FAITH–BASED COMMUNITIES AND POLITICS IN DULLSTROOM-EMNOTWENI: LOCAL STORIES OF IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

A majority of the black community of Dullstroom-Emnotweni in the Mpumalanga highveld in the east of South Africa trace their descent back to the southern Ndebele of the so-called 'Mapoch Gronden', who lost their land in the 1880s to become farm workers on their own land. A hundred years later, in 1980, descendants of the 'Mapoggers' settled in the newly built 'township' of Dullstroom, called Sakhelwe, finding jobs on the railways or as domestic workers. Oral interviews with the inhabitants of Sakhelwe – a name eventually abandoned in favour of Dullstroom-Emnotweni – testify to histories of transition from landowner to farmworker to unskilled labourer. The stories also highlight cultural conflicts between people of Ndebele, Pedi and Swazi descent and the influence of decades of subordination on local identities. Research projects conducted in this and the wider area of the eMakhazeni Local Municipality reveal the struggle to maintain religious, gender and youth identities in the face of competing political interests. Service delivery, higher education, space for women and the role of faith-based organisations in particular seem to be sites of contestation. Churches and their role in development and transformation, where they compete with political parties and state institutions, are the special focus of this study. They attempt to remain free from party politics, but are nevertheless co-opted into contra-culturing the lack of service delivery, poor standards of higher education and inadequate space for women, which are outside their traditional role of sustaining an oppressed community.

INTRODUCTION

Rose Sithole Sindane, aged 42, lives with her son, Mxolisi Michael Nyathi, in her mother's house in Sakhelwe, the 'township' of Dullstroom in Mpumalanga province (Sithole Sindane, Interview 5 May 2013). It is situated 33 kilometres to the east of Belfast, on the road to Lydenburg/Mashishing. Rose and others living here no longer favour the name 'Sakhelwe' and refer to it as Dullstroom-Emnotweni, which is the inclusive name for the previously 'white' and 'black' towns.

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Rose grew up with her mother's family, the Sindanes. Her mother was born in Rodekrans, 20 kilometres south of Dullstroom, where the family owned land by verbal arrangement. They lack a title deed or other papers of ownership. Rose does not know how they lost the land. She only knows that at some stage her mother moved to Madala, the 'old location' outside Dullstroom, from where they were forcefully removed in 1980 to Sakhelwe, the 'new location' with the name given in white arrogance meaning 'the place which we have built for you', where Rose grew up. Her mother died in 1994.

The family name of Rose's father is Sithole. He was born in Groenvlei near Belfast, about 20 kilometres to the west of Dullstroom, also on family land. Rose, again, does not know how her father's family lost their land. She often visits him in KwaMhlanga, where he has lived for several decades now. KwaMhlanga, for her, is the spiritual home of the amaNdebele, and Rose traces her heritage back to 'Mapoch, king of the Ndebele', at the same time emphasising that her grandmother on her father's side was 'white'.

Four years ago Paulos Dinizulu Mnisi, who is of Swazi descent, paid *lobola* for Rose, who then was 38 with no lobola having been paid for her before. Both of them are elders in the church council of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, which was known as the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa before it (re)united with the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1996. Paulos and Rose both remained pillars in the church, although the stipulations of the church order do not recognise the giving of *lobola* as constituting a Christian marriage. The relationship broke up with Rose finding the traditional roles of womanhood imposed by Paulos on her as too restricting, while the Constitution and its Bill of Human Rights afforded her much more freedom. When she left Paulos, he insisted on the church telling her to come back to him as was expected of a good woman. At present, then, Rose is living in her mother's house, with her son attending the Ndebele initiation school. She and Paulos still serve on the church council.

Rose is an active member of the ANC, yet she has never expressed her political ideas at church. She works for the South African Police Service. When service delivery uprisings occur, the police are ordered to shoot, creating a situation where members of the same congregation could be shooting at one another (Sindane Sithole, Interview 5 May 2013).

The story of Rose's experience points to the main themes of this paper: the history of the black people of Dullstroom-Emnotweni from 1980 to the present is the history of the remnants of land alienation and forced removals. It is also the history of people from different cultures forced together in the struggle for survival and with ambivalent loyalties to their cultures. It is also a history in which the relationship between 'church' and 'state', faith and nation, has shown a variety of faces since 1994, from violent to silent.

The paper will now proceed in three sections. Firstly, a short overview of the history of the people in and around Dullstroom-Emnotweni will be given from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. The sources used for this subsection will be mainly written (albeit not always published) sources. Secondly, the most recent history of Dullstroom-Emnotweni (1980–2013) will be constructed through oral history interviews with black and white church members. Thirdly, the findings of research projects conducted in this area on the relationship between 'faith and nation' will be given. The sources for this subsection will be the semi-structured questionnaires used in the research.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF DULLSTROOM-EMNOTWENI AND SURROUNDINGS

A majority of the inhabitants of Sakhelwe can trace their roots back to the rural and farming area between Dullstroom and Roossenekal, 50 kilometres to the north-west, with Tonteldoos in between. Hentie Joubert (n.d.:16-20) gives a short overview of the history of the greater Tonteldoos area in the *Tonteldoos Register*. In 1839 the remnants of the Ndzundza tribe returned to their ancestral land and built their capital town, eRholweni, today known as 'Mapoch's Caves' named after their chief Mabhoga, called Mapog by the Boers. The Boers moved into Mpumalanga in 1846 after having 'bought' the area from the Swazi King for 100 'aanfokbeeste', ignoring the presence and claims of the tribes in the area. In 1865 war broke out with the 'Mapochs', and again in 1882 when Mampuru murdered a white farmer, Gert Viljoen (as well as his own brother, Bapedi chief Sekhukhune), and took refuge from the Boer commando with Nyabela, the chief of the 'Mapochs'. The Boers cut off their food and water as the 'Mapochs' were taking refuge in the caves. Nyabela surrendered on 11 July 1883 and handed over Mampuru, who was hanged in Pretoria on 22 November 1883. The 'Mapochs Gronden' were then declared open for Boers to occupy. About 400 'burghers' interested in acquiring land met on the banks of the Modderspruit on 15 October 1883. When the word was given, they rushed to claim plots, some running as far as 12 miles. Some 80 plots were occupied in the Tonteldoos area out of a total of about 200 claimed from the 'Mapochs Gronden'.

And thus the land of the 'Mapochs' was handed over to the 'burghers' and the 'Mapochs' reduced to farm workers. Sekibakiba Lekgoathi (2013: 36), in an article titled 'Orality, literacy and succession disputes in contemporary Ndzundza and Manala Ndebele chieftaincies', summarises the process as follows:

> The entire land of the Ndzundza was confiscated to prevent the people from regrouping, and Nyabela's subjects were indentured on the Boers' farms for a period of five to seven years, after which they had no land to return to and were thus forced to remain on white farms as labour tenants under conditions of peonage.

Peter Delius in 'The Ndzundza Ndebele: Indenture and the making of ethnic identity' describes how, after the defeat of Ndzundza, the remaining 15 000 morgen of the heartland of the chiefdom 'were opened on a first-come first-served basis to all burghers who had done service on the commando' (Delius 1989: 232), and how the population of the chiefdom was 'dispersed amongst the burghers and indentured for a period of five years'. He furthermore describes how the Ndzundza fled from the farms, or 'illegally' moved to richer farms, scattered all over the 'Transvaal', and what the influence of this was on Ndebele family life and identity.

This history of the struggle for identity will become clear from the following history of Sakhelwe/Dullstroom, as told by its present inhabitants, where remnants of the South Ndebele reside and form the majority of the population.

A RECENT HISTORY OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY OF DULLSTROOM-EMNOTWENI

Johannes Mahlangu has lived in Madala, the old 'location' of Dullstroom, since 1966 and since 1980 in the newly built Sakhelwe, where black people were forcefully removed to make room for the sewerage farm of the white town.

Johannes Mahlangu, now aged 88, calls himself a 'Mapor' ('nie 'n Mapog nie'; Mahlangu, Interview 5 May 2013). His father, Job, came from Roossenekal. Johannes, the oldest of five children, was born on 25 December 1925 on the farm 'Linden' belonging to 'baas Douw Wolmarans', now called Konterdanskloof, near Tonteldoos. For a short time Johannes attended school in Badfontein. He had to walk 25 kilometres to get there, but could stay over during the week. He says, however, there was not much use for that sort of knowledge on the farm. After 20 years on this farm he left for Lydenburg (now Mashishing), where he worked on the farm of Mr Burgers for another 10 years, before moving to Botshabelo near Middelburg. Speaking Afrikaans, Johannes says that he is not angry with the white people, 'want ek het partykeer lekker gebly' (because sometimes I lived well).

In1966 Johannes, then 31, moved with his wife, Betty Singhami, and their children (there were five eventually) to the newly established Madala township in Dullstroom. Here Johannes did a variety of jobs. He worked on the railways and at some stage he was a 'mechanic' for Martin van Rensburg in Dullstroom. In Madala there was no electricity, no water, no sewerage, of course, and no streets. They lived in four-walled houses with straw roofs. However, there was a huge Dutch Reformed Church building that could seat 600 people. It was by far the strongest church in the township, with the Lutheran and Presbyterian ('Alliance') churches as the only other churches. Johannes was, and still is, an elder in the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, now the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa.

Johannes's story confirms in a way that the remnants of the Southern Ndebele were confined to farm work until well into the present post-apartheid era, and eventually became township dwellers working as unskilled labourers. Johannes's story also introduces the main theme of this paper, namely the presence of 'the church' among the Southern Ndebele. This church presence was foreign to them as tribal communities in the 19th century, became a natural part of life in the 20th-century townships, and eventually in the 21st century the church started to play a new, politically ambivalent role among the poor and destitute.

In his extensive study on the *History of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Sekhukhuneland and church development 1875–1994*, Gerrie Jordaan (2011:38ff.) describes the missionary 'successes' among the Bapedi in Sekhukhuneland during the latter part of the 19th century, while no missionaries worked (or were allowed to work) among the Ndzundza 'of Mapoch's caves'. During the 20th century they were missionized on the farms where they worked and this was especially 'successful' in KwaMhlanga. Missionary Christianity also took the lead, as Johannes's story confirms, in Madala, the old 'location' of Dullstroom and later also in Sakhelwe. Paulos Dinizulu Mnisi, born in 1951 in Dullstroom and an elder of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (Dullstroom) for the past five years, relates how his family moved from a farm in Kareekraal, 18 kilometres south of Dullstroom to Madala and then to Sakhelwe (Mnisi, Interview 6 June 2010). His father, Simon Nganekwane Mnisi, was an evangelist in the DRCA, that is, the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, the branch of the Dutch Reformed Church reserved for black people, now the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa seeking unification with the white DRC. At present the predominance of missionary churches in Sakhelwe has dwindled in the light of the establishment of African Independent Churches. There are not as many AICs in this rural 'township' as there are in urban ones. The two most prominent are the ZCC, which is 'mainline' independent, and Elohim Church, which is local.

Dull's Stroom was an area initially developed by Wolterus Dull, a Dutch immigrant who assisted landless Boers after the first so-called 'Anglo-Boer War' to find their feet again. A group of people from the Netherlands settled in Dull's Stroom in May 1884, led by J. H. Janson Jnr. The Dutch psychiatric nurse, Hans Kroon, who visits Dullstroom twice a year to write down its history, relates how his great-grandfather, whose name he carries, immigrated to South Africa in 1895 and found a place to live at Dull's Stroom which he developed into a town, making him the 'founder' of Dullstroom (Kroon 2013: 1).

Very soon after Dullstroom came into being, a Nederduitch Hervormde Kerk was built. The building was finished as early as 1891, demolished by the British in 1901, and rebuilt in 1905 – although there was no full-time pastor. The Rev. Johannes Dreyer became the first full-time minister of Dullstroom and in 1932 the headquarters of the NHK moved to Dullstroom, remaining there till it found a permanent home in Pretoria in the 1950s (Kroon 2002: 30).

The (white) Dutch Reformed Church in Dullstroom traces its history back to 1916, when it was established as a congregation independent of Belfast, Middelburg and Lydenburg. It received its first full-time minister, Rev. J.P. Theron, on 12 January 1918. The 'pastorie' was finished in 1919 and the church building in 1920. For the next three decades the small congregation suffered financially. They recovered sufficiently to inaugurate an organ in 1954 and a church hall in 1963. However, in 1989, when Rev. J.N.R. Bosman left, it became clear to the church council that they could no longer exist as an independent congregation. Since 1 September 1991 DRC Dullstroom has functioned in combination with DRC Belfast (Dutch Reformed Church Dullstroom 1996: 1–3).

What was the relationship between the DRC Dullstroom and their black brothers and sisters of the DRCA in Madala/Sakhelwe? In the 1950s Rev. B.J. Britz, minister in Dullstroom from 1947 to 1960, bought a piece of land in Draaikraal, one of the wards of the DRCA (Sakhelwe) and started building a school for the children of black farm workers. Rev. Johan Bosman (1986–1989), now ministering in Vaalwater, a small town near Nylstroom/Modimolle in Limpopo Province, relates (Bosman, Interview 14 April 2013) how they – that is, the white people of Dullstroom – made bricks and built the school at Draaikraal for the black children. As far as Dullstroom itself was concerned, he continues, the whites felt that they would look after the black church, but that black people must know their place. There were fears about black people owning land in Dullstroom, lest they establish a ‘plakkerskamp’ (informal settlement or squatter camp) in the white town. Bosman relates an incident where the leader of the elders of the white church, Stoffel Laubscher, said to the black minister Markus Mathopo, ‘Do not call me brother, do not call me oom,’ thereby making it clear to the man who was the Moderator of the Northern Transvaal Synod of the DRCA how he wanted to be addressed. Bosman’s wife, Erna, relates how the white women participated in the life of the township church by helping them run bazaars and by giving ‘werkersklasse’, that is, classes teaching women to do needle work, while at home the white women only permitted their domestic workers to drink from tin cans.

Willem van Niekerk, now 74 and minister in Dullstroom from 1965 to 1967, confirms that there was a relaxed and productive relationship between town and township during a time when both had meagre resources (Van Niekerk, Interview 12 June 2013). Ordained on 7 March 1956, the young reverend baptised his own son as his first ‘ministerial act’. Every second Sunday he visited the township – now referred to as Madala but which did not even have a name then – preaching and administering the sacraments. At this time a (black) evangelist supported by the white church was inaugurated in the township, but Van Niekerk could not remember his name. According to the list of pastors compiled by elder Paulos Mnisi, he was S.P. Shabangu (Mnisi, Interview 6 June 2013). Van Niekerk does remember that the white church bought the evangelist a motor bike, which he put to good use in serving the black congregation. Van Niekerk also remembers that the politics in the white church of the time was not about racial issues, but revolved around the ‘Natte’ and the ‘Sappe’, that is, the supporters of the National Party government and the adherents of Jan Smuts who lost the elections to the Nationalists some years before in 1948. This led to extensive and competitive ‘political praying’ when elders from opposing political parties used prayer time to get at one another. Oom Flip, ‘wat Republiekwording as die aanbreek van die Duisendjarige

Vrederyk gesien het' (who saw the coming of the Republic as the dawn of the Thousand-Year Empire of Peace) often used prayer time during Pentecost as an opportunity to lash out at 'daardie godloënaar van 'n Jan Smuts' (that atheist who is Jan Smuts), prompting vehement, albeit prayerful, responses from the 'Sappe'.

In 1993 Eddie Bruwer (and his wife Marie) came to Dullstroom (Whitehorn, Interview 6 May 2013). He had recently retired as minister from the (black) Dutch Reformed Church in Africa. He was soon engaged in the township, not only as an elder of the DRCA congregation, but also in initiating money-generating projects in Sakhelwe, which included a chicken, vegetable garden and sewing project. When he became a councillor in 1994, he championed better living conditions for black people in public. This earned him abusive labels such as 'fokken kommunis' (fucking communist) and 'kafferboetie' (kaffer lover). When he preached in the white DRC church, half of the church council would stand up and leave. In the bank and in the shops white attendants refused to serve him, and people crossed to the other side of the road when he came walking down. 'How do you handle this?', he was asked by his friends, Gerda and Brian Whitehorn, to which he answered, 'I think of what Jesus would have done,' thereby displaying the close relationship between faith – in the pietistic cloth of local liberation theology – and politics in this area. The Whitehorns were, of course, not Bruwer's only white supporters in town. Marianne Holtzhauzen, CEO of Epileptic SA, remembering the whites assisting in the bazaars in Sakhelwe, calls Bruwer ''n brugbouer deur middel van die dorpsraad' (bridgebuilder through the town council) (Holtzhauzen, Interview 4 May 2013), indicating that the division between blacks and whites in the town was not a clear-cut one.

This more or less reflects the state of 'race relations' and the role of faith in Dullstroom in the 1990s, and the same was the case elsewhere in eMhakazeni's Highveld, to which further reference will be made in the next sub-section. Bruwer also – perhaps primarily – became involved in land claim issues when the Dutch Reformed Church reclaimed the farm of Kranspoort, 60 kilometres to the west of Dullstroom between Middelburg and Groblersdal, which had previously been a mission station (Bruwer 1999:7). In a letter to the daily newspaper, *Beeld*, Bruwer reprimanded the DRC for this and saw it as a missed opportunity for reconciliation. With that his fate was sealed and his own attempts at reconciling black and white people in the area faced huge opposition.

This was not the case among the black community. Iris Mphuthi (57) was a councillor from 1995 to 2000, and again from 2006 to 2011, and calls Bruwer the 'Black Pastor', which is an indication of his acceptance by the black community. Mputhi came with her parents to Sakhelwe in 1980, when it was founded on 'Goedgeluk', a farm between Waterval-Boven and Machadodorp. Like most of the people who settled in Sakhelwe at this time, her father came to work on the railways where he offloaded trains at the station. The 1980s, of course, was a time when blacks were not allowed into shops and their movements were regulated by 'blankes' and 'nie-blankes' ('whites' and 'non-whites') signs. And blacks were not allowed to own land (Mphuthi, Interview 4 May 2013).

Jan Potgieter, minister in the white Dutch Reformed Church in Dullstroom for the past 15 years (since 17 December 1998) and member of the Democratic Alliance (DA), points to land claims and service delivery protests as the main reasons for the divisions and ill feelings among blacks and whites in Dullstroom today (Potgieter, Interview 5 May 2013). There were no blacks living in the Dullstroom area when the white farmers moved there at the end of the 19th century, he says. However, land claims that are false, according to Potgieter, are now being submitted by farm workers against long-established white farmers who have in any event lost their cattle through theft. Once a prosperous sheep farming area, there are no more sheep here. And milk farmers now farm only with 'skuldbossies' (literally 'debt bushes'). The shop owners in the town are leaving and guest-house owners are selling. This seriously impacts the white DRC congregation in Dullstroom, which has now been impoverished to such an extent that they can no longer afford a minister. Furthermore, according to Potgieter, black people are targeting old people in the area and during the past few months three attacks were made on the aged in Belfast alone. Potgieter refers to the recent request by the Unemployed People's Organization to the Business Chamber of Dullstroom that the mines around Dullstroom should be reopened to create work for the young people, and that R7 000 should be paid to everybody in Sakhelwe who is unemployed. This, Potgieter says, brought Dullstroom to the brink of collapse on the eve of the Easter Weekend this year (29 March to 1 April 2013).

An interview with the Unemployed People's Organization Committee (UPOC), which represents the Dullstroom Business Economy Forum (DBEF), and which organised a service delivery protest in March 2013, reveals the struggle of young black people (Mogoni, Interview 6 May 2013). They are fighting for the opening of five coal and platinum mines, focusing on one between Dullstroom and Tonteldoos, and another ('Pama') 14 kilometres from Belfast on the Dullstroom road. They mention the resistance of the Dullstroom Chamber of Business to this. Significantly, they ask for the help of the church (here the URCSA) to achieve their goals.

We now move to describe incidents and research projects that reflect the relationship between faith-based organisations and politics in Dullstroom-Emnotweni. The religious identities described will be Christian, simply because the people in Dullstroom-Emnotweni who are religious are predominantly Christian. There are about 20 (practising) Muslims in Dullstroom-Emnotweni, with their own mosque that was built in 2000, an imam residing on site, and a cemetery of 20 graves as part of, but segregated from, the white cemetery just outside Dullstroom on the road to Belfast. They are for the most part of Indian descent, and the imam is black. There are three Indian/Muslim families in Dullstroom – the Vaid, Arbee and Bhamjee families – who all live and own businesses in the 'white town'. An interview with Mahmood Vaid reveals that they have been in Dullstroom since 1916, the same year the white DRC was established, that they have a strong sense of identity, which is not threatened by others, that they have good relationships with both blacks and whites, and that they stay out of politics (Vaid, Interview 6 May 2013).

The research projects described here were led by the author as a research professor at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion at the University of South Africa. At present she is the tentmaker minister of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, Dullstroom. The church is situated across the road from Mphilonhle Primary School in Sakhelwe.

RESEARCH IN EMAKHAZANI MUNICIPALITY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND POLITICS

Church, violence and service delivery

Before the service delivery uprisings of May 2009, the more or less 10 000 inhabitants of Sakhelwe lived in 700 four-roomed houses, most of them housing three generations and up to 30 people each. A recent survey indicated that more than half of the youths in Sakhelwe have completed matric, but that 91% of them are unemployed and living with their parents (that is, mainly mothers) in these four-roomed houses (Landman 2011). When the pastor of URCSA, who is also the author of this article, wanted to visit the wounded and imprisoned, the church council was divided. Some of them are members of the police who shot at the youths on command. Others simply felt that service delivery uprisings are not the business of the church. Furthermore, the local ANC leadership called the church leaders in Sakhelwe together and asked them to preach non-violence to their church members, which the pastor of URCSA refused to do simply as a favour to a political party.

From these service delivery uprisings and the church’s involuntary engagement with them ensued two research projects. The first was to investigate the ways in which young people saw the relationship between service delivery protests and faith-based organisations, or the ‘church’ in short. Forty-four interviews were held with youths in equal numbers from the four ‘townships’ of the eMakhazeni Local Municipality, which include Dullstroom/Sakhelwe, Machadodorp/eMthonyeni, Belfast/Siyathuthuka and Waterval-Boven/eMgwenya (Landman 2013). All the interviewees were active in their church’s youth movements, while also participating as individuals in at least one of the service delivery protests in their vicinity. They demanded job opportunities, housing, skills training and sports facilities. A majority felt that the protests did not achieved anything, but that the churches should join with them to achieve their demands. The churches should not only provide spiritual guidance, caring and praying, but encourage the youths to stand up for their rights as well as mediating between the youths and the municipality. They pointed out that their churches have in the past not participated directly or indirectly in service delivery protests, and that they resented the churches’ passivity in this regard.

While this research was being conducted, the DA intervened and confiscated the questionnaires meant for Waterval-Boven; they insisted on doing the research themselves and adding their own report on the church-politics relationship. This report was never produced in spite of numerous requests for it.

While the youths experienced no tension between their religious and their political identities, church leaders seem to think differently. A similar project was launched in the four areas of the eMakhazeni Local Municipality asking church leaders about their church's preferred involvement in politics, that is, both in protests against the politically controlled municipality and in party politics. Fifty questionnaires were distributed with a request that the church leaders filled them out and return them, after which an interview would be arranged. Only four questionnaires were returned, with the church leaders requesting not to be interviewed. All four were from Sakhelwe, three of whom indicated that it was their church's policy not to get involved in political action or party politics, that they would not give a platform to political parties in their church, and that the aim of their church was to preach the word of God, which they regarded as non-political.

Youth, church and politics

A project called The Histories of Children's Futures (Landman 2011a) was conducted in Dullstroom-Emnotweni during the latter half of 2011. Fifty learners from Mphilonhle Primary School between the ages of 10 and 13 years were randomly chosen and interviewed on their career expectations. What is significant in this context is that, while children of this age usually choose fantasy careers such as becoming a pilot or a TV star, a majority of these children dream of careers that would benefit their community, such as nurses, teachers and social workers, professions which are all but absent from Sakhelwe.

It is historically significant that 48% of these children's mothers and 32% of their fathers are unemployed. The parents are waiters, domestic workers and semi-skilled labourers. Subsequently 60 young people were interviewed who had left school more than 10 years ago and of whom only 10 are employed. They also work as waiters and domestic workers, with none of them trained for or skilled in a specific job. It is ironic, then, that these youths have less access to the labour market than the previous generation did.

Of political significance are the needs expressed by the youths, which they prioritize as obtaining business skills, receiving job opportunities, having access to skills training and tertiary education, and undergoing HIV counselling, and that they would consider the church as an alternative service provider. This should, of course, be seen against the background of a 'township' in which there are no institutions, but churches, that is, no social workers, no doctors, a 47.2% HIV prevalence rate, and a municipality that is bankrupt.

Women, church and politics

For a project, Women's Space in Church, 60 black women and 40 black men from rural Dullstroom-Emnotweni were interviewed during the first few months of 2013 on what they viewed as proper gender roles for men and women, and how they saw women's roles in the church.

The women's ages ranged from 19 to 70. And yet there does not seem to be a difference in the way they view gender roles. They all view the man as the head of the family. A substantial number of the women feel that a man may punish his wife if she is disobedient, although the younger women feel it is against the law. By far the majority of women say that a good man is one who supports his family, although at least 80% of the men in the township are unemployed. A good woman in the eyes of the women interviewed is one who cooks for her husband, respects him and does not drink beer. Although 70% of the women interviewed were unemployed, there are more women employed in the township than men.

When asked which woman in the Bible they regarded as a role model and why, a vast majority of women answered that Mary was their role model because she gave birth to Jesus. Interestingly enough, some of the older women – albeit a very small minority – looked at Hagar and Ruth as role models because they were strong women.

The men's responses to gender role questions were even more stereotypical. The man is the head of the household. He leads his family in God's will. A good woman is one who respects her husband and does not drink alcohol. In spite of casting women in their traditional roles as far as the family is concerned, the men gave politically correct answers in affirming the idea of space for women in the church as well as their leadership roles in ecclesiastical matters.

Of political significance is the conflict in both the women's and the men's answers between religious discourse and political law: the women acknowledge the man as head of the household in true religious fashion, while they take up their right in terms of political liberalism not to be beaten. The men in turn afford the women leadership roles in the church, while keeping them captive in 'churchy' roles at home, that is, in roles sanctioned by the church.

CONCLUSION

A majority of the black community of Dullstroom-Emnotweni in the Mpumalanga Highveld in the east of South Africa trace their descent back to the southern Ndebele of the so-called 'Mapoch Gronden', who lost their land in the 1880s to become farm workers on their own land. A hundred years later, in 1980, descendants of the 'Mapoggers' settled in the newly built 'township' of Dullstroom called Sakhelwe, finding jobs on the railways or as domestic workers. Oral interviews with the inhabitants of Sakhelwe – a name abandoned in favour of Dullstroom-Emnotweni – testify to histories of transition from landowner to farmworker to unskilled labourer. The stories also highlight cultural conflicts between people of Ndebele, Pedi and Swazi descent and the influence of decades of subordination on local identities. Research projects conducted in this and the wider area of the eMakhazeni Local Municipality reveal the struggles of religious, gender and youth identities with national and political interests. Service delivery, higher education, space for women and the role of faith-based organisations in particular seem to be sites of contestation. Churches and their role in development and transformation, in which they compete with political parties and state institutions, are the special focus of this study. Endeavouring to remain free from party politics, they are – outside of their traditional role of sustaining an oppressed community – co-opted into contra-culturing the lack of service delivery, higher education and space for women.

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