

# A broken land and a healing community: Zulu Zionism and healing in the case of George Khambule (1884-1949)

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## *Abstract*

The destruction of the Zulu Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century, the Bambatha Rebellion, the First World War and Spanish Influenza in the Twentieth Century destabilised Zulu culture, created widespread death and suffering, and also led to a longing for healing among the Zulu people. George Khambule's experience in Nquthu and the Western Front, together with his near death experience from Influenza resulted in his call to become a prophet and his foundation of iBandla Labancwele in 1918. His healing practice is analyzed and compared with the contemporary healing practice of Charles Johnson at St. Augustine's Mission, Nquthu, as competitive cultural and social phenomena.

## **Introduction**

When the missionaries and other imperial agents of the Western world came to Africa, they were, for the most part, convinced of their technical and cultural superiority. One of the effects of the First and Second World Wars was to shake this confidence. The end of the classic European empires which followed opened up the possibility for an openness to the emerging voices of the subjugated peoples, to their cultures and world views. It seems to me that what is emerging in the wake of globalisation is a new hard empiricism which acknowledges only one world view as legitimate in the long run, and that is what is often called the “Western scientific world view” (which is not the same thing as science in and of itself). Other perceptions are no longer tolerated but described as “delusions”.<sup>1</sup> In the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, this kind of approach runs the danger constructing a new kind of hegemony which sees it as only a straightforward problem of finding the right medication and overcoming the “ignorance and superstition” of African people with regard to sex and sanitation. This is not to deny the importance of medical advances and the responsibility of the state to provide the best treatment available to those who suffer from HIV and AIDS, a matter rightly addressed by our Constitutional Court.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, it is to insist on the parallel importance of taking cultural questions seriously. In this respect, it forms part of the ongoing “long conversation” between Africa and the West described by Jean and John Comaroff.<sup>3</sup>

The Comaroffs argue for a continuing relevance for the concept of hegemony as describing the “taken for granted” coherent world view with which people operate unquestioningly, of which they are not even aware until it comes into conflict with another hegemonic world view.<sup>4</sup> The conflict produces a sphere of contested meaning which they describe as ideology, in which symbols and practice become “unfixed … set afloat, fought over, and recaptured on both sides of the colonial encounter”.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Christianity in Africa, they argue that, “The story is woven from two contrapuntal narratives.”<sup>6</sup> The HIV and AIDS pandemic in Africa calls urgently for a recognition that, while recognising the

<sup>1</sup> The echo of Richard Dawkins, *The God delusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) is deliberate, not because he is necessarily wrong in his critique of right wing religion, but because he argues in the most strident way possible for the monolithic universality of the “Western scientific world view”.

<sup>2</sup> The discussion of this question has focussed on the AIDS denialism which characterised the policy of President Thabo Mbeki. See for example Deborah Posel, “Sex, death and the fate of the nation: reflections on the politicization of sexuality in post-Apartheid South Africa”, *Africa* 75 (2005) 125-153.

<sup>3</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism and consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). This emphasis on “conversation” finds its place also in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edition. trans. by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 11. This way of viewing the imperial encounter with subjugated cultures and its modern consequences is taken up helpfully also by Edward Said, *Culture and imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

importance of the search for effective medical treatment, it is more than a technical issue. Western medicine has been an important aspect of the “long conversation” between the West and Africa, and African responses to technocratic “solutions” need to be heard in the context of this long ideological discourse,<sup>7</sup> in which Africans found ways of asserting their agency. This paper attempts to view the dialogical nature of the introduction of Western medicine among the Zulu people by reading the church of George Khambule (1884-1949) and the mission of Charles Johnson as a conversation, which was sometimes conducted consciously and sometimes unconsciously, in any case at best only imperfectly understood by either party.<sup>8</sup>

### **A ruined kingdom, broken people and Christian healing**

In June 17, 1884, the missionary Anglican bishop of Zululand, Douglas McKenzie, writes from his precarious position at the mission station at Isandlwana, site of the famous British defeat in the Zulu War a decade earlier:

The same awful state of bloodshed and chaos continues beyond the boundaries of the Reserve and even within there is unrest and distrust of the British government ... The blood in this land cries out to God against England.<sup>9</sup>

In the civil war which followed the British defeat of King Cetshwayo, the forces of the young Usuthu king, Dinizulu, were first defeated by Zibhebhu, the leader of the Mandlakazi, with the connivance of the British governor, Sir Melmoth Osborn. Zibhebhu was in turn routed by the Usuthu with the help of the Dutch, until finally the mercenary Sotho chief Hlubi, turned the tide once more against the Usuthu.<sup>10</sup> McKenzie feared that at any moment his small mission station would be swept away and he had made plans for evacuation. There was bloodshed, famine and plunder on every side and a Zulu people in serious political, social and cultural disarray. At about the same time George Khambule was born around twenty kilometres away in Telezini near Nquthu, in the heart of the territory carved out of Zululand and given by the British to their ally, chief Hlubi. His father, Isaac Khambule, was a member of a well educated and influential land-owning Methodist family from Edendale near Pietermaritzburg, capital of colonial Natal.<sup>11</sup> His uncle, Simeon Khambule, commanded the Edendale Regiment which fought alongside the colonial forces against King Cetshwayo and was awarded a medal for gallantry at Isandlwana, where he led the regiment back unscathed across the war ravaged land after it failed to break through to the besieged British forces and ran out of ammunition.<sup>12</sup> In a time of economic recession in Pietermaritzburg, Isaac had obtained land from Chief Hlubi and settled in Telezini as an *induna* (headman). Here his son George (seemingly originally called Garden or Gardiner) was born and grew up in the maelstrom of the new colonial frontier after the annexation of Zululand, something that Bishop McKenzie had campaigned tirelessly to promote on the basis that it would bring peace, promote the work of the missionaries, and “advance civilisation” among the Zulus.

One of the Natal settlers, a volunteer in the Natal Carbineers who had been seriously wounded during an earlier war against Chief Langalibalele, was Charles Johnson (1850-1927).<sup>13</sup> After his recovery, Johnson first became a missionary teacher at Springvale Mission in 1873, and then was invited by Chief Hlubi to join him in Nquthu. He was ordained in 1881 and he worked in Nquthu for more than forty years. Just twenty five years after McKenzie’s letter, Johnson in turn wrote a

<sup>7</sup> Jean Comaroff, *Body of power, spirit of resistance: the culture and history of a South African people* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> In this I differ somewhat with James Scott’s approach, with which I otherwise find helpful, in *Domination and the arts of resistance* (1990), which maximises the conscious agency of the dominated. On the other hand, I do not mean to deny the reality of the element of control exercised or at least exerted by the agents involved. Perhaps use could be made of the theory of “discursive field” (Steinberg 1998) in semiotics as this is developed by Timothy Shortell, “The notion of a field, in which the interpretation of collective action and shared identity takes place, suggests that the ways in which meaning-making promotes and inhibits action is not fully conscious or intentional. But neither is it entirely outside the control of the actors involved.”

<sup>9</sup> Rhodes House Library, Oxford, USPG Archives, CLR 143, 106, 17 June 1884.

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Guy, *The view across the river: Harriette Colenso and the Zulu struggle against imperialism*. Cape Town: David Philip Oxford: James Currey/ Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> See Sheila Meintjes, “Edendale, 1851-1930: farmers to townspeople, market to labour reserve”, in J. Laband and R. Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988: a new portrait of an African city*. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press/Shuter & Shooter, 1988), 66-69.

<sup>12</sup> O. Watkins, “Fought for the great white queen. Edendale”. Typewritten account in the Killie Campbell Archives (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> For a pious but valuable account of his life, see A. W. Lee, *Charles Johnson of Zululand* (n.p.: United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1930). Also available electronically at <http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/za/cjohnson/>.

passionate and moving letter during the Bambatha Rebellion of 1906, as Zululand was plunged into war and chaos once more:

... The terrible atrocities committed especially by one section of the Natal Field/Force under Colonel Boyston, under the plea of putting down this rebellion, prisoners have been shot down in cold blood, I myself buried the bodies of five prisoners that had been taken down to a small donga and shot and left there to rot a short distance from here; a great number of kraals have been burnt down, the houses of many hundreds of women and children, not merely kraals within the fighting line, but whole districts many miles from any fighting have been devastated, and are now a barren wilderness ... The means used have been barbarous and cruel.<sup>14</sup>

This, argues Johnson, was no moment's excess but the result of a deliberate attempt to solve the "native question" by genocide:

Some strong-handed men have thought the time was ripe now for the solving of the great question. They knew that there was a general widespread spirit of dissatisfaction amongst the natives of Natal, Free State and Transvaal, but especially in Natal, and they commenced the suppression of the rebellion with a fierce hope that the spirit of rebellion might so spread, or if lacking vitality it might be *forced* into spreading throughout the land, and engender a war of practical extermination. I fully believe they were honestly imbued with the conviction this was the only safe way of solving the Native question, and they were greatly disappointed that the spirit of rebelling was not strong enough to bring more than a small moiety of the Native peoples under the influence of the rifles.<sup>15</sup>

George Khambule was educated up to standard four, probably in one of the schools for the "Basutoes" mixed with Zulus for which Bishop McKenzie obtained funding from the USPG (among them the famous school at St. Augustine's Mission, Nquthu). Khambule probably fought with the rest of the Amahlubi on the colonial side during the Bambatha Rebellion (the archives show that he inherited his father's gun<sup>16</sup>) and he certainly seems to have benefited financially from the rebellion, being paid handsomely for using his wagon to transport prisoners for trial from Nquthu to Dundee. But the bloodshed in the area was followed from 1908 to 1909 by sickness, cattle fever, locust plagues and continuing unrest. The Zulu people in the Nquthu area turned to Christianity in large numbers: Johnson speaks in a letter of 21 December 1913 of having baptised 579 people and having 842 people engaged in the three year long process of "seeking" and being catechised.<sup>17</sup> He reckoned that there were around 15,000 worshipers attached to the Anglican mission in his area. The same phenomenon could be observed all over the ruins of the former Zulu kingdom.

Although Johnson had been sent to Nquthu as a teacher, he became far better known to the people of the area as a doctor and dentist, even though he had no medical training at all. In the absence of any trained medical personnel, he found himself drawn into the work of healing in which he became so famous that the modern hospital in Nquthu is named after him:

Common sense, eked out by Cassell's *Family Doctor*, could achieve much. Epsom salts, quinine, and ipecacuanha will carry a man far into the affections of a primitive people. Dental forceps, wielded however unskillfully, are infinitely to be preferred to the leverage of a sharp-pointed spear 3 feet long. The prestige of a white man invests even the mildest drug with magical properties ... So Charles Johnson took up, figuratively speaking, the scalpel of the surgeon and the pestle and mortar of the physician, and spent a large part of his time wielding them.<sup>18</sup>

The missionaries set out to heal Zululand with British rule, education and medicine, but even by 1930 there were only ten or eleven qualified doctors in the whole of Zululand. What was available at St.

<sup>14</sup> Rhodes House Library, Oxford, USPG Archives, CLR 144, 8-9, 24 July 1906.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, Nquthu Magistrate, unclassified papers. George's father was Isaac Khambule, from whom he inherited his land. This was the crux of the legal process between George and both the Provincial and Union governments, and was not disputed. However, the heir of Isaac Khambule was called Garden Khambule in the records of inheritance in the Natal Provincial Archives for Nquthu in these unclassified papers. It seems that he adopted the name George at some stage, probably when he worked on the mines.

<sup>17</sup> Rhodes House Library, Oxford, USPG Archives, CLR 144, 93.

<sup>18</sup> Lee, *Charles Johnson of Zululand*, electronic version, chapter X, p. 2.

Augustine's in Nquthu in 1918 was a compendium of compassion, faith and experience. In fact, once medical doctors began to arrive in Zululand, they complained about Johnson's methods and saw him as a competitor:

When more settled conditions prevailed in the country, and district medical officers were established in most of the magisterial districts, he was instrumental in persuading large numbers of Zulus to give up their own ignorant practitioners and go to the European doctors. By some of these medical men he was regarded as a rival who diverted from them patients who should have been treated by them. Several of the government doctors complained of his practices, as they did of the medical work of other missionaries in the country.<sup>19</sup>

The context in which St. Augustine's, Nquthu and Khambule's church at Telezini emerged has been set out here at some length to show that it was not so much a difference in material resources and training which characterised them as a difference in world views. Despite his lack of training, Johnson's belief in Cassell's handbook is symptomatic of an underlying scientific world view, with its trust in rational technological explanation of phenomena, however much he may have used the language of faith. Khambule's world view was informed by a belief in spiritual and not technological agency however much he may have received a Western education and attempted to utilise Western technology, such as the encrypted field telegraph.

### **World War and returning servicemen**

The task of healing was once again disrupted by war, this time the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, which took its toll on the missionaries. Johnson's five sons all fought in the war, and Kenneth, who had already started training as a missionary before the war, was severely wounded and lost a leg on the Western Front. He returned to Nquthu for a while to assist his father, crippled as he was, as the latter's health failed. Charles Johnson was forced in 1923 to retire after a heart attack and died in 1927.

One of the Anglican missionaries from the Diocese of Zululand was Rev. Captain Walter H. Hallowes. Born in India, sprung from a long line of military and ecclesiastical establishment figures and Oxford educated, Hallowes began his missionary work under Johnson at Nquthu in 1901 and writes as a chaplain to the black volunteers of the South African Native Labour Corps (SANLC) from the Western Front in France on 7 March 1917:

The natives have done exceedingly well at work in spite of the severity of the weather and will do much better. They are strictly compounded, and so far have had no opportunity of vice or drink.<sup>20</sup>

He noted that the ten thousand strong SANLC had been split up into small unarmed work gangs of between 150 and 500 scattered about in various places on the British front line. He did his best to continue his missionary work among them supporting them spiritually and materially as an officer. After the war he returned to take up the mission work at Nkandla from 1918-1930 and Eshowe as Rector from 1930 to 1943.

One of those he would undoubtedly have come across at some stage on the front line was George Khambule, volunteer in the SANLC. Hallowes' bland and censored reports to his bishop and the agents of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel tell nothing of what was going on beneath the surface for chaplains and for Khambule and the other educated *amaKholwa*, isolated from the other white soldiers, confined behind barbed wire, unarmed and deployed in the mayhem of the front line. One of them, Stimela Jason Jingoes, writes:

There we had a hard time, because nearly every evening we were attacked by the enemy planes and we had nothing to defend ourselves with. Only the whites were given arms. This camp was twice in flames during enemy attacks.<sup>21</sup>

Jingoes was court-martialled and nearly executed for protesting about the maggot ridden food and the insulting racist behaviour of one of the missionary officers (who served as both plaintiff and prosecutor

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Rhodes House Library, Oxford, USPG Archives, CLR 144, 171-172

<sup>21</sup> Ian Gleeson, *The unknown force: Black, Indian and Coloured soldiers through two world wars* (Rivonia, Johannesburg: Ashanti, 1994), 36.

in the hearing). Disaffection among the SANLC was rife. The alarmed colonial authorities first brought them back from the front into a more concentrated camp and then sent them home before the end of the war. The myth of the whites and their kingdoms as “civilised” and invincible was forever shattered for those who had seen the wholesale destruction and slaughter of this globalised warfare. The myth of the Christian love of missionaries for their black converts was also severely dented by their behaviour as commanding officers of the SANLC in the testing conditions of the Western Front. For Khambule, as for so many returning servicemen, things could never be the same.<sup>22</sup> Nor would things be the same for Hallowes, for Johnson’s son and for the Anglican mission at Nquthu.

### Death and resurrection and the mission to heal

As if the trauma of the First World War had not been enough, Spanish Influenza swept across the world in its aftermath, killing more people than the war itself. The speed and deadly nature of the epidemic certainly created a crisis comparable to the kind of crisis created today by the global spread of the HIV and AIDS epidemic – estimates of the death toll from the Spanish Flu vary between twenty and forty million people globally in the years 1918 to 1919.<sup>23</sup> In October 1918 the newly returned Khambule was working on the mines in Johannesburg, having applied successfully to be registered as an “exempted native”, exempted that is from tribal law and (supposedly) living a Western Christian monogamous lifestyle – many of the Khambule family had obtained this status under the Natal Franchise Law of 1865.<sup>24</sup> Khambule was taken to hospital with influenza, died and experienced himself looking down from on high at his mine girlfriend burning in hell and found himself accused of adultery and murder:

Then I saw the corpses of many people whom I had murdered, and then I spread my hands saying, “Lord, I have never handled poison.” The voice said, “You killed them with your mouth”.<sup>25</sup>

Khambule’s dead sister, Agnes (Agrineth), in the form of an angel, intervened on his behalf and he entered heaven and received a commission to save and heal his people:

In 1918 on the 10<sup>th</sup> month, it was dark in Khambule. Today St. Itengirrah is present. The gates were opened. One of us entered through the twelve gates, because he was worthy. Itengirrah defeated death.<sup>26</sup>

Armed with this experience and in alliance with a local Anglican teacher turned independent preacher, John Mtanti, Khambule returned to his village of Telezini and set up his *iBandla Labancwele* or Church of the Saints.<sup>27</sup> Khambule’s healing church experienced heady growth at a time when Charles Johnson was incapacitated by his heart attack and his severely crippled son Kenneth struggled for a time to fill the gap. The irony of this situation was probably lost on these two veterans of the Western Front.

I have described many of the features and the history of Khambule’s fascinating movement elsewhere,<sup>28</sup> but here I will concentrate on the church as an attempt to mediate healing and restoration

<sup>22</sup> Eric J. Leed, *No man’s land: combat and identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979; Jonathan A. Draper, “Global warfare and charismatic resistance: the case of George Khambule (1884-1949) and the Book of Revelation”, in S.J. Staelset (ed.), *Spirits of globalization: the growth of Pentecostalism and experiential spiritualities in a global age* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 90-106.

<sup>23</sup> Molly Billings, “The influenza pandemic of 1918”. Created June, 1997 modified RDS February, 2005. <http://virus.stanford.edu/uda>.

<sup>24</sup> See Howard Phillips and David Killingray (eds.), *The Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 – new perspectives*. [Routledge Studies in the Social History of Medicine] (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> P. Mhlongu, “Report in Zulu on various Independent Churches at Telezini”, 14-17. Presented to Bengt Sundkler as an assignment at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Umphumulo, 1941 and located in the Sundkler Archives in the Carolina Library, Uppsala. Transcribed and translated by J.A. Draper and M.K. Ntuli. Note that murder “with your mouth” resonates strangely and strongly with the pent up resentment of the unarmed SANLC expressed by Jingoes above.

<sup>26</sup> George Khambule et al., Diary 2:85; Liturgy 3:76. These texts belong to a collection unpublished diaries, liturgies and hymn books in isiZulu quoted here as Diaries 1-4; Liturgies 1-3; Hymnbooks 1-2, 1925-1949, located in the Sundkler Archives in the Carolina Library, Uppsala. Transcribed and translated by J.A. Draper, B.M. Mkhize, M.K. Ntuli and B. Maseko

<sup>27</sup> See Bengt Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and some Swazi Zionists* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 119-160

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan A. Draper, “The marriage of the lamb and the Isigodlo in *iBandla labancwele* of the Zulu prophet George Khambule,” in P. Denis (ed.), *The Power of oral history: memory, healing and development. Proceedings of the XII<sup>th</sup> International Oral History Conference 24-27 June 2002 (Pietermaritzburg: Oral History Project, 2002)*, 1, 15-33; “The closed text and the heavenly telephone: the role of the Bricoleur in oral mediation of sacred text in the case of George Khambule and the Gospel of John”, in Jonathan Draper (ed.), *Orality, literacy and colonialism in Southern Africa* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature – Leiden: Brill, 2003), 57-89; “Global warfare and charismatic resistance: the case of George Khambule (1884-1949) and the Book of Revelation”, in S.J. Staelset (ed.), *Spirits of globalization: the growth of Pentecostalism and*

in an indigenous movement just a few miles away from Charles Johnson's centre of healing and education at St. Augustine's, Nquthu, a presence of which he was well aware. One of the entries in the diary (probably not by Khambule) claimed that, "His whole congregation is as big as Johnson's in the beginning". Khambule's church was based on a quasi-military interpretation of the book of Revelation. The church was formed by entry into the marriage of the Lamb "on earth" to join the harem or *isigodlo* of King Jesus (men and women), after a period of seclusion modelled on the traditional seclusion of the puberty ritual of the *isigodlo* of the Zulu king.<sup>29</sup> They were now forbidden to have normal sexual relations, since the virgins follow King Jesus, the Lamb, wherever he goes. Nor were they to eat the food offered to idols (understood as ancestors) available in the homesteads around the church, but only the food of the New Jerusalem which Khambule built on the homestead he had inherited from his father.

In the New Jerusalem, the throne of God himself came down to earth<sup>30</sup> and his regent on earth was Khambule, on whom the whole presence of first Moses and then Jesus himself had come down: "You must know this. You have taken upon you the likeness of the Lord Jesus".<sup>31</sup> The heavenly ark on which the Lord is enthroned, which is mentioned in Revelation, had come down to earth and was now present among them and needed to be tended by the *isigodlo*, just as the royal Zulu throne or *inkatha* had been of old. They now worshipped in the presence of the unseen angels, "We thank the holy ones (angels) of the Church. Yes, they cannot be seen. Let peace be among you. This is the new throne which came down."<sup>32</sup> They were united with the angels in a special way and received prophecies and power directly from them. The seven lamps of the Apocalypse now burned in the worship of *iBandla Labancwele* (the Church of the Saints) and the seven angels went forth in power with them when they went out.<sup>33</sup> Here we will focus on Khambule's Church of the Saints and its nature as a healing community in response to a Zulu society which was broken and diseased both socially and physically after fifty years of turmoil and war. It takes a markedly different form to what was on offer from Charles Johnson and the other white missionaries in Zululand. Nevertheless, one must ask whether the school and hospital which Khambule set up was so very different in intention: like Johnson, Khambule began his healing work with compassion, faith and experience. All that was missing was Cassell's *Family doctor*. In its place was the Bible and Khambule's very different cultural perspective and world view.

### ***iBandla Labancwele* as a healing community**

The primary source for examining the healing practice of the Church of the Saints is the fieldwork report of Bishop P. Mhlungu, made in 1941 while he was a student at Umphumulo Lutheran Theological Seminary, where the Swedish theologian and anthropologist Bengt Sundkler was teaching. Khambule and his movement were then still very much alive, though their star was waning. Secondly, Sundkler himself visited the community in 1968 when it was in serious decline and confusion, as can easily be seen already in the book of prophecies from 1951-1952 written down after the death of Khambule himself in 1948. As Sundkler notes, the practice of the community at that stage seemed to be in contradiction at some points to earlier accounts.<sup>34</sup> However, he recovers some of the memories of the community about earlier times. In addition, there are the cryptic references in the various writings of the church. Finally, together with field workers,<sup>35</sup> I was able to interview members of Khambule's family, survivors of the movement and the last of the women prophets still practising Khambule's healing methods, a survivor of Khambule's *isigodlo* in Johannesburg now living in Badplaas.

experiential spiritualities in a global age (London: SCM Press, 2006), 90-106; "Many voices, one script: the prophecies of George Khambule", In R.A. Horsley, J.A. Draper and J.Miles Foley (eds.), *Performing the Gospel: orality, memory and Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 44-66; "The Nomadic text: Africa", in John F.A. Sawyer (ed.), *The Blackwell companion to the Bible and culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 176-197.

<sup>29</sup> See the account of Nomguquo Dlamini in H. Filter and S. Bourquin, *Paulina Dlamini: servant of two kings* (Durban: Killie Campbell Africana Library – Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1986). Khambule's better known contemporary, Isaiah Shembe, also established an *isigodlo*, but his was confined to young girls, the virgins, before they were given in marriage. The question of the origin and dating of some of the terminology and practice which Khambule and other Zulu prophets used is contested. The dating of the origin of their use is difficult, and the various Zulu movements clearly borrowed from each other. Khambule, however, makes a consistent theological appropriation of the cultural practice based on the book of Revelation. This may well be the origin of the practice, in my opinion.

<sup>30</sup> Khambule et al., *Liturgy*, 3, 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> Khambule et al., *Diary*, 1, 7a.

<sup>32</sup> Khambule et al., *Liturgy*, 3, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Khambule et al., *Diary*, 1, 19b-20a.

<sup>34</sup> Bengt Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and some Swazi Zionists* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 145, n. 5.

<sup>35</sup> B. Mduduzi Mkhize, Brian Maseko and M. Khawulani Ntuli were all involved with me in the fieldwork, transcription and translation of the Khambule material and were an integral and indispensable part of the project. I would like to record my thanks and appreciation to them here.

Mhlungu's account makes it clear that healing was at the centre of the Church of the Saints. He seems to have derived most of his information from Mr. and Mrs. Khulu, who are the speakers in this interview:

The Hospital (*Isibhedlela*): "Khambule would pray for many who were sick and they would be healed. If they did not get healed, Khambule would ask them to confess their sins. Besides Khambule there was an *isibhedlela* (hospital) consisting of those who were chosen to pray for and visit the sick. They used water and prayer (*ngesiwaho nangomkhuleko*). Ash (*umlotha*) is put in the water over which prayer has been said and is used to ward off all diseases, casting out demons and ending fits of insanity (*asebenza izifo zonke ngawo bakhipha amadimoni nezipoliyana*)."

The days for prayers of the *isibhedlela*: "Tuesday and Friday after the *isibhedlela* had fasted for two days and prayed all night. They wear long blue dresses and hats. They go and preach in the houses among the unbelievers, even at Msinga where the unbelievers abound. . . ."

The Hospital sits separately in church gatherings: "The *isibhedlela* prays for the sick. One stands and the other sits down. All buy clothes for themselves since the money of the church does not come by compulsion but as a voluntary gift."<sup>36</sup>

Khambule himself was renowned for his ability to heal and people would come to him from all over to seek healing. This passage already shows Khambule's understanding of sickness and healing at a number of levels.

#### *Disease is related to a person's spiritual state*

Firstly it is clear from this passage that he made a connection between sickness and the spiritual state of the person who came to him. If he prayed for the person and they did not get healed immediately, then confession was required since the sickness was perceived as connected to their sins. In other words, sickness was not for him simply a physical medical problem but a "disease of the whole person" and a reflection of relations within the community. In this way, Khambule believed that underlying a persistent medical problem there may be a spiritual malaise – a very old, widespread and persistent understanding of course. While the uncoupling of disease and personal culpability is a major achievement of modern medicine, it may deflect attention away from the social context of disease and the individual's participation in that context. It makes the diseased person a "patient" and not an agent. Public recognition of guilt can end the underlying social alienation of the sufferer by public absolution and restoration to the community, something modern medicine cannot do. On the other hand, this kind of approach raises serious ethical questions, since it adds guilt to disease. In the context of an epidemic like HIV and AIDS it is even more problematic, since the predominantly (but not, of course, necessarily) sexual nature of its transmission make it an easy source of stigmatisation and social ostracism.

#### *Healing is communal practice*

Secondly, although he was clearly perceived to have a personal ability to heal, the process is part of a communal ritual practice of *isibhedlela* (hospital), in which a specialised group was involved and ultimately the whole community, since the hospital "sits separately" and had a privileged and central place in the worship structure of the community, according to Mhlungu's diagram.<sup>37</sup> The hospital ritual consisted of eight people in a cruciform arrangement around the sick person. The "hospital" wore special blue robes and the white hats of the "volunteers".<sup>38</sup> They were required to keep a vigil for two days of fasting and prayer before they conducted their healing ministry on the designated days of Tuesday and Friday. They then went from hut to hut in procession singing and dancing to preach and

<sup>36</sup> Mhlungu, "Report in Zulu on various Independent Churches at Telezini", 29.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 39. Again, the origin of the term *isibhedlela* is contested and obscure. It may well go back to the earliest Zulu Zionist prophet, Daniel Nkonyane, who broke away from the Zionist church established by Le Roux in 1906. See Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu prophets in South Africa* (London, Lutterworth Press, 1948, reed., Oxford University Press, 1961). At least its origin with Nkonyane was claimed by leaders of one of the branches of this church today, the Christian Catholic Apostolic Hoy Spirit Church in Zion (*Enyonini*) in field interviews. They also use the terminology of "weapons" (*izikhali*) in healing practice, although in their case this refers to the use of special sticks.

<sup>38</sup> Again, the terminology of "volunteers" is obscure. Robert Houle traces it back to the earlier movement in the American Zulu Mission led by Mbiya Kuzwayo. See R.J. Houle, "Mbiya Kuzwayo's Christianity: revival, reformation and the surprising viability of mainline churches in South Africa", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 38 (2008), 141-170.

seek out those in need of healing or exorcism. The healers went out in groups which Khambule called “gangs” (after the “labour gangs” of the mines and of the Western Front, with which he was familiar):

It is very bad in heaven. It is about the swords [probably a reference to the stones elsewhere called “weapons” and used in healing] themselves. You must know this. It is hard if gangs are called. It happens when Satan has planned too much evil. It is quiet now in heaven and they are waiting for that hour. It is very hard for the leader of the gangs ... It will be good when the gangs are praised for their victory ... Those who come to pray for difficult things, Hannah Ngobose is with them with power. Rebecca Ndlovu comes in with power to pray for difficult things. There are some among those who pray for difficult things who do not know this. There is still going to be a selection among them, and an *isibhedlela* of high quality and many other things ... On Friday again the gangs are praying for Lydia Mzoneli, together with the pain of her child and the difficulties she is experiencing. Many things are to be done by the gangs.<sup>39</sup>

People are healed and become in turn a part of the healing community fighting in the spiritual warfare against Satan. This experience of and participation in the process of communal healing was the most important catalyst for the growth of the community.

#### *Disease and healing are related to conflictual human and spiritual agency*

Thirdly, as we have seen, sickness is understood as coming from the ill will and witchcraft activities of hostile members of the local unbelieving community, so that healing meant “warding off” such demonic attack or witchcraft. Khambule understood this as warfare against Satan. While the apocalyptic references come from the book of Revelation, the language is drawn from traditional Zulu cultural language of witchcraft (such as *izipoliyana* above). So, in a prophecy of 18 June 1925, Khambule the Judge is described as going to two local kraals with Fakazi Mhlungu the Prosecutor. Nester Sithole was a possessed person at that time, a ghost, but she is exorcised and comes to faith. Zwana, however, is unrepentant and is warned that his rejection of Khambule will result in him being possessed as Sithole was, and ultimately will result in final condemnation:

It is he who went with the Prosecutor (*Umshushisi*) to Zwana’s place. It is he who went to Sithole’s place at the time Sithole was an evil ghost (*epoka*). So it will be with Zwana. He will also become an evil ghost (*uzopoka*). After this, his actions must be avenged, for he is undoubtedly destined for the fire. It is so.<sup>40</sup>

The world of the spirit and spiritual warfare lies behind the material world of disease and healing. Later, Khambule’s brother, Jeremiah, who had left his wife to become a celibate member of the *isigodlo*, ran off with the very same Nester Sithole who had been saved from being a ghost. In this community, what might be described as a traditional Zulu theory of causation is still operative. Things do not happen by accident, but are always the result of the purposive agency of others, whether neighbours, relatives, ancestors or witches. Therefore healing is not only conducted on the material but also on the spiritual level, and involves active intervention to discover and neutralise whoever or whatever has brought this disease on a person.<sup>41</sup>

People who were seriously ill were required to come and stay in the hospital for extended prayer and treatment until they recover. So, for instance, Mr. Khulu suffered from an extreme form of eye

<sup>39</sup> Khambule et al., Diary, 1, 30b-32b.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 1:18b-19a.

<sup>41</sup> After the birth of a child to Fakazi Mhlungu, reputedly fathered by George Khambule, Isaiah Khambule, his brother, who had been responsible for enforcing celibacy in the community, left the church, went to Johannesburg and married. This caused a major decline in the church. However, Isaac subsequently had a vision of Mary with the sun and moon and repented. His subsequent illness was seen as a result of his action in destroying the church: “When he was sleeping he saw the vision of Fakazi, the mother of Jesus, saying: ‘You saw me carrying a child putting my foot on the moon.’ He says, ‘I then remembered that I had seen the vision when this girl was young’. He said, ‘This is the curse on me because I have destroyed the Church of Khambule because Fakazi gave birth to a child.’” He then went to Khambule to ask for forgiveness and healing. So Khambule prayed for him and he had to offer a sacrifice like was the custom, because he had not yet been paid at work Khambule promised to pay for him. He told him to go home. But because Khambule delayed offering the sacrifice he had promised, Isaiah was not cured. This thing troubles him; it has episodes of him wanting to throw himself into the fire. In 1935 I also saw him burned in his whole body at hospital at Swede. This time Khambule was at kwaThalane (Dundee) where he still is. Till today this man is mad. But he has come back to Kambule’s church out of remorse that he caused the church to disintegrate and he and other people who are members of Khambule’s church believe it is because of this that this happened to him” (Mhlungu, “Report in Zulu on Various Independent Churches at Telezini”, 48-49).

disease, perhaps glaucoma, and was carried by cart from his home to Spookmill (the final headquarters of the church):

We also once left during the great dispersion of the Church, but we have now come back because Khulu suffered from an eye infection after that. None of the traditional healers (*izinyanga*) could treat it and we therefore returned back here – he was carried in a cart to Spookmill where they now were settled. It was the feast of Christmas. He went taking with him a lamb to sacrifice. When he arrived, water was taken to Khambule so that he could pray for it and sprinkles some ashes on it; this ash is prepared by a certain girl and it must always be ready. She takes mud and burns it in the vessel and closes it. I was taken outside the homestead (as is always the case when the disease is a serious one). I washed my body with that water (*isiwasho*) and I went back home and Sikhakhane (Khambule's brother-in-law), who is now a leader, prayed for me. I came back after three days having been healed, my eyes back in position, with only minor pains. To this very day I remain safe and sound.<sup>42</sup>

It is significant that Khulu had already tried all the local *izangoma*, the traditional Zulu healers. He came to Khambule because the traditional means had failed but he was not willing or able to go to Western missionary hospitals.

#### *Use of material agents in healing: sacrifice, water and ash*

Here we can also observe a fourth characteristic of Khambule's approach to healing, the use of traditional Zulu material agents relating to healing, namely animal sacrifice and ashes mixed with water, over which prayers (or incantations) have been made. This was used here for washing the body, but such water might also be used for drinking. The preparation and keeping of the *isiwasho* by the women of the *isigodlo* was regarded as a very serious matter and occasioned a serious quarrel among them on one occasion, which was resolved by Khambule in a decision dated 19 June 1926 and used in liturgical recital. It is carefully recorded to govern future rituals with the water and ash:

*Minister:* Secondly, Saul Mtshali came in the afternoon. He said, “A man came and said I should come here to be prayed for by three girls and two ladies.” But the problem was that the girls were not three but four. And there was a big commotion at that time when he was there. It was found that there was one who was unworthy when the lots were thrown to choose between the four girls. But names were called and it was found that *uMshushisi* (Prosecutor) was found to be unworthy.<sup>43</sup> Then St. Nazar asked of the Clark saying, “How can you say that she is unworthy of them?” Then the Clark said, “I don't mean that she has a sin, but *hai nje!* (There is something which is not seen). I don't know! But I do know about these two. I know that I can even take these two to the sea.<sup>44</sup>” Immediately, St. Nazar stood up and went to his place of prayer. And then the voice came saying, “What you are saying is not true. The place of these two is to carry water so that if a person had a sin they have to go and pray for him or her. The one who is said to be unworthy must carry the ash to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the person who has sinned. What *uMshushisi* is doing is not just for today, but this was prophesied before the camp was there that she must go and ask for forgiveness on behalf of people.”

*The Congregation:* These two must carry water but this one must carry the ash.<sup>45</sup>

Joanna Ndlovu was seriously ill, probably with polio, since she was crippled in one leg already by July 1925, and the fear was that the sickness would pass to the other one as well.<sup>46</sup> It seems as if the sickness gave Fakazi Mhlungu the occasion to question the presence of Joanna Ndlovu, who was Khambule's favourite, in the *isibhedlela*. She was implying that Ndlovu's sickness was a sign that she was somehow a sinner, though she did not say so openly. Again, though, we can note the connection

<sup>42</sup> Mhlungu, “Report in Zulu on various Independent Churches at Telezini”, 20-21.

<sup>43</sup> It seems as if the quarrel is between Fakazi Mhlungu, who is the “Clark”, and Joanna Ndlovu, who is the “General”. The term “Prosecutor” (*uMtshuthsisi*) is difficult to pin down though often used and may be an alternative title for Ndlovu. The ambivalence comes out in the stole worn by Mhlungu where she has the title, “The General's Clack of the Lord. & Prosecutor”. It seems to me that the “& Prosecutor”, coming after a full stop, refers back to the “General”. It is difficult to make sense of this scene otherwise.

<sup>44</sup> A Zulu proverb: that you can take someone to the sea to be cleansed, but if your sickness is beyond control it will take you and swallow you.

<sup>45</sup> Khambule et al., Diary, 3, 120-22.

<sup>46</sup> Khambule et al., Diary, 23b-25b.

between sin and disease. Khambule's solution to the problem caused by this quarrel was to rule that the sin that Mhlungu sensed in relation to Ndlovu was actually a sign that Ndlovu had a special role in preparing and carrying the ash to intercede on behalf of sinners, while the others would carry the water for healing to the sick person. This fits well with earlier prophecies in Diary 1, which says that Ndlovu had become united with the angel St. Agrineth, Khambule's dead sister, who had interceded for him before God when he had "died" in the hospital in Johannesburg in 1918. A special liturgy for the ash is provided for Wednesday 18 August 1927, though no specific directions are given beyond providing the text of Isaiah 62:1-3, Jeremiah 16:13-16, Hebrews 9:1-14. The passage from Isaiah relates to Zion, New Jerusalem and its destiny to be recognised by all nations. The passage from Jeremiah is strange but seems to be referred to the exile period of the Church after its expulsion from Telezini (when it is called *Illy* or Elim). The passage from Hebrews refers to the coming of Khambule as Christ whereby the promises of the Old Testament ark and sacrifice of goats and bulls, together with the ashes of a heifer, are fulfilled. Khambule, as the one on whom the spirit of Jesus has come down, is understood to have "appeared as high priest" and "entered once for all into the holy places". This mixture of passages from the Bible interpreted from the perspective of the special calling of the community of New Jerusalem is characteristic. The Scriptures were written for Khambule and only he can interpret them.<sup>47</sup> The woman I observed still practising Khambule's healing gave this healing water, which she identified as water and ash, to a girl who came to consult her.

The ash is related to the animal sacrifice in the Bible, as we saw above in the citation of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the liturgy. Khulu's account of his healing also shows that animal sacrifice was a part of the healing ritual, in this case a lamb, which is more associated with Christian tradition (through Easter rituals) than cattle or goats. The same passage recurs with reference to Khambule's entry into heaven in Diary 2:1-2. The internal cultural logic of Zulu sacrifice relates to the ancestors, who are placated by the libation of blood which is ritually spilled onto the ground. Although the offering of animals to the ancestors is taboo in Khambule's church, and members are not allowed to eat the food of outsiders for that reason, the slaughter of animals in the traditional way is still very much a part of life in the Khambule community according to Mhlungu's field report: "At this event and many other such events a beast is slaughtered and the *isigodlo* get dressed in many different colours. There would be choirs that would render musical items. Such ceremonies were highly appreciated by the whole church."<sup>48</sup> How they understood the connection is not expressly stated, particularly by Khulu when he brought a lamb with him to Khambule's "hospital".<sup>49</sup>

#### *The Izikhali or weapons of the volunteers*

Another unique material aspect of Khambule's healing ritual was the use of *izikhali* or "weapons". The word usually describes the weapons of a Zulu warrior: spear, stick and shield. They might also be carried ritually by an *isangoma* or traditional medium as part of his regalia, as may be seen in a painting, *iSangoma* by Gerard Bhengu (1910-1990) in the Campbell Collection, Durban. However, Khambule used stones as weapons of power in the war of the Saints against Satan: dark volcanic stones found in the Telezi River, wrapped in cloth to prevent the break out of power from harming the user. Some stones were kept in the ark and used in the worship of the community, along with the seven candlesticks representing the seven angels who would go out into the world to overthrow the kingdoms of this world. Others were carried by members of the *isibhledela*. They were used in divining the messages of the angels who visited the community and in the process of healing, which was also a form of warfare against Satan, as we have seen. The last healer to use Khambule's method was still using one of these stones along with the water and ash, though she pointed out to me a small ritual Zulu shield with spear and stick above her door.<sup>50</sup>

Khambule himself was never without his stones in his hands, even when eating, according to field reports, and in addition carried a tall staff with a snake on top in imitation of the serpent lifted up by Moses in the wilderness for the healing of the people.

#### **Examples of healing**

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Mhlungu, "Report in Zulu on various Independent Churches at Telezini", 35.

<sup>49</sup> Note also that Isaiah Khambule is required to sacrifice an animal as part of the requirement for healing in the story given in footnote 28 above. Failure to complete the sacrifice timeously is blamed for the continuance of his illness.

<sup>50</sup> She had other ritual objects, such as keys and steel nails which she showed us, which were likely to have been her own innovation. She and her sister donned the blue mantles of the *isibhledela* to worship while we were there, covering their faces with them while they sang and prayed.

One of the interesting aspects of the Khambule material is that we have reports from many sides, as well as written material from the church itself. Khambule in one of his hearings refers to the fact that even a local magistrate's wife had consulted him about her sick child. There is no further information about this, or which magistrate is in question – certainly not the magistrate responsible for his final trial, who was very unsympathetic. Mhlungu's field report gives several examples of healings, drawn from the Khulu family. On other occasions, particular reports of healings are recorded in the writings of the community. The following are the categories into which Mhlungu's report divides the accounts of healings in the order he gives, supplemented from the writings. An interesting cross reference is provided by Lee's account in 1930 of the diseases for which Zulu people particularly sought healing.

#### *Barrenness*

Prayers for barrenness play an important part in the healing ministry of many Zionist prophets. It is very important for the church of Isaiah Shembe. In a conversation with Axel-Ivar Berglund, he described rituals sometimes conducted by such prophets in association with special water springs (e.g. at Ceza) and symbolically utilising the ritual staffs which most prophets carry (a snake on the top of the staff in Khambule's case, imitating that of Moses<sup>51</sup>). Khulu and his family were converted because Khambule restored his wife's fertility. He confirmed the healing by pointing to the boy who was born as a result of Khambule's prayer:

Khambule soon became famous for his preaching and healing of the sick of all diseases and those who were barren. By this time Mrs. Khulu had given birth to four girls, she was of the Methodist Church in Nyanyadu. When she could not fall pregnant, she went to Khambule. He prayed for her and said, "You will give birth to a son with big eyes." And so it happened. So it happened that, when we saw this, we wished to go to him and give thanks ... This boy is Gilbert Khulu.<sup>52</sup>

In a similar fashion Diary 1 records that Jemimah Ndimande not only bears a son (whom she names significantly as Sipho or "Gift") but gives him to the *isigodlo* in gratitude: "This child I begat in a wonderful way. Therefore I made him a sacrifice, no matter what. I have given him to God."<sup>53</sup> Here the prophets like Khambule and Shembe take over an important role which would have been played by traditional healers, while the missionaries had little to offer beyond prayer.

#### *Eye diseases*

Another important area of healing for the prophet is with eye problems, as we have already seen in the account given by Khulu of his own healing, maybe glaucoma related to diabetes, a common problem. In the absence of access to medicine and opticians, eye problems inevitably form an important aspect of people's daily experience. Lee confirms that eye problems were important and ridicules the superstition of the Zulu people about this: "A pain in the eyes, again, must be due to the presence of some *isilokazana*, or beetle, in the affected parts. Incisions under the eyes, therefore, with more injections [of herbal pastes], will cause the eyes to water freely and so to eject the foreign body."<sup>54</sup>

#### *Chest diseases*

Chest problems, often associated with tuberculosis, are another major problem even today in rural Zululand (and increasingly also now in the cities as an opportunistic disease associated with AIDS). Lee's account again confirms this: "[They believe that] chest complaints of all kinds, from bronchitis to pneumonia, are caused by holes inside the chest, a diagnosis which, in some cases is pretty near the truth. The holes must be filled up. If the patient recovers after the filling process is complete his recovery proves the value of the treatment. If he dies it is because the holes were not sufficiently filled."<sup>55</sup> Actually, at the time of Khambule, modern medicine had no real answer to tuberculosis

<sup>51</sup> Khambule et al., Diary, 1, 51b: "About the matter of Mount Sinai, this is the one starting from the right hand. This is the Mount Sinai where Moses was speaking to God. Exodus 19:1 texts. George is Moses." There are several photographs of Archbishop Sikhakhane with the staff with the snake on it in the Sundkler archives, one of many loose photos in unnamed and unnumbered boxes, one of which is printed in *Zulu Zion*, but trimmed, so that the snake is not visible. The link with healing power is obvious

<sup>52</sup> Mhlungu, "Report in Zulu on various Independent Churches at Telezini", 17-18.

<sup>53</sup> Khambule et al., Diary, 1, 52a.

<sup>54</sup> Lee, *Charles Johnson of Zululand*. We quote here from the electronic version, X page 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

beyond isolation and a change of climate. In an account which reflects one of the major conflicts experienced by Khambule's Church of the Saints, Miriam Shezi from the neighbouring district of Msinga was brought to Khambule's Church at Telezini because of a serious chest disease. She was already betrothed. Marriages were arranged by parents and cattle were transferred from the man's family to the young woman's family in payment of *ilobola* or bride price. After her healing she refused to return home and joined Khambule's *isigodlo*, through the "marriage of the lamb". The community paid back her *ilobolo*, but this was one of the cases which wound up in court and led ultimately to the expulsion of the church from the area after a magistrate's hearing.<sup>56</sup> The charge was that he was abducting the women and children of the area without the permission of the patriarchal heads of families. He was well aware of the gathering storm but remained defiant: "I have not come to bring peace to the world. I have come to separate the father and daughter. Why? If the daughter will follow me there will be no peace."<sup>57</sup>

#### *Spinal problems*

One of those healed was the daughter of Lulaba Molefe, one of the relatives of the Hlubi chief Isaac Molefe. We are told that she was a cripple with spinal problems (*inesifumbu*), probably a hunchback. She was unable to walk and was carried to Khambule's New Jerusalem, where they prayed for her for two weeks. She went back home walking on her own. Khulu reported that she was still alive and walking. All that remained was her hunchback (*isifumbu*).<sup>58</sup> More serious was the progressive disease suffered by Joanna Ndlovu, which was probably polio. First one leg and then the other became crippled. A prophecy of "The Word coming from Jehovah" declared that church members would be surprised when they found out she was crippled. The reason for this sickness, however, was that the wrath and vengeance of Satan had found opportunity in divisions which had emerged in the community – probably the elopement of Khambule's brother, Jeremiah, with Nesther Sithole, a girl from the *isigodlo*:

It is because Satan has planned great evil right from the day of the marriage [the creation of the *isigodlo* by entry into the "marriage of the Lamb"]. He failed from that day until he began to conquer here on earth. He therefore went to God and asked for many things in accordance with his plans. This is why he is powerful against any member of the congregation of saints. He has gained a lot through this breaking away because he says they are always protected from temptation. He has many plans, and so many will fall away from this way through the power of Satan. Satan really has great power. When you try to lift up your foot, he just snatches it. Hai! In his time it is so, and it was so when he tempted the Lord himself. It even appears as though he is no longer an angel. Why? God allows him if he asks him.<sup>59</sup>

Nothing, however, seemed to help in the matter of Joanna's sickness. The first report of the disease was given on 23 July 1925, when a prophecy says, "It is not good for a person to suffer like this, when it is not meant that she should die. But if she keeps on being like this it is not good."<sup>60</sup> Just a week after this, there is a rather cryptic report without names attached: "But she will depart and there is no more death in her. Even though her flesh is finished, she has already passed from death to life."<sup>61</sup> At the end of the month, things were only getting worse. A prophecy given to John Mtanti declared that the reason for the disease is that Ndlovu should not be seen by ordinary people because she is holy. So a new sanctuary should be constructed separating the senior members of the *isigodlo*:

Do you know why the Prosecutor is always sick? It is because there are eyes which look at her though they are not worthy. That is why she is sick. She does not know either. That is why she is sick. She too does not know. There is a need to build a house where no one can enter except the elect, where she will not be seen. There will be a partition which is attached to the wall, and there must be a cloth which will cover it. This name will be written on it: Jerusalem. It will be written on this white cloth, where everyone who enters there may see that there is a gate which is closed. This house will be spacious. There will

<sup>56</sup> Mhungu, "Report in Zulu on various Independent Churches at Telezini", 30.

<sup>57</sup> Khambule et al., Diary 1, 50b.

<sup>58</sup> Mhungu, "Report in Zulu on various Independent Churches at Telezini", 30.

<sup>59</sup> Khambule et al., Diary 1, 25b-26b.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 23b.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 33a.

be one for the Bearer of the Ark and there will be one for Captenis. There will be seven lamps in it. This will be done so that the General of the Lord will not be seen outside. Why? That is where the entire royal seat is. It stays there. It has come down and it is here. The seven angels are not spoken about. The whole throne of God is here. All of it is here. This first vision will not be told to anyone.<sup>62</sup>

Despite all these attempts at finding healing for Joanna Ndlovu, Khambule's angel Gabriel, she died and was buried, along with the field telegraph which had produced the encrypted letters of the prophecies. The report of her death is brief and starkly poignant:

Captenis Capthes left this world on 21/10/1925, Wednesday, 2:30am. She was buried 22/10/1925. The service began at 3:45pm up to 5:30pm. Because of its length and that which the people had to hear, the words that he spoke were an exhortation to everybody.<sup>63</sup>

Here was the inevitable problem for a church which claimed healing power: why did some of its members die? We will see later that this was such a problem for the church that it would have nothing to do with dead bodies. It is the same problem which faces many prophets and healers today with the emergence of the scourge of HIV and AIDS and ultimately confronts those who claim that faith or traditional African remedies can cure it.

#### *Dumbness*

Mhlungu writes that, "The daughter of Ngobese at Nondweni was born dumb. Her parents brought her to Khambule. She was prayed for and now she speaks and all her family are members of Khambule's Church."<sup>64</sup>

#### *Possession (ifufunyane)*

A very common problem in Zulu society, particularly thought to afflict women, is *ifufunyane*, which is a form of hysterical madness. As we have seen, Diary 1 describes this sickness as being a ghost (*ipoka*). Mhlungu records that the six daughters of Sithole from Telezini, who had this affliction, were cured at Khambule's place and entered Khambule's *isigodlo* through the marriage of the Lamb.<sup>65</sup> This caused huge ructions in the community, as can be imagined. Later one of the girls, Nesther Sithole, who had been made "Bearer of the Ark", ran away with Jeremiah Khambule and her father was so angry he wanted to kill her. A prophecy describes this situation, though it is hard to disentangle:

It is difficult to hear about the going away of *uMpathi weArk*. It is still a great wonder to know what made her go away. It was said at the court of the chief [the tribal court presided over by Chief Isaac Molefe], but it is difficult today. Even the priest [Jeremiah] himself is no longer popular but they [the church] can prepare themselves while they are waiting for a report about the children [the girls of the *isigodlo*]. But it is not good if the elders are not present. Also it is a problem to go hunting after them [Jeremiah and Nesther] to find out where they are. In the affair of Nesther Sithole it is good that she knows that what can save her life is to come out of there, because Sithole wants to strangle her with his own hands. You have seen this for yourself. She no longer likes to be there. She says she can only be helped by you [Khambule].<sup>66</sup>

The various hearings in the chief's traditional court bring forward a procession of complaints from aggrieved fathers and husbands, but they were powerless to act against Khambule, since he had the status of a native exempted from tribal law, yet could not be expelled from the reserve either since he was born there and lived on property inherited from his father. It is finally a magistrate's court which expels him and his followers from Telezini. Nesther and Jeremiah returned to the church and remained with Khambule and Sikhakhane, who succeeded him as leader, until they died.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 40a-41a.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 47a-47b.

<sup>64</sup> Mhungu, "Report in Zulu on Various Independent Churches at Telezini", 31.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>66</sup> Khambule et al., Diary 1, 21b-22b.

However, George Khambule's brother Isaiah was also afflicted by a kind of mad possession which led him to throw himself into the fire, as we have seen.<sup>67</sup>

### **The problem of death**

It is clear from the description of the illness and death of Joanna Ndlovu that the church had a problem with death, since Khambule overcame death and had already entered heaven, according to the foundational myth. The heavenly New Jerusalem is already come down to earth and the marriage of the Lamb with the virgins who follow him has already happened. The consequent difficulty they have with death is well documented by Mhlungu's field report:

Since people who were sick with all kinds of diseases stayed in Khambule's place until they were healed – and those who got healed did not leave – those who died were treated in an unusual manner. None of those who were full members of the church could handle or carry the corpse. So if a person who came to be prayed for happened to die, that person was not buried until his or her people came, or until members of the community who were not members of Khambule's church took pity and buried the person. At times the people of Khambule's church would go and ask the members of another church to come and bury the person for them. If a relative of a member of Khambule's Church died, they were not allowed to mourn for the person nor to visit or console the bereaved. Only two weeks or a month after the death could they go to pray if the deceased was a member of the church or to console a relative of the deceased even if they were from another church. To carry or handle the corpse is to defile oneself so the members of the church could not do it.<sup>68</sup>

Such a case was that of an Anglican who came because her fingers and other parts of her body were rotting after a medical operation for sterility in a Western hospital in 1935. She was probably suffering from septicaemia or gangrene. As with Mr. Khulu, since her disease was particularly serious, she was placed outside Khambule's place even though it was winter and she died the same night. However, it was four days before the body was buried by the relatives, since the church would not touch it. A young Lutheran man of the Shabalala clan was brought to the *isibhedlela* for two months because his skin was rotting – perhaps also gangrene – and when his family returned they found his body left unattended in a hut:

When his relative came to see him, they found that he was already dead and neglected. No one was going into the house in which this young man was kept. His mother had to ask people from other churches to help her bury him. When it was all over, she had to clean and polish the house herself (using the fresh cow dung); this is against the Zulu custom in which a bereaved is exempted from the responsibility of handling the corpse.<sup>69</sup>

The church did not practice the traditional Zulu burial rites of slaughtering an animal and drinking traditional beer, but although ministers of the church would not participate, it seems they did not forbid their members to take part.

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<sup>67</sup> See above note 28.

<sup>68</sup> Mhungu, "Report in Zulu on Various Independent Churches at Telezini", 35-36.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 38.

## Conclusion

Khambule's apocalyptic perspective, brought on by the chaos of war, famine, epidemic and plague on a scale never seen before, both in his Zulu homeland and even in Europe, interpreted the symbolic warfare of heaven in the book of Revelation through the lens of the Zulu world view. In a perceived period of crumbling world empires, he saw the New Jerusalem coming down to earth in Zululand and set about organising the new community accordingly. From the throne of God and the Lamb flows the river of life with trees whose leaves were for the healing of the nations. He identified himself as the incarnation of Jesus, the bright morning star, the Alpha and Omega, sent to call his people to drink of the water of life and to be healed. The Spirit and the Bride say come! The marriage of the Lamb has come down to earth! Outside are the evil doers, inside are the saints of the church.

Khambule's hospital sought to give concrete expression to this heavenly healing by combating Satan by confession, exorcism, prophecy, prayer, singing and dancing, celibacy and a communal lifestyle. The material means of healing in the hospital were the water and ash of *isiwasho* and the weapons of the stones of power or *izikhali*. In areas of disease which might be described as social, Khambule's church had considerable success: barrenness, hysteria, inability to speak, even some forms of paralysis. With several medical conditions for which there was no cure at the time, or at least none available in Zululand, such as tuberculosis and eye diseases, they may perhaps have had at least as much success as Johnson's makeshift hospital. The concept of healing as deriving from the conflict of unseen spiritual forces, which Khambule built on his interpretation of Revelation, matched their world view better than the mission clinics and later government hospitals. The link between confession and healing within an accepting and supportive community of others, who had been healed, enabled Khambule to maintain the Zulu understanding of disease as flowing out of conflict in the community and healing as flowing out of putting right and reconciling fractured relationships within the community and with the ancestors. Members felt healed, transformed and empowered by their experience in Khambule's church.

However, since the New Jerusalem had already come, the ark and the whole throne of God's glory was located here in this place, and the Bridegroom had already come when Jesus came down upon Khambule to claim the bride of the Lamb, it was difficult for the community to deal with failure and sin. The community male and female, young and old, was pledged to celibacy and a life of perfect holiness, yet members were constantly running off to get married. Even devout members, like the Khulu family, sent their children away to other churches so they could get married and keep the family continuity, an important consideration in a culture based on the omnipresence and power of the ancestors. Khambule himself had a child with one of his two chief prophets, Fakazi Mhlungu, causing a split in the church. His brother Jeremiah married Nesther Sithole. Moreover, the celibacy of the *isigodlo* caused endless clashes in the surrounding population of Telezini and beyond, where women and girls were considered to be under the authority of the male patriarchs and at their disposal. The New Jerusalem had come down to earth and yet the powers of Babylon were able to drive Khambule out and smash down his Jerusalem. The members of the New Jerusalem drank of the water of life and had access to the leaves for the healing of the nation, yet they got sick and died. Most devastating for Khambule personally, his particular favourite prophet, Joanna Ndlovu, whose prophecies even now seem to possess a charm and power, died probably of polio. The community could only respond to death and failure by denial.<sup>70</sup>

Zionist churches tend to be localised (though bigger ones like the amaNazaretha of Shembe, the Zion Christian Church of Lekanyane or the St. John's Apostolic Church of Ma' Nku, now have or claim to have millions of adherents) and their particular configurations tend to be highly specific to the vision and experience of their founders. However, this is one potential problem which may face all of them in the context of HIV and AIDS. The understanding of healing as spiritual conflict and the idea that the New Jerusalem has in some sense already come through the anointing of the founding prophet makes it hard to accept the idea of an incurable disease. On the one hand, the heavy emphasis on the moral and sexual purity of its members, especially young girls, may mean that some are protected from HIV and AIDS by a more prolonged virginity before marriage (as was the intention of John Mtanti, who did not envisage the marriage of the Lamb being extended to all members by Khambule). On the

<sup>70</sup> Rodney Stark makes a helpful proposal for ten major principles for predicting the success or failure of a new religious movement. Khambule's movement meets several of his key criteria for failure: the level of tension with the surrounding environment is too high; the legitimacy of his leadership was undermined in terms of his own criteria for authority; his insistence on permanent celibacy meant it was impossible to maintain the requisite "level of fertility to ... offset member mortality" and finally his socialisation of the young clearly did not work, even with his own children. See R. Stark, "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model", *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11/2 (1996), 133-146, here 145.

other hand, it also makes it particularly hard for people who are already members to come out into the open with their HIV and AIDS status because of its association with sexual activity.

Those who seek healing in Nquthu and Telezini today are likely to seek it first in the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital. However, they are very likely to consult an *isangoma* or prophet as well. If they don't, they may well ask for special prayers in their mainline denominations. Healing by Western medical technology and healing by forms of spiritual warfare both continue to be embraced in South Africa by the same people with little sense of contradiction. This is an aspect of a long conversation which, like most arguments, has not been and cannot be unilaterally settled. However, in this new time of crisis in HIV and AIDS there are signs that they may be working against each other, as in the time of Johnson and Khambule, instead of working together to find creative ways of "remaking and re-imaging" community to address the pandemic, drawing on the distinctive insights of each form of healing.