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Joel Cabrita

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Text and Authority in the South African Nazaretha Church

Text and Authority in the South African Nazaretha Church tells the story of one of the largest African churches in South Africa, Ibandla lama-Nazaretha, or Church of the Nazaretha. Founded in 1910 by charismatic faith healer Isaiah Shembe, the Nazaretha church, with more than four million members, has become an influential social and political player in the region. Deeply influenced by a transnational evangelical literary culture, Nazaretha believers have patterned their lives upon the Christian Bible. They cast themselves as actors who enact scriptural drama upon African soil. But Nazaretha believers also believe the existing Christian Bible to be in need of updating and revision. For this reason, they have written further scriptures – a new ‘Bible’ – which testify to the miraculous work of their founding prophet, Shembe. Joel Cabrita’s book charts the key role that these sacred texts play in making, breaking, and contesting social power and authority, both within the church and more broadly in South African public life.

Joel Cabrita is University Lecturer in World Christianities at the University of Cambridge.

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University of Cambridge

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Frontmatter

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To Hester and João Cabrita

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978-1-107-05443-1 - Text and Authority in the South African Nazaretha Church
Joel Cabrita
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xiii
<i>Glossary</i>	xv
1 Introduction	1
2 Scholars, Their Subjects, and the Sources: Ecumenicism and Literary Collaborations in the Nazaretha Church	32
3 Charting a Changing Literary Landscape: Isaiah Shembe and the Early Zion Movement in South Africa	62
4 Transcription Services: Young Literates and the Transformation of Generational Relations	108
5 The Imitation of Christ: Healing Performances and Biblical Spectacles	148
6 Reading from the Same Page: Bible Writing and the Creation of Orthodoxy	185
7 Tales of War: Women’s Testimonies and the Crafting of Heroic Reputations	216
8 ‘God Loves This Chief of Ours’: Oratory and Chiefly Conversions to the Nazaretha Church	256
9 Pursuing Recognition: Rhetoric and Reality in Church–State Relations	295
10 Conclusion	336
<i>Bibliography</i>	353
<i>Index</i>	381

List of Figures

1	Natal and Zululand magisterial districts, 1930	<i>page</i> xviii
2	Main temples of the Nazaretha church	xix
3	Shembe family tree	xx
4	Isaiah Shembe	104
5	Washing of the feet, Isaiah Shembe at Ekuphakameni	162
6	Feast of the Passover at Ekuphakameni, Isaiah Shembe and Johannes Mlangeni in foreground, the latter holding what may be the ‘Book of Life’	163
7	Johannes Shembe and council	194
8	Petros Dhlomo	199
9	Isaiah Shembe at Ekuphakameni	241
10	Religious dancers at Ekuphakameni, July 1939	246
11	Emzimoya Temple during annual meeting, Msinga, with chief’s homestead on hill, 2008	290
12	Trial of female members for stoning man to death, 1939	311
13	Johannes and Amos Shembe, c. 1940	326

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-05443-1 - Text and Authority in the South African Nazaretha Church

Joel Cabrita

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-05443-1 - Text and Authority in the South African Nazareth Church

Joel Cabrita

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

ABM	American Board of Missions
AFM	Apostolic Faith Mission
AIC	African Independent Church (or African Indigenous Church, or African Initiated Church)
ANC	African National Congress
AZM	American Zulu Mission
BAD	Bantu Affairs and Administration Department
CAP	Church Agricultural Project
CNC	Chief Native Commissioner
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
NAB	Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository
NAD	Native Affairs Department
NC	Native Commissioner
NERMIC	The Study of New Religious Movements and Independent Churches
SAB	South African National Archives Repository
SNA	Secretary for Native Affairs
ZCC	Zion Christian Church (very occasionally, also Zulu Congregational Church)

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Glossary

<i>Ababhali</i>	writers
<i>Abakhokheli</i>	leaders of the married women’s congregations
<i>Abapathi</i>	leaders of the unmarried girls’ congregations
<i>Abapropheti</i>	prophets (usually referring to the leaders of African Zionist and Apostolic congregations)
<i>Amabhalana</i>	clerks or secretaries
<i>Amabutho</i>	martial regiments of the Zulu king
<i>Amadlozi</i>	ancestral spirits
<i>Amadokodo</i>	temporary shelter
<i>Amafepenzana</i>	spirits thought to cause madness when in possession of an individual
<i>Amagoso</i>	young male leaders of wedding festivals
<i>Amakhokwa</i>	Christian converts, usually those linked to missionary organisations
<i>Amakhosazana</i>	princesses, as well as the church’s name for its virginal female members
<i>Amakhosi</i>	chiefs
<i>AmaNazaretha</i>	Nazaretha believers
<i>Amandiki</i>	spirits thought to cause madness when in possession of an individual
<i>Amazioni</i>	Zionists
<i>Babamkhulu</i>	grandfather, as well as the church’s name for Isaiah Shembe
<i>Emathunzini</i>	place of the ancestors
<i>Ibandla</i>	church or gathering
<i>Ibandla lamaNazaretha</i>	Nazaretha church
<i>Ibeshu</i>	loin covering for men made of skin
<i>Iduku</i>	cloth head covering for women
<i>Ilanga</i>	sun, as well as the church’s name for Johannes Shembe
<i>Imbomu</i>	metal horns blown during church dances

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978-1-107-05443-1 - Text and Authority in the South African Nazareth Church

Joel Cabrita

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi Glossary

<i>Imbongi</i>	praise-singer
<i>Iminazaretha</i>	white surplice worn for church services
<i>Imithandazo</i>	the morning and evening prayers of the church
<i>Impepho</i>	incense burnt during ceremonies supplicating the ancestors
<i>Incwadi</i>	book
<i>Indaba</i>	story (plural: <i>izindaba</i>)
<i>Inkatha</i>	sacred coil symbolising power and unity of the Zulu nation
<i>Inkosi</i>	lord, chief
<i>Inkosi uNyazi lweZulu</i>	the church's name for Mduduzi Shembe, 'the Lord Lightning from Heaven'
<i>Inyanga</i>	moon, as well as the church's name for Amos Shembe
<i>Ipasika</i>	the Passover
<i>Isidwaba</i>	skin skirts worn by Zulu matrons
<i>Isifociya</i>	a grass cummerbund customarily worn by women after birth
<i>Isigekle</i>	traditional song or dance
<i>Isigubhu</i>	the Nazareth church's variation on a military band brass drum
<i>Isililo</i>	'wailing', the name for the women's organisations within the American Zulu Mission
<i>Isipholiyana</i>	a hysterical illness, usually thought to afflict women
<i>Isivivane</i>	small piles of stones representing good luck
<i>Iskotch</i>	Tartan kilts worn by young men and boys during the church's sacred dance
<i>Izeluleko</i>	counsel or advice
<i>Izibongo</i>	praise poems
<i>Izifundiswa</i>	educated or learned people
<i>Izihlabelelo</i>	hymnal or psalter
<i>Izihlabelelo zamaNazareth</i>	Nazareth hymnal
<i>Izinduna</i>	headmen
<i>Izingoma</i>	diviners
<i>Izintshumayelo</i>	sermons
<i>Izinyanga</i>	herbalists
<i>Kraal</i>	Zulu homestead
<i>Lobola</i>	bridewealth
<i>Manyano</i>	all-women's organisation of the mission churches

<i>Mngcwabo</i>	catechism of the church (literally burial or funeral rite)
<i>Thixo</i>	God
<i>Ubunazaretha</i>	Nazaretha-hood
<i>Ucu</i>	Zulu ‘loveletters’ made of beads, exchanged between courting couples
<i>Udutelonomi</i>	Deuteronomy
<i>Ukubuyisa</i>	ceremony conducted by the living one year after a relative’s death, intended to facilitate the deceased’s passing into the realm of the ancestors
<i>Ukuhlobonga</i>	pre-marital sex play
<i>Ukuhlonipha</i>	respect
<i>Ukusina</i>	the sacred dance of the church
<i>Ulevi</i>	Leviticus
<i>Umgidi</i>	ceremony or festival
<i>Umhlangano</i>	meeting
<i>Umhlangano yakinkhosi</i>	the chief’s meeting
<i>Umjafeta</i>	white surplice worn by female church members
<i>Umoya</i>	the Holy Spirit
<i>Umphefumulo</i>	a spirit, also the name of the female medium who sought to gain power from Johannes Shembe in the late 1930s
<i>Umutsha</i>	traditional fur girdle worn by men



Figure 1. Natal and Zululand magisterial districts, 1930



Figure 2. Main temples of the Nazaretha church

SHEMBE FAMILY GENEALOGY

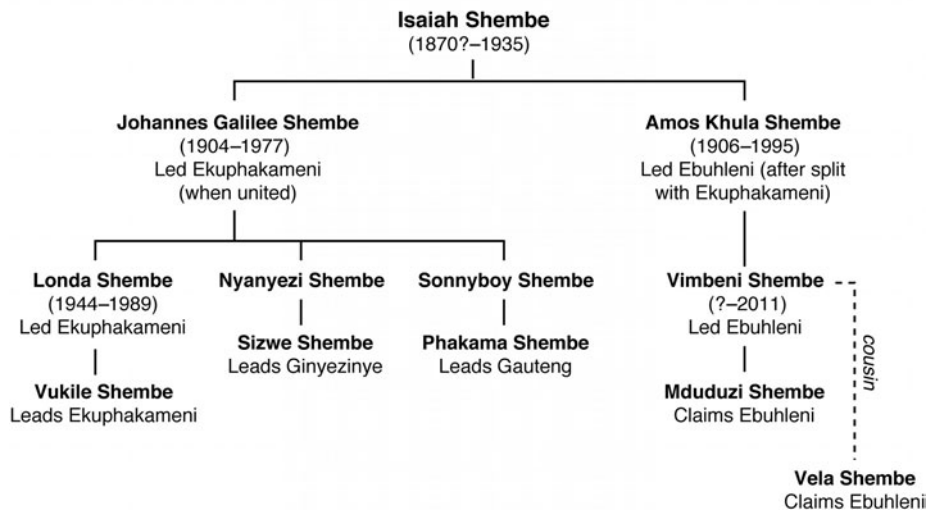


Figure 3. Shembe family tree