homies. This is our mountain' (Shembe 2012). Minister Nzama explained that, 'If we were not following Jehovah, we would have fought to climb the mountain, but our Father [Mduduzi] told us that we should not go past here. But no one stopped us' (Nzama 2012). Like the trip to Gospel, the pilgrimage to the mountain was a failed, or at least a skewed performance. The Nazarites of eBuhleni performed the rituals but at the wrong place, as the proper stage was denied to them by their old rivals from eKuphakameni. Rather than pressing on, as their numbers would have permitted, Mduduzi avoided confrontation by replacing the mountain. This replacement, like the foundation of a second New Jerusalem at eBuhleni, constituted a rupture in the configuration of sacred space, as the presence of the current Shembe

trumped Isaiah's foundational acts. Nzama acknowledged the breach when he said that 'the reason we fight so much is the covenant between Shembe and God', and he urged the Nazarites 'to ensure that we do not break the covenant' and to 'pass your offering because now we are on the mountain. You will see for yourself when you get back home whether we were telling the truth or not' (Nzama 2012). The fact that the holy mountain of the Church was indeed the one at Homies in 2012 had to show in the blessings the Nazarites received. Mduduzi had to use his charisma to legitimize his relocation of Church rituals. At that point, however, stories of his miracles were already circulating, and the Nazarites of eBuhleni were provoking their opponents with the deeds of their new leader (Cabrita 2014:345).

New holy mountain

In 2013 the eBuhleni branch returned to iNhlangakazi, but in 2014 Mduduzi led them to a new mountain called iKhenana, the biblical Canaan. Preaching on 21 January 2017, Mduduzi recalled the troubles of 2012, their last pilgrimage to iNhlangakazi, and the excitement of the pilgrimage in 2014, when 'policemen sited at the corner assumed that we were going to the old mountain as usual. They forgot that we were led by God. To their surprise, we took a different turn. You were also confused, but you had the courage to follow' (Shembe 2017a). Upon arrival at iKhenana, on 5 January 2017, he thanked the Nazarites for showing up in large numbers and claimed that all the earlier leaders were with them on the mountain and that when 'we ask God for something, he grants it instantly' (Shembe 2017b). Mduduzi presented himself as powerful mediator with God, as the true heir to the spiritual Shembe, and claimed as proof his miraculous healings and number of adherents.

During my stay at iKhenana in 2017, about 50 000 Nazarites assembled there, and on several days hundreds of people gathered to receive Mduduzi's blessing, both matching the numbers I had witnessed on iNhlangakazi during Vimbeni's reign in 2009.[17] As the overwhelming majority of the Nazarites of eBuhleni acknowledged Mduduzi as the embodiment of spiritual power, the new mountain became a place of power for them, despite the fact that they had abandoned the site of the covenant between Jehovah and Isaiah. Nazarites I talked to, as well as officials in their sermons, put forward various arguments legitimizing this innovation. One was based on the innovation itself because in establishing a holy mountain, Mduduzi did what the founder had done. They pointed to a stone bearing the footprint of the founder as material proof that iKhenana, like eBuhleni, was destined to become a sacred place of the Church from the beginning of time. There were stories of miracles, of the space of the temple already marked out by white stones, and of a fountain of water suddenly appearing while the temple was be-

17 These figures are my own estimates.

ing built. There were arguments that the old mountain had been desecrated and that God was demanding a new one, or that the decision had not been taken by Mduduzi, but by either Amos or Vimbeni, or even commanded by Isaiah, who had miraculously appeared in a homestead in the region in 2007. Finally, there were pragmatic arguments that the conflicts with the eKuphakameni faction forbade the use of iNhlangakazi and that the old mountain had become too small to host the growing numbers of Nazarites from eBuhleni. What struck me most, however, was the complete lack of a feeling of loss regarding iNhlangakazi, which had, after all, been the earthly site of the way to paradise. All the Nazarites I talked to were enthusiastic about the new holy mountain. While this pointed to the centrality of the Church leader and their satisfaction with him, it also underscored the importance of performative practice.

Mduduzi led the congregation on foot during the three-day walk up the mountain, like Isaiah had done, and unlike other leaders, such as Vimbeni, who had travelled by car. This performance was interpreted as attesting to Mduduzi's toughness and his uncompromisingly strong leadership, compared to Vimbeni's more compassionate but weaker style. This difference was also reflected in their rather programmatic Church names: 'Rainbow', Vimbeni's name, referred to the biblical covenant between God and humanity and to the Zulu Princess of the Sky, the bringer of fertility and gentle rain. 'Lightning', Mduduzi's choice, expressed the anger of both the biblical God and the Zulu Lord of the Sky (Gen. 9:13; Job. 37:3; Berglund 1989:41, 65). Mduduzi set the stage by building himself a new homestead at iKhenana. While the new homestead violated church rules prohibiting the erection of permanent buildings on the holy mountain, it followed the spatial order of all the homesteads of the eBuhleni branch, which drew upon the layout of Zulu homesteads. Performances turned the stage into an affective place characterized by an atmosphere of hardship, celebration and respect. As I argue elsewhere (Echtler in press:99–100), Nazarites were hardened people who walked to the mountain barefoot, built temporary huts there and organized everyday life there for two weeks. They worshipped outside, facing the elements in drenching rain and scorching sunshine. They celebrated their community, including the ancestors, by dancing in their valued neo-traditional attire outside for hours on end. This performance opened the gate to paradise and only took place in the presence of the leader. In bodily postures and speech, Nazarites paid respect to their Lord, to Church officials and to all others of higher standing within their patriarchal system, the Church's version of *ukuhlonipa*, the Zulu system of respectful behaviour. The performances, with a structured stage, things and moving bodies, created a powerful atmosphere corresponding to the Nazarite habitus, an affective force centred on Mduduzi. In their joint performances, the Nazarites reproduced his charisma. By kneeling and shouting 'You are holy!', they committed themselves to Mduduzi. By 2017 at the latest, enough Nazarites had knelt in front of Mduduzi. Their performance was the ritual redress of the social drama that effectively closed the succession crisis and made Mduduzi the new Lord of eBuhleni. On 14 January 2017, the Zulu King Zwelithini, the highest representative of traditional authority,

visited iKhenana. Addressing the congregation he declared that 'Lightning is the leader of the Nazarites at eBuhleni' (Zwelithini 2017). This was despite the fact that three months earlier a South African court had judged Vela to be Vimbeni's rightful heir.

The court case

In April 2011, Vela applied to the High Court of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, to seek an order giving effect to the Deed of Nomination appointing him Titular Head of the NBC and sole trustee of the Church trust and to prevent Mduduzi from proceeding with the anointing rituals (High Court 2018:3–4). The court interdicted Mduduzi's anointing right away and passed its judgement, giving effect to Vela's appointment, on 18 October 2016. Mduduzi appealed against the ruling twice, first at the High Court in Pietermaritzburg and then at the Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa in Bloemfontain. Both appeal courts upheld the original ruling in April 2018 and December 2019 respectively.

In the original ruling, the court established at length the authenticity of Vimbeni's handwriting, both in the Deed of Nomination and in the letter, and it accepted the evidence given by Buthelezi, the lawyer, and Chancey Sibisi, the Secretary General of the eBuhleni branch (High Court 2018:11–17). It rejected the evidence of Mqoqi Ngcobo, who claimed in court that on various occasions Vimbeni had told him, as the local chief and a long-time confidant, that Mduduzi should be the next leader. It rejected his evidence not least because Ngcobo did not mention the oral nomination when he announced Mduduzi as the new leader at the funeral (High Court 2018:20–22, 28–29). Both appeal courts upheld the ruling, the Supreme Court (2019:10–12) arguing that the 'chronology of events tells a story': in 1999 the Church adopted the new constitution proposed by Vimbeni, which specified that the leader should nominate his successor. In 2000 Vimbeni signed the Deed of Nomination naming Vela, together with an order that it should be announced at his funeral 'so as to avoid any dispute regarding the leadership of the Church'. Vimbeni's letter of March 2011 confirmed his decision, and his 'desire to avoid leadership disputes after his death runs like a golden thread through these actions of the late leader'.

Even if the court had interpreted Vimbeni's intentions correctly, his plan failed because he overestimated the weight of legal authority in his Church and because he picked a successor from the wrong house, which made it easy for the faction led by the chiefs to mobilize the majority of Nazarites behind Mduduzi. In following the evidence of the lawyer and the Secretary General, who argued that the constitution had actually become operative in governing Church leadership and administration, the court supported the legalist faction (Supreme Court 2019:7, 11). The judgement caused another closure of the judicial process, maybe the final one. As Vela had died in 2017, the court declared his successor Pinda Shembe, another son of Johannes called 'Sunshine'

('Ilanga lokukhanya'), to be the Titular Head of eBuhleni and the sole trustee of the Church's holdings.

However, the judgement did nothing to redress the succession crisis. On the Saturday after the court ruling, Nazarites forcibly prevented the delivery of the court orders demanding that Mduduzi hand over control of eBuhleni. Sibisi, now Secretary General of the Thembezinhle branch, stated that it is 'the legal right of the exact leader to go back to the premises of the Church and lead from there', adding that they, the Nazarites of Thembezinhle, were 'expecting of course that resistance, but let's just use the law rather than our armies' (Msimang 2019). However, the police did not evict Mduduzi, nor did they prevent him from leading the vast majority of Nazarites to iKhenana in January 2020. There he stated that the conflict was not about leadership but about money and that 'a man's wealth is not inherited by another family' (Phungula 2020), thus repeating the script his supporters had delivered right at the beginning of the crisis in 2011. Already in 1977, both sides in the split in the Church accused the other with pursuing material interests only to discredit their spiritual claims. While the considerable wealth of the Church both then and even more so now is certainly at stake in the succession conflicts, it is in the interests of all the actors in the religious field to appear disinterested in personal gain.[18]

Conclusion

Given the conflicting legal and ritual closures to the social drama of the succession, the situation remains volatile. If the state chooses to enforce the court's judgement, the issues are whether the Nazarites will stick to Mduduzi and leave their homes in eBuhleni without a fight, or whether they will shift their allegiance to the legally appointed leader, Pinda, and hence to the house of the Sun. For the time being, however, house politics has beaten the Deed of Nomination, and the traditionalist faction has proved stronger than the legalist one. On the public stage of the funeral, Ngcobo and Qwabe delivered powerful performances. Their scripts presented Mduduzi as the heir of the house of the Moon and dismissed Vela's legal claim as a covert attempt by a rival house to take over. By using their standing as chiefs, and playing on the ingrained enmity with the eKuphakameni branch, they succeeded in extending their framing of the succession in terms of house politics. Within a year, the vast majority of the eBuhleni Nazarites had knelt in front of Mduduzi and shouted 'You are holy!' in public performances that produced his charisma. To a large extent, then, the performance of the traditional authorities decided the succession conflict within the NBC.

However, it might be better to speak of legalist and traditionalist options rather than persistent factions in the politics of the NBC. When Johannes succeeded his father

18 See Echtler and Ukah (2016:5).

Isaiah, he established his charismatic authority against the church official appointed by his father (Jarvis 2014). Later, he strengthened it by codifying the Church's teachings and traditions (Cabrita 2014:188), as well as through alliances with the chiefs, who, by the time of his death, claimed that it was they who had the final say in Church matters in their dominions (Oosthuizen 1981a:25). At the time of the Church split, Vilakazi (1989:129–131) distinguished three groups within the NBC: the constitutionalists who advocated succession according to Church regulations, the traditionalists who adhered to Zulu customs, and the spiritualists who believed in succession by divine sanction. Vilakazi argued that Amos' success was based on the spiritualists, but then his book was co-authored by Mthembeni Mpanza, who also wrote a new hagiography of Isaiah Shembe that provided exactly this kind of divine sanction for Amos. My own involvement in Church politics was marginal. I received a half-hour lecture on proper behaviour as a guest in Church in January 2012, after the minister who vouched for my research had sided with Vela. This university-educated minister cultivated intellectual discourse on church matters, which made him a favourite amongst Nazarite university students, who formed my peer group, and who discussed how the Church could be organised more effectively on a regular basis. Despite these legalist leanings, however, they follow not the Deed of Nomination but Mduduzi because he was '*socially* predisposed' (Bourdieu 1987:130; italics in the original) to become their charismatic leader because he came from the house of the Moon.

According to Weber (1946:280), it is interests, not ideas, that 'directly govern men's conduct', but frequently '"world images" […] determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest'. The world view from the polygamous homestead with its house politics informed the strategy pursued by the chiefs, but I would turn Weber's argument around: there are no tracks beyond interested action, and there is no fixed cultural representation beyond its situated performance. Weber's 'world images' correspond to what Robbins (2003:230) identifies as the heart of 'continuity thinking', as well as cultural anthropology, namely the assumption 'that people only understand the world in terms of their received categories'. However, if social performances can fail, there is no continuous extension of cultural meaning; if social dramas lead to reintegration or schism, both emergence and reproduction have to be produced in performative practice. According to Homi Bhabha (1994:55), cultural performance takes place in Third Space, relating the proposition to the positionality of the speaker and ensuring 'that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same sign can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew'.

When Ngcobo mobilized house politics in his performance, he convinced the Nazarites not because of the unchanging significance of a pre-colonial African world view, but because of the concrete history of house politics in the NBC and the interested acts that built the tracks he could use in promoting Mduduzi as new Lord of the Church. Nazarites followed the logic of house politics because Isaiah linked his charisma to his

descent group and nominated Johannes, from the *iqadi* house, to be his successor, because Johannes had established the concept of hereditary charisma and because Amos, from the *ikhohlwa* house, had broken away and established his own homestead. At all these junctures, house politics was but one option, and all the leaders pursued various strategies to strengthen their charismatic authority. In the NBC's social dramas, succession crises were redressed by judicial as well as political and ritual means. Nevertheless, from an early stage the 'strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic' (Bhaba 1994:52) has been a strong option for the routinization of charisma in the NBC. In 2011, the performance of Chief Ngcobo, using a script based on house politics, set Mduduzi on the path to becoming the charismatic Lord of the Church. While Ngcobo's speech did not rupture history as Isaiah Shembe did in establishing a new way to salvation, it did shape the Church's history by enabling the ongoing rapture of the charismatic leadership of the spiritual Shembe for a large number of Nazarites.

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