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Michelle Winslow (UK)

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“Women Who Live with HIV.”

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Philippe Denis (South Africa)
“Thirty years later: The long-term effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on South African society.”

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Christina Landman (South Africa)
“Free but fragile: Human relations amidst poverty and HIV in democratic South Africa.”

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Anni Turnbull (Australia)
“Grief and hope: Stories from the Australian AIDS Memorial Quilt Collection Project.”
Free but fragile: Human relations amidst poverty and HIV in democratic South Africa.

Christina Landman
(South Africa):

Abstract: Dullstroom-Emnotweni is the highest town in South Africa. Cold and misty, it is situated in the eastern Highveld, halfway between the capital Pretoria/Tswane and the Mozambique border. Alongside the main road of the white town, 27 restaurants provide entertainment to tourists on their way to Mozambique and/or the Kruger National Park. The inhabitants black township, Sakhelwe, are remnants of the Southern Ndebele who have lost their land a century ago in wars against the whites. They are mainly dependent on employment as cleaners and waitresses in the white town. Three white people from the white town and three black people from the township have been interviewed on their views whether democracy has brought changes to this society during the past 20 years. Answers cover a wide range of views. Gratitude is expressed that women are now safer and HIV treatment available. However, unemployment and poverty persists in a community that nevertheless shows resilience and feeds on hope.
INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND, CONTENTS AND METHOD
A majority of the people living in Sakhelwe, the impoverished and underdeveloped black township of Dullstroom-Emnotweni in rural Mpumalanga in eastern South Africa, are remnants of the Southern Ndebeles who until a century ago lived on their ancestral land 40 kilometers to the east on what is today known as “Mapoch’s caves”. After losing their land in wars against the whites the Ndebeles were reduced to working on white farms, that is, on land previously owned by themselves. Eventually their children and grandchildren came to Dullstroom to work on the railways and as domestic workers in white households. The people of Sakhelwe tell the stories of their forebearers who went from being landowners to farmworkers to unskilled labourers ... and how they themselves landed up being unemployed and impoverished. Sakhelwe has an unemployment rate of 70% and an HIV infection rate of 75%. ¹

The paper will relate stories on human relationships in Sakhelwe after the coming of democracy in South Africa in 1994. The stories will indicate how the coming of democracy – and its secular constitution based on human rights - has influenced the power relations in this “powerless” community (1) between men and women, (2) between the youth and people with cultural seniority, (3) between people employed in highly paid government and municipal positions and the unemployed, and (4) between people in the township and those in the town itself, especially between the white and the black churches in Dullstroom-Emnotweni.

INTERVIEWS
Professor Mashilo Molobi, a colleague at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion at Unisa, reacted as follows to my complaint that people in Sakhelwe “do not reveal their real feelings about 20 years of democracy when I interview them”: “The people in the rural areas are strongly attached to tradition. They are very secretive about their real feelings. They honour their government. They will not open up, not even to a black person.” ²

Keeping the limitations of this research in mind, I present summaries of the interviews I had (with consent) with six people staying in the rural town of Dullstroom-Emnotweni in the week before the general elections of 7 May 2014. An interview schedule is attached.

Three of them are white and live in the (previously) white town of Dullstroom (or neighbouring Belfast). The other three are black and live in Dullstroom’s township, Sakhelwe. Although these interviewees are small in sample, they represent a wide variety of views, from outspokenly anti-government to admittedly committed to the ANC³ tradition. The interviewees are as follows:

(1) Joost Tryhou, a white man critical of government, living in the white town of Dullstroom.
(2) Marianne Holzhauzen, a white woman in sympathy with the old and new problems experienced by the black community of Sakhelwe.
(3) Sannelie Kruger, a younger white woman torn between white losses and persistent black poverty.
(4) Paulos Mnisi, a black man born on Kareekraal, a (white) farm near Dullstroom, critical of present president Jacob Zuma but an ANC supporter.
(5) Iris Mphuthi, a black woman living in Sakhelwe and previous counsellor in the ANC led eMakhzeni Municipality.
(6) Rose Sindane, a black woman of the “human rights generation”, critical of traditional gender relations and employed by the ANC government.

¹ For the history and present state of the Southern Ndebeles in Sakhelwe Township, Dullstroom-Emnotweni, see Christina Landman, 2013, Faith-based communities and politics in Dullstroom-Emnotweni: Local stories of identity, in Oral History Journal of South Africa Volume 1, Number 1 (September 2013):45-57.
² Interviewed 26 May 2014, Unisa.
³ The African National Congress (ANC) has governed South Africa since the coming of democracy in 1994.
Democracy in south africa is better than autocracy but not what we dreamt of...
Joost Tryhou (65) has come to retire in Dullstroom, living in the (previously) white town. He speaks passionately – but without racist bitterness – about his journey locally with democracy after 20 years. We have idealised democracy, he says, but we are now suffering because of its bad fruits. Education has moved backwards. Administration, in local and national governments, is totally corrupt. Mother languages have been undermined so that all people now speak bad English and consider themselves as being learned. Votes are bought with promises that are not supported by facts. The consequence of “democracy” is that products of inferior quality are tolerated and even promoted by government on all levels, from service delivery to education to physical products that are put up for sale in shops. Tryhou concludes by saying: “Democracy as we have it now is slightly better than autocracy – but it is not what we have dreamt about.”

Empowerment should come with life skills development
Marianne Holzhauzen (70) is the CEO of the Mpumalanga branch of Epileptic South Africa which houses 86 people who, apart from suffering from epilepsy, are also intellectually challenged. She has been living in Dullstroom for the past 34 years with a strong civil involvement both in the black and white communities. How have things changed in Dullstroom the past 20 years? she is asked.

The white people in Dullstroom are not necessarily worse off than 20 years ago, she says, apart from having to make a special effort to keep things together ... like everybody else in South Africa. And for the black people there are more job opportunities. However, she feels strongly that job creation should be accompanied by life skills development and good work ethics. The newly employed should be taught not to buy things on credit, and that a job comes with responsibilities and not only with cash. She herself engaged in life skills training for people living with disabilities, but feels that the after-school centre should teach learners life skills and that the church should offer workshops in this regard.

The black community of Dullstroom has grown tremendously the past 20 years, especially in comparison to the white community. In 1994 there were 250 white people residing in Dullstroom, with 2500 black people in Sakhelwe. Now, in 2014, there are 480 white and 15 000 black people living in Dullstroom-Emnotweni.

However, not all things have changed for the better. Many more people are affected by HIV and AIDS than 20 years ago. Openness about HIV infection has not grown, and many people from Dullstroom go to Belfast for ARV treatment. Service delivery has deteriorated. The roads are full of potholes; the water is undrinkable and often completely cut off; corruption reigns at the eMakhazeni Municipality.

As far as relationships in Dullstroom-Emnotweni are concerned, Holzhauen experiences no discrimination against women in her daily contact with local people. She herself feels respected by men and has entered into many trusted working relationships with them. She also testifies to good relations between black and white locally, but points out that the youth feel excluded from the employment market and opportunities – in spite of the fact that Dullstroom’s economy has grown extensively because of an expanding tourist market. “Twenty years ago, if it was misty, you would drive through Dullstroom and miss it completely”.

The youth is indestructible
Sannelie Kruger (45) is a Pamgolding estate agent working in Dullstroom and living in Belfast, 33 km to the west. She points to the resilience and hope of the black youth in a rather hopeless situation. The eMakhazeni Municipality is bankrupt and in spite of the fact that individual residents pay their electricity bills, Escom (the national electricity provider) is on the brink of cutting off all electricity in the municipality, including that of the black townships who had been suffering from the lack of electricity in the long
decades before democracy came twenty years ago. Although Dullstroom remains the playground of the rich from Gauteng, Sakhelwe is peaceful with the youth not engaging in criminal acts such as stealing. “The youth is indestructible. They always bounce back. They live with hope. I have been involved with a school for six years now and in this time there was not one single racial incident.”

Voting for the ANC for what Mandela has done for us
Paulos Mnisi (63) was born on Kareekraal, a farm 20 kilometers to the southeast of Dullstroom. He grew up in Madala, the “old location” which was relocated to Sakhelwe in 1980 when the white town wanted to build a sewerage where Madala was. Mnisi’s father was the evangelist of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) in this area. Today Mnisi is retired from Escom and the leader elder of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, as the DRCA is now called.

Mnisi7 is from Swazi descent and traditional in his ways. He is critical of some forms of women’s liberation. He feels that women do not respect their husbands anymore, do not look after them when they are ill, and drink too much. “They just go their own way.” However, Mnisi also reverts to the language of equality when needed as is expected from men today: “A man must not sit on a woman. They must agree on things.”

The young people too, he says, do not respect the older people. The old people in Sakhelwe suffer a lot while the young ones do not look after them. The young people drink a lot. Even children walk in the street with bottles of beer. The young men show affection to their girlfriends right in front of the older people.

Mnisi is angry towards the white people in town who exploit black workers and pay them R800 ($70) per month. White people come from the cities and open businesses in town. They are willing to pay their employees well, but the local white people convince them to pay them badly at the going rate. “Black workers are not treated as equals,” Mnisi says. “However, black people must work on their own and should not always look for work at the white people’s places.”

Mnisi is critical of the corruption, extravagance and a lack of service delivery attributed to the eMakhazeni Municipality. Municipality workers do not receive overalls. The roads are dangerous with potholes. They have built 550 RDP (state-funded) houses which are, however, without electricity and water. The houses are “skeef en krom” (crooked) with no tarred roads. The counsellors “eat the money” and entertain themselves with huge parties. He is critical of the ANC government as well. The past 20 years have been a little better for blacks, but Nkhandla (the house of president Zuma costing R256 million/$25 million) was an eye-opener, he says. The EFF (Economic Freedom Fighters) of Julius Malema will take over. “However, I shall vote ANC for the rest of my life because Mandela has helped us. If it was not for Mandela, I would not have voted.”

Things are better but poverty is huge
Iris Mphuthi has been a counsellor for the ANC led eMakhazeni Municipality for two terms during the past 20 years. She feels that, during this time, things have dramatically changed for the best. Domestic violence is under control. And this is because of government policy and the police. If the wife lays a charge of assault, the law takes its cause. There is no more domestic violence in Sakhelwe. There is respect for women now.

The youth too respect their parents, and even share their salary with their parents. They even share with other youth who are unemployed. However, the young people are fond of going to the shebeen. There are no drugs in the township, and no prostitution. There was a time when young women could be picked up in front of “La Bamba” (the cafe in the town), but that has stopped.

7 Interviewed 5 May 2014.
You also see that employers treat their employees well. The clinic also works well, although people refer to go to Belfast for their HIV treatment because of the stigma. Also, the relationship between black and white in Dullstroom-Emnotweni is much better than 20 years ago. “We now work together.”

It is just the churches that do not mix. For instance, the Elohim Bible Church [a large independent church in Sakhelwe] do not like people from other churches. It is only when there are funerals that the people mix.

“But, yes, things are much better than 20 years ago. Much better. It is just the poverty that is big.”

Everyone is free, and everything is transparent
Rose Nomadlozi (39) is from the “human rights generation”. She is informed and empowered through human rights discourses, especially discourses on women’s rights. She is working in a state department.

During the past 20 years everything changed, she says. Everyone is free now. At the police in Dullstroom-Emnotweni no rape or abuse is reported. Everything is transparent. We are taught about our human dignity everywhere, on the television, at the schools – it is even preached in the church. The women are definitely better off.

The young people, also, are more patient with the older ones. They used to ask us “Did you really live like that in the old days?!” But now they are trying to understand that older people do not go on strikes or participate in protests like they do. They also recognise that the older people have not used the same technology in cell phones and computers.

The relationship between employers and employees in Dullstroom-Emnotweni is one hundred percent, she says, but unemployment amongst the youth and the men is very high. And the youth does not have money to go and study after matric.

The HIV situation is also better than 20 years ago. We used to bury the children of parents who were HIV positive, but today the children are negative. We all grow in knowledge about HIV every day.

The churches in Sakhelwe are a problem, though. The Elohim Bible Church does not want anything to do with the other churches, especially the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). There is a lot of tension, she says.

But in summary, according to Nomadlozi, Dullstroom-Emnotweni today, after 20 years, is a free community.

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8 Interviewed 28 May 2014
IN CONCLUSIÓN

The six interviews related in the above represent a wide variety of views on the gains and failures of democracy in the rural town of Dullstroom-Emnotweni which is still very much geographically divided into the white town catering for an upper class tourist market en route to the Kruger National Park, and the black township, Sakhelwe, where unemployment reigns supreme.

In conclusion then follows a summary of the views expressed in terms of the interview schedule presented:

How are things here in Dullstroom-Emnotweni between men and women?
Answers varied between women being too free and disrespectful towards their husbands and roles, to women now being truly free and protected against violence.

How are things here in Dullstroom-Emnotweni between young and old?
On the one hand the youth is being accused of drinking too much and being disrespectful and radical; on the other hand, the youth is commented for assisting the older people who are not as politically conscious are they are, who are unemployed and not skilled in internet technology. Drugs and prostitution do not seem to be an acknowledged problem amongst the youth. However, professional training and life skills are lacking amongst them.

How are things here in Dullstroom-Emnotweni between the employed and the unemployed?
Unemployment is identified as a massive problem by all the interviewees, independent of their political views and their views on the gains of the 20 year old government.

How are things here in Dullstroom-Emnotweni between employers and employees?
All acknowledges that employees are vulnerable because of limited job opportunities and a lack of access to post-matric training.

How are things here in Dullstroom-Emnotweni for those affected by HIV and AIDS?
Anti-Retroviral treatment is available from the (one room) clinic in Sakhelwe, but most of the infected go to Belfast for treatment because of a fear for stigmatisation. However, conscientisation and advocacy programmes are successfully presented in Sakhelwe.

How are things here in Dullstroom-Emnotweni between blacks and whites?
The existence of racial tension was not admitted by any of the interviewees.

How are things here in Dullstroom-Emnotweni between the churches?
However, tension between churches seems to be rife in the township itself in competing for members. Historically there are 20 Muslims in Dullstroom-Emnotweni, who have built their own mosque and support a full-time imam. The Muslim population has grown extensively over the past year with the take-over of businesses in the white town as well as in the township. However, no tension between Christians and Muslims has been reported.
WORKS CONSULTED

INTERVIEWS
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