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## THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF AFRICAN METHODISM IN THE ORANGE FREE STATE\*

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The amalgamation of the Ethiopian and AME churches culminated a remarkable historical convergence between black Christians at opposite ends of the diaspora. African Americans and Africans, both searching for meaning and identity in their own worlds, seemed to discover it by refracting their own histories through the history and experience of the other. For African American church leaders, the opening of the African mission field helped salve the pain of the past; slavery, for all its horror and brutality, had been purposeful, a part of God's unfolding plan for the redemption of Africa. For Mangena Mokone and his fellows, the prospect was equally bracing. Seen through the prism of black America, their humble rebellions in places like Marabastad and the Waterberg resolved themselves into the stuff of history. As one church founder wrote in an early letter to the *Voice of Missions*: "The prophecy predicted by the Psalmist, 68, approaches its perfection." Ethiopia was at last stretching forth its hands unto God.<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, however, the handful of leaders gathered around Mokone did not encompass "Ethiopianism," or exhaust its meanings. If the movement had remained the province of a handful of dissident clerics, it would never have generated the enthusiasm it did, or struck such fear into the hearts of colonial officials. Ethiopianism, and later African Methodism, clearly struck a deeper chord. In the fifteen years between 1895 and 1910, the gospel of *Tiyopia* exploded across the subcontinent, eventually reaching as far as Barotseland, north of the Zambesi. By the formation of Union, the AME

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\*What follows is about one-third of a chapter from a forthcoming book about the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in the United States and South Africa. The chapter explores the emergence and evolution of African Methodism in a series of different South African contexts, roughly between 1895 and 1910. The first section of the chapter examines African Methodism on the Witwatersrand; the last looks at the church in particular reserves; this middle section focuses on the towns and farmlands of the O.F.S. At risk of indulging in the old tactic of self-defense by self-deprecation, let me note two problems. The first relates to obscurity, which is hard to avoid when readers are dropping into the middle of a study. Hopefully the introduction provides the necessary context. The second problem, less easily solved, relates to writing simultaneously for two different scholarly audiences, neither of which necessarily knows much about the other's patch. In such circumstances, the safest course is to explain everything, which sometimes makes for ponderousness. I should add that the footnotes are a bit spotty. This reflects time pressure, but is also intended as a tribute to P. Bonner. Emulation, after all, is the highest form of praise.

Church boasted perhaps 40,000 full members within South Africa alone. Thousands of other people had been touched by the church's message.<sup>2</sup>

Who were these people? It was characteristic of church leaders that they rarely said; their congregants, as far as they were concerned, were black people. Contemporary white sources are scarcely more informative. Missionaries in particular were so hurt and enraged by 'Ethiopianism,' that they rarely stopped to ask who specifically had defected to the movement, or why. When whites did comment on the composition of the AME Church, they tended to do so less in sociological than in characterological terms, working endless variations on the theme of racial adolescence. African Methodists were "ambitious," "restless," "immature," "half educated." Most had had prolonged exposure to the city, where they had lost "the strong feelings of loyalty to their hereditary chiefs" that characterized Africans in their "raw" state. The movement's association with black America was particularly menacing; it gave the "wrong warp" to black aspirations, while promoting an "unnatural cohesion" among Africans previously riven by tribe. Such assessments easily slipped into "Black Peril" hysteria; at best they dripped with condescension. Thus the 1904 General Missionary Conference in Johannesburg attributed the movement to "the quickening power of the gospel," which had "awakened" Africans from their timeless slumber into a new racial "self consciousness." Ethiopianism, the missionaries resolved, represented a "mis-directed" use of this "new born energy."<sup>3</sup>

Today, nearly a century later, this characterization remains embedded in South African historiography, albeit in less invidious form. Without meaning to do violence to a quite diverse body of scholarship, most of the literature on "Ethiopianism" remains preoccupied with assessing the movement's contribution to a rising tide of African nationalism. The movement's adherents, when noted, are almost invariably described as "urban," "middle class" and "de-tribalised" -- precisely the people who founded the South African Native National Congress (later the African National Congress) in 1912. Confirmation of the thesis is found in the movement's association with black America, though how that association came about, and what it meant to different South Africans, are rarely examined. The Oxford History of South Africa, for example, discusses religious independency in the chapter on "African Nationalism," in the context of an emerging African middle class. Having left behind their own "traditions," members of this urban, educated elite were susceptible to "Ethiopianism," an impulse which the authors portray as emanating from nineteenth-century black America.<sup>4</sup>

This characterization is not without a measure of truth. 'Ethiopianism' did first take root in cities -- in Marabastad, with its welter of languages and cultures, and later in the teeming locations of the Rand. Many adherents, and most leaders, were recruited from the "de-tribalised" elite, and embraced Black America as a model of progress and racial unity. There is also some merit in the equation of African Methodism and nationalism. AME ministers and lay people played prominent roles in the various congresses, vigilance associations and political unions that so plagued imperial officials in the early years of the century; during one period in 1907, in fact, the church was represented on the executives of three of the four provincial native congresses. Nearly a dozen of the men who launched the South African Native National Congress in 1912 had been touched by the AME Church, and by the broader traffic with black America. <sup>5</sup>

It does not take long, however, to reach the limits of such generalizations. The standard portrayal of African Methodism cannot explain the church's popularity in the reserves of the Eastern Cape and Transkei, where the majority of people still worked the land, acknowledged the authority of chiefs, and moved within more or less ethnically-bounded communities. Still less can it explain the lively traffic between the AME Church and revanchist African chiefs, including the Paramount Chiefs of the Mpondo, Basotho, Barotse and Bapedi. Nor can this characterization be easily reconciled with the discoveries of historians like Tim Keegan and Charles van Onselen, who have uncovered thriving AME communities among highveld sharecroppers. Even within cities, the church's constituency and character defy convenient generalization. In Cape Town, for example, the church became the province of an emerging Coloured elite, who wore their affiliation with black America as a badge of distinction, even to the extent of calling themselves "Negro." Living through a plague scare and a concerted effort to push non-whites out of the central city, these Coloured brahmins found in the church a mechanism for distancing themselves from the city's Africans, some of whom met in a nearby AME Church of their own. <sup>6</sup>

How can one account for this diversity? For white missionaries, the answer was patent: Africans lacked the capacity to maintain institutional order and "standards." Stripped of the racist husk, there is a small kernel of truth here. The South African AME Church did lack a strong institutional center, particularly in the early years. Episcopal authority, strong in theory, remained minimal in practice. From 1900 onward, the U.S. church dispatched several Bishops and missionaries to oversee the South African work, but war and the imposition of a postwar "permit" system for interior travel more or less confined the African Americans to the western Cape. Financially, the church was even less centralized. AME leaders loved to tally

the value of the church's property holdings, which reached into tens of millions of dollars, but in actual practice the church remained an impecunious institution. The South African church was poorer still, lacking even the capacity to pay ministerial salaries. Instead, ministers fended for themselves, subsisting on whatever local congregations could scrape together, a position which made them highly susceptible to "capture from below." Newly appointed ministers who refused to address local issues or accommodate local leaders could, and sometimes did, find themselves hungry. Obviously this point should not be pushed too far. While less structured than its American counterpart, the South African AME Church did possess a published *Discipline*, an established episcopacy, and a large body of procedure and precedent, all of which lent it a degree of institutional integrity unmatched by any other independent church. Even so, the early church remained a decentralized affair, less a single movement than a mould, into which local communities could pour their own interests and concerns.<sup>7</sup>

What generalizations then can we make? Was the AME Church just a concatenation of local movements and communities, or, as with the proverbial elephant and the blind men, was there a single beast uniting its seemingly disparate features? Ultimately, the only way to answer that question is by examining the emergence and evolution of the church in a series of specific contexts. The chapter which follows attempt to do just that. Section one examines the church in the urban Transvaal, the birthplace of "Ethiopianism" and the center of South Africa's ongoing industrial revolution. The second section moves to the towns and countryside of the Orange Free State, where small, ethnically-mixed communities of Africans struggled to maintain a modicum of independence in the face of extraordinary oppression. The final section examines less a place than a phenomenon: the rapid spread of African Methodism in South Africa's "reserves," where chiefs and their subjects grappled with an increasingly intrusive and exacting colonial state.

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The expansive, level plains of the southern highveld were the crossroads of nineteenth century South Africa. During the *difigane*, raiders and refugees traversed the region, dislocating indigenous Sotho communities and depopulating broad swaths of territory. Over the next ten years, a steady stream of immigrants crossed into 'Transorangia' from the Cape: the Griqua, people of mixed Khoi, European and slave descent; trekboers in search of grazing for their cattle and sheep; and a motley collection of European, mostly British, missionaries. With the onset of the Great Trek in

the middle 1830s, upwards of ten thousand Boers entered the region, accompanied by thousands of African and Coloured dependents. Decades of upheaval ensued, punctuated by an international wool boom, an abortive British annexation, the establishment of Boer independence, and an endless series of raids and skirmishes, culminating in the Basotho-Boer Wars of the 1860s. The opening of the Kimberley diamond fields a few years later, and the subsequent discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand, wrought perhaps the greatest transformation of all, transforming a colonial economy, still organized around the provision of wool and skins, into the grainery of a nation. <sup>8</sup>

This history of upheaval bequeathed to the Orange Free State a singularly polyglot black population. By far the largest contingent were Basotho, a category which included not only people from the Sotho heartland, but the Tlokoa, well established in the region before the *difigane*, as well as groups like the Bakwena and Bangwato, refugees from the western Transvaal who had settled under Moshoeshe. The Barolong, the second largest African group in the Free State, were likewise refugees, and lived with their chief Moroka in an enclave around Thaba 'Nchu. A substantial Zulu population lived in the republic, especially in the districts bordering Natal, while smaller Mfengu and Xhosa contingents were dispersed across the farms in the south. Sprinkled amongst these groups were Afrikaans-speaking *oorlams* and *inboekselings*, as well as more recently captured slaves and "apprentices," many of whom hailed from north of the Vaal. <sup>9</sup>

Of all the African populations in the subcontinent, these were the most thoroughly dispossessed. With the exception of the Barolong at Thaba 'Nchu, who maintained a tenuous autonomy into the 1880s, all independent chiefdoms, and all indigenous claims to land, had been extinguished in the republic. By the end of the nineteenth century, something between eighty and ninety percent of blacks lived on white-owned farms, often in extended kin groups, working as tenants or sharecroppers. Developed in the wake of the mineral discoveries, the sharecropping system represented a kind of compromise white and black patriarchs: the first controlled land but lacked the means to exploit it profitably; the second lacked land, but commanded skills, implements, draught power and large amounts of labor. Terms of tenure varied across space and time, depending on the quality of the land, the nature of production, the capital resources of landlords and, most importantly, the skills and productive resources of particular tenants. In contrast to the United States, where sharecropping quickly spiralled into a system of debt peonage, many Free State tenants and sharecroppers did very well indeed, accumulating large flocks of sheep and cattle, and reaping hundreds of bags of grain per year. Most privileged of all were those who

cropped for absentee landlords, usually urban speculators or land companies that had bought up farms for the potential mineral rights. The most famous example was Vereeniging Estates, a collection of twenty-two farms in the southern Transvaal and northern Free State, owned by mining magnate Sammy Marks. In their heyday, the Estates housed two hundred and fifty sharecropping families, most of whom went their daily rounds without so much as a by-your-leave to white authority.<sup>10</sup>

Several other aspects of this world are worth remarking. First, this was a world where the "political economy of racial domination" was peculiarly fragile, as Timothy Keegan has shown. White farmers' fortunes depended on the skills, energy and productive resources of black tenants and sharecroppers, a fact which no amount of racist bluster could obscure. Worse still, many tenants appeared to be growing increasingly prosperous and independent, expanding herds and acreage even as more and more whites slipped into poverty and landlessness. When natural and economic disasters struck the highveld, as they so frequently did in the late nineteenth century, it was usually debt-strapped whites who buckled first, while blacks, embedded in networks of reciprocity and able to call upon the labor of extended kin groups, endured and recovered. The result, in terms of race relations, was a structure both precarious and paradoxical, ever poised between intimacy and loathing, mutual dependence and competition, paternalism and violence. In moments of great stress, that balance could topple, producing "moral panics," great populist spasms targetting foreign capitalists, Jewish speculators, and, above all, independent Africans. At such moments, any sign of black prosperity and self-reliance became a provocation. Special ordinances gave any white the authority to arrest and detain an African. Schools were closed, and blacks en route to church were turned away.<sup>11</sup>

Part of the secret to sharecroppers' independence lay in their capacity to generate non-farm income, a necessity which grew as the century progressed. Standard dichotomies like urban and rural, "townsman" and "tribesman" cannot comprehend the world of Free State peasants, most of whom had considerable exposure to town life and to working for wages. Tenants and sharecroppers rode transport, and worked on railroads and diamond diggings; they sold wood and skins; they plied trades in dozens of different cities and towns. Probably the most common pattern was for one or two family members -- usually young men, sometimes young women -- to migrate to town during the lulls between planting and harvest, or during periods of crisis, such as that following the coming of rinderpest. Already, a few individuals and families had begun moving permanently to town, but even they tended to keep a foot on the land, maintaining a few cattle and

sheep on the farms of kinfolk, contributing labor during planting and harvest times. This interpenetration of urban and rural worlds informed every aspect of life in the Orange Free State. For policymakers, the problems of "native administration" in urban and rural areas were inseparable. Municipal policies toward African tradesmen, for example, had a direct effect on white farmers' capacity to recruit and discipline black labor, a fact lost on none of the actors involved. For blacks, on the other hand, economic survival often hinged on the ability to move between town and country, and to bring skills and resources accumulated in one realm to bear in the other. <sup>12</sup>

All these factors -- the mobility, the ethnic mixing, the constant tension between subjugation and autonomy -- left their imprint on the character of the people themselves. As a group, tenants and sharecroppers were remarkable for their openness to "progressive" -- i.e. western -- ideas and values. At a time when less than one in five black South Africans might be classified as a Christian, close to half of blacks in the Free State were professing Christians. Methodism in particular enjoyed a rich harvest, attracting close to fifty thousand adherents by the 1890s. In many cases, conversion was accompanied by a rudimentary education, often in schools of tenants' own construction. In this world of aliens and refugees, few Africans retained meaningful links with traditional authority; many, most notably the Bakwena and Bangwato groups entering the republic from Basutoland, settled on white farms precisely to escape chiefly exactions. While sharecropping families continued to exchange *lobola*, a crucial underpinning of patriarchal power, customs like initiation, a practice more directly related to chiefly authority, waned. The vast majority of men took only one wife. Finally, Free State Africans possessed a long experience of involvement in the colonial economy, not only as pastoralists and cultivators, but in a range of entrepreneurial activities. In a word, these were enterprising people, for whom values like respectability, self-reliance and self-improvement were not merely missionary clichés, but palpable, daily realities. Such people would find a natural home in the AME Church. <sup>13</sup>

It is difficult to reconstruct African Methodism's initial spread across the highveld with any precision. Even before the Ethiopian Church's formal affiliation with the AME Church in 1896, the movement had begun to emanate southward and westward from its base in Pretoria and the Witwatersrand. By 1897 or early 1898, Ethiopian Church founder Marcus Gabasahane and his son Abel had established a solid chain of AME churches all along the northern bank of the Vaal River: in Potchefstroom, Klerksdorp, Wolmarannstad and Bloemhof. Abel eventually ventured as far west as Vryburg, while his father joined exiled chief Samuel Moroka on his trek through Bechuanaland to Bulawayo, in what would become Southern



Rhodesia. At about the same time, Jacobus Xaba planted the first AME congregations in the Orange Free State. <sup>14</sup>

The youngest of the original Ethiopians, Xaba possessed the ideal pedigree for working amongst the Free State's progressive, ethnically diverse peasantry. The Xaba family hailed originally from Basutoland, but had been uprooted during the difiqane. Eventually they settled in Natal, in the prosperous peasant community clustered around the Wesleyan mission at Edendale. Educated at Edendale and Healdtown, Jacobus seemed destined for a career in the Wesleyan ministry, but, like so many of his colleagues, he clashed with his European superintendents. While stationed in Heilbron in about 1893, he was suspended from the ministry, apparently for some form of insubordination. Xaba, however, refused to relinquish his pulpit; he seems also to have neglected to report his suspension to republican authorities, in order to keep the pass which allowed native church workers to travel and preach freely. (A Wesleyan missionary, writing a decade later at the height of the 'Ethiopian' panic, accused Xaba of lying, falsifying a testimonial, and forging a pass.) When discovered, Xaba was arrested and dismissed from the Wesleyan Church. On his release, he contacted Mangena Mokone, with whom he was apparently well acquainted. In 1894, Xaba was formally re-obligated to the Ethiopian ministry. From that date until his premature death a decade later, he remained the church's most avid and effective evangelist. <sup>15</sup>

Most of Xaba's initial harvest came at the expense of his erstwhile co-religionists. Posted to Vereeniging by Mokone, he trolled the mid-Vaal region, gathering in other Wesleyan ministers and local preachers, many of whom shared his disenchantment with the white missionaries. Most of these men, in turn, carried their congregations with them. By early 1898, AME congregations had sprouted all across the northern Free State, most prominently in the districts of Heilbron and Vredefort, precisely the places with the highest rates of absentee landownership and most prosperous African tenantry. By the beginning of the South African War, even tiny towns and sidings like Parys and Viljoensdrift boasted substantial AME churches. While it is impossible to establish how many people joined the movement, the numbers were clearly substantial. A British administrator, touring Viljoensdrift in 1901 estimated that half of the black Christians in the area had defected to the AME Church. <sup>16</sup>

The church's increase, however, was not confined to the north, nor did it come solely at the expense of the Wesleyans. By the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in September, 1899, AME churches had risen all across the Free State. In Smithfield location, a preserve of the Dutch Reformed Church, Xaba accepted two hundred new AME members in a single day. In

Bloemfontein, a burgeoning rail center visited by African American Bishop Henry Turner during his 1898 tour, the church boasted several hundred adherents, including a large contingent of former Anglicans. In Kroonstad, further up the line of rail, African Methodism seems virtually to have swept the location. By mid-1899, the Kroonstad AME Church boasted a substantial brick building, day and night schools, and an active women's prayer union. The congregation was especially renowned for its choir, which performed under the direction of minister Simon Sinamela, yet another of the original Ethiopians and one of the most important purveyors of the African American 'Jubilee' style in South Africa. In Jacobus Xaba's words, Africans across the Free State "flocked into our church like a swarm of locusts into contumacious Pharaoh's palace." <sup>17</sup>

As elsewhere, African Methodism's owed much of its initial success to black disenchantment with European missionaries, who were widely regarded as neglectful, if not outrightly disdainful, of their African charges. At the same time, however, the broader social and political climate in the Boer republic was singularly propitious for the spread of independent Christianity. Even by the standards of the highveld, the 1890s were tumultuous years. Between 1891 and 1893, the Free State experienced a devastating sequence of drought and locusts, accompanied by an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. The next few years were bountiful, and produced a dramatic improvement in tenant fortunes, but drought returned in 1896-98, now accompanied by the rinderpest epizootic. Many Boer farmers lost everything, and joined the swelling white proletariat in cities like Bloemfontein and Johannesburg. African tenants and sharecroppers, while generally more resilient, were likewise forced into town, to work for wages and begin the laborious task of restocking. Obviously this townward trickle never rivaled the cataract of African urbanization on the Rand, but it nonetheless badly overstressed existing facilities. In most municipal locations, housing was inadequate, and churches and schools, if they existed at all, were swamped by hundreds of new arrivals.

Politically, the climate was just as searing. The spectacle of African "independence" and prosperity, projected against a backdrop of white debt and dispossession, produced yet another of the Free State's periodic "moral panics," marked by enflamed racial rhetoric, violence, and a political assault on "insolent," independent Africans. In the words of one Volksraad member, "the poor whites are being wholly oppressed by the accumulation of too many loose Kaffirs." The centerpiece of the assault was Ordinance 4 of 1895, which, in an effort to stamp out absentee landlordism and secure a more equal distribution of black labor, restricted the number of black "squatters" on white land to five families per farm. Insofar as the Ordinance purported

to assist struggling white farmers, it failed almost totally: the anti-squatting provision was ill-enforced; land companies and large farmers continued to monopolize skilled black labor; poor whites were driven off the land in ever greater numbers. The importance of the ordinance, however, was not lost on Africans, particularly better off sharecroppers, who faced new exactions from landlords, as well as a wave of racist harassment, from the closing of schools to outright assault. <sup>18</sup>

These roiled circumstances offered peculiarly fertile soil for African Methodism. Clearly the church possessed a potent imaginative appeal, embodying black aspirations for independence and respectability at the very moment they were under assault in the broader society. This appeal was doubtless enhanced by the church's association with black America, which existed for most Africans as an almost mythical land of black progress and prosperity. At a more concrete level, the church's decentralized structure enabled it to reach many individuals and communities that had, by choice or circumstance, fallen out with white missions. At a time of increasing restrictiveness in European missions, when even the Wesleyans were reluctant to entrust religious authority to Blacks, African Methodists itinerated with gusto. Ministers like Xaba and Benjamin Kumalo, another recruit from Natal's *amako/wa* elite, traversed the republic, gathering in the neglected or disillusioned, dispensing sacraments and moving on. In their wake came deacons and elders, who set about building churches and organizing congregations and schools. On the farms and in smaller towns, authority was vested in a cadre of unordained lay preachers, recruited from local leadership soon numbering over two hundred. "It is by means of staff of local preachers [that] the machinery of our church is moving on," Xaba reported 1898. <sup>19</sup>

African Methodism was thus firmly rooted across the Free State before the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War, in October, 1899. Of all the upheavals which remade the southern highveld in the century between 1820 and 1920, the war was the most devastating. While relatively unscathed by the war's opening campaigns in the war, the Free State -- rechristened as the Orange River Colony -- bore the brunt of the two years of guerilla fighting which followed. By mid-1902, when a treaty was finally signed, vast swaths of the countryside had been depopulated and laid waste. Thousands of farms and several entire towns lay in ashes. Productive assets of every kind -- herds, ploughs, implements, wells -- had been smashed in the British army's relentless scorched earth campaign. Probably the only institution to emerge from the war stronger than it had been at the outset was the AME Church, which took advantage of the unprecedented

concentration of black population, and of equally unprecedented levels of bitterness and disillusionment, to win thousands of new adherents. <sup>20</sup>

In contrast to the trauma of the Boers, long a staple of South African history texts, the wartime experience of Africans has only begun to engage the attention of historians. Jeremy Krickler and Peter Warwick have recently shown how the war afforded chiefs across the Transvaal an opportunity to reclaim land, accumulate arms and, with the connivance of the British, commandeer Boer stock. Reasserting state control over such chiefdoms, in fact, became one of the central problems of reconstruction administrators in Pretoria. Free State Africans, in contrast, rarely profited from the crisis. In a few isolated pockets -- in the mountainous regions of Bethlehem District, and in a protected enclave around Thaba 'Nchu -- Africans continued to sow and reap "as regularly as if no war existed." Other tenants and sharecroppers were able to find refuge, with their implements and herds, in Basutoland. The bulk of the black population, however, was whipsawed between British and Boer forces, and lost everything. Boer commandoes raided African settlements, stealing stock and grain, impressing men and boys into service as grooms and servants. British troops did much the same thing, though usually with at least promises of compensation and a monthly wage -- promises which, in the case of stock compensation at least, were more honored in the breach than the observance. By mid-1901, tens of thousands of Free State peasants had given up the struggle and fled to town, where the presence of British garrisons at least ensured an ample supply of wage labor. Most of the rest -- close to sixty thousand men, women, and children -- were rounded up, with their stock and whatever possessions they could carry, and herded into any of thirty "refugee camps," strung along the lines of rail. These camps, almost completely neglected by historians, were to become crucial staging areas in the dissemination of African Methodism. <sup>21</sup>

It takes nothing from the suffering of the Afrikaaner women and children who died in the notorious wartime concentration camps to say that conditions in the African refugee camps were generally worse. In conception, the camps served an amalgam of purposes: they were 'strategic hamlets,' labor depots, victualing stations for the British army and, as one British administrator put it, schools "to inculcate the principle of self-help, and to teach the Kaffir the 'dignity of labor.'" In actual practice, they were fetid rural slums, where thousands of people struggled to scratch out a life in the absence of adequate food, water, shelter or sanitation. In contrast to Boer internees, African refugees were required to provide their own shelter, which in many cases consisted of little more than mealie bags stiched together. Africans were also expected to feed themselves, either by cultivating grain, or by purchasing it at government stores, which enjoyed

monopolies in each camp. Men were "encouraged" to accept work with the British army. Those who did were paid 1s per day, or about £1/4s per month -- £1 of which was deducted to pay for dependents left in the camps. Between inadequate rainfall, Boer raids and the voracious appetite of the British army, starvation stalked many of the camps. Grain was scarce, milk and meat unobtainable; in Boeschhoek, a camp near Harrismith, residents were reduced to eating rinderpest carcasses. Medical facilities were virtually non-existent, and various pestilences -- measles, smallpox, leprosy, typhus, pneumonia -- ran rampant. Total mortality in the refugee camps never equaled that of the Boer concentration camps, where 28,000 people -- a tenth of the pre-war Boer population -- lost their lives. Mortality rates, however, were generally higher. In the worst month, December, 1901, the annual mortality rate in the Free State camps was 436 per thousand. <sup>22</sup>

Beyond the brute facts of death and deprivation, surviving evidence records little about the consciousness or experience of those who passed through the camps. Obviously this first encounter with British authority did little to instill confidence in the region's new rulers. The experience also seem to have increased Africans' alienation from white mission churches, which made virtually no effort to minister to their converts in the camps, at least prior to 1902. AME ministers, in contrast, managed to reach most, if not all of the camps, braving impressment and even execution by Boer commandoes to do so. Samuel Mabote, one of Bishop Turner's ordinees, secured a permit to hold services in three of the largest camps, Honing Spruit, Geneva and Boschrand, which together housed over seven thousand Africans. Nicholas Makone, an AME minister who had twice been ejected from Lindley location before the war, spent the duration at Heilbron camp, holding services, delivering sacraments, and burying the dead. John Kubedi, one of the church's more outspoken leaders, was sufficiently conspicuous at the Virginia and Holtfontein camps to be judged a nuisance by British authorities. John Phakane, ordained a deacon a few months before the outbreak of the war, preached at three camps -- Kopjes, Vredefort Road and Roodevaal Spruit. AME ministers were also reported at Rhenoster and Taaibosch, the enormous camp on Vereeniging Estates. It is impossible to know how many new adherents the AME Church gained in the camps, but thousands were at least exposed to the church, and that at a moment of profound duress and disillusionment. As the refugees dispersed after the war, many carried African Methodism with them. <sup>23</sup>

The refugee camps represented one staging area for African Methodism; towns and cities represented another. During the guerilla phase of the war, urban locations, already swollen from the upheavals of the 1890s, experienced explosive growth -- growth which showed little sign of

abating at war's end. Bloemfontein's black population, for example, swelled from about 3,000 in the mid-1890s to over 15,000 during the war, and upward past 20,000 in 1904-05. Dozens of other Free State towns experienced similar influxes, albeit on a smaller scale. By 1904, British officials, anxious to revive agricultural production, were complaining of desperate shortages of rural labor. "The two great needs in [the rural] part of this district are stock and labor," the resident magistrate at Bloemfontein reported. "Kaffir labor is in many cases absolutely unobtainable." "It is worth seeing Bethany," added a colleague, "for here one sees the natural native population of a whole district congregated together while the surrounding district is destitute of labor." In Edenburg, home to a large British garrison, the resident magistrate was startled to find entire farms with "not even one Native." Farmers were so desperate for labor that they found themselves rushing to pay the fines of Africans convicted of pass law violations or other crimes, a predicament which accounts, at least partially, for their demands for a return to the republican practice of flogging.<sup>24</sup>

Not all Africans, of course, left the land. On many farms, sharecropping relationships were quickly reconstituted; families who had passed the war in Basutoland, or had otherwise managed to husband their resources through the crisis, were able to extract very advantageous terms from white landlords. Nonetheless, agricultural lagged, as thousands of former refugees headed for already overcrowded municipal locations. From the perspective of farmers, this exodus was just more proof of Africans' penchant for idleness. Imperial officials, with even less insight into this class of rural accumulators, attributed the movement to the war; the "native mind," one administrator intoned, had obviously been "a good deal unhinged by the war." In fact, black sharecroppers' move to towns was characteristic and calculated. Postwar cities and towns offered abundant opportunities to work, often at unprecedentedly high wages. Africans found work in construction or cartage, servicing garrisons, or working on the railways, which became a source of protected employment for black tenants who had served in the British army and feared reprisals if they returned to the farms. The expanding black population itself opened a market for black shopkeepers and contractors, as well as an outlet for the kind of artisanal skills which many rural Africans possessed -- carpentry, butchery, cobbling, harnessmaking and the like.<sup>25</sup>

The countryside, in contrast, offered little but more suffering. Without seed, draught, or assets of any kind, most had little hope of getting a crop into the ground, or surviving long enough to harvest it. Few white farmers were in a position to pay wages. Money was scarce in the countryside after the war, and indeed became increasingly so. With the Witwatersrand mired

in recession, demand for foodstuffs slumped; at the very same moment, cheap American wheat began to flow into the interior along reconstructed railroads. Nature added its mite to the misery. Drought returned in 1903-04, and what rains did fall brought forth more locusts than maize. In such circumstances, Africans had little incentive to return to the land, whether to their former landlords or to the new British settlers sprinkled through the countryside by the reconstruction administration. Imperial officials could perhaps have provided some, by expending resettlement funds on Africans producers, or at least by offering blacks a share of the food relief set aside for indigent whites. For the most part, however, they declined to do so, lest they alienate Boers and encourage Africans' alleged taste for idleness. Of the £14.5 million spent by Britain on reconstructing the South African countryside, scarcely one percent found its way into African hands. In the Orange River Colony, just £27,000 was spent repatriating black refugees. <sup>26</sup>

As urban centers grew, African Methodism flourished. By 1904, the first year for which substantial evidence is available, the AME Church possessed substantial congregations in virtually every city, town and dorp in the colony, from Boshof in the west to Bethlehem in the east. In most of these communities, the church opened schools, a vital resource not only to those who hoped to remain in town, but to tenant and sharecropping families increasingly dependent on non-farm earnings. At a time when there were only four or five thousand Africans enrolled in schools in the entire Orange River Colony, the AME Church maintained at least two dozen schools, catering to close to 1,200 students. Even where other churches and schools existed, African Methodists enjoyed bountiful harvests. In Bloemfontein, for example, home to no less than eight European denominations and more than a dozen mission schools, the AME Church attracted over five hundred full adult members and sustained four thriving schools. Membership in the colony as a whole is impossible to establish with any precision, but it was substantial and growing. The generally unreliable Orange River Colony Census of 1904 ranked the church as the fourth largest denomination in the colony, with about 3,700 full adult members. Typically 'members' accounted for between a third and a half of AME adherents, suggesting a following in the colony of about ten thousand people. Even that figure, however, seems conservative. Probably closer was the calculation of an AME presiding elder, who counted 7,300 full members in 1906. <sup>27</sup>

Establishing who these people were is, as always, difficult. In denominational terms, the largest contingent were former Wesleyans, but the church drew converts from every mission church. Ethnically, AME adherents appear to have represented a fair cross-section of Free State Africans. The majority of those who can be identified were of Basotho

origins, but the church also boasted various Tswana-speaking contingents, as well as individuals of Zulu, Xhosa, and Mfengu descent. The occasional surfacing in church records of names like Johannes, Paulus and Botha also suggests that some members possessed *oorlam* or *inboekseling* origins. People of different ethnic background mixed freely within congregations, and there is little if any evidence of ethnic strife. In 1905 or '06, a group of Tswana speakers in the Free State cleaved off and organized a Bechuanaland Methodist Church, but the origins of the schism appear to have had less to do with ethnicity than with a dispute over the authority of an African American Bishop. Given the diversity of congregations and the church's policy of assigning ministers without regard to ethnic background, language differences occasionally posed a problem, but the church seems to have conquered them with a remarkable system of simultaneous translation. As a preacher spoke, one or two members of the congregation would stand next to him, translating his remarks, in sequence, into Afrikaans, Sesotho, or any other given language, reproducing not only the substance of a sermon, but emphases, inflections and gestures. (Simon Sinamela, founder of the AME Church in Kroonstad, once stunned a visiting American Bishop by instantly translating a sermon into three different languages.) Musical selections were apparently offered in any number of different languages, and members quickly learned them, or simply chipped in in their own tongue. Such practices obviously accorded well with church leaders' self-consciously 'national' vision of African life. <sup>28</sup>

Characterizing the church's constituency in class terms is even more problematic. In a society like South Africa, where all blacks remained members of a subordinate caste, the membrane between classes was indistinct and often porous. This was doubly the case in the cities and towns of the postwar highveld, where people of disparate background and experiences had been tossed together, many having lost everything. Moreover, blacks in municipal locations faced in common a range of oppressive barriers and regulations, which, while occasionally exacerbating class distinctions, tended in most cases to efface them. One did not need to be a member of a specific class to resent restrictions against walking on sidewalks, municipal ordinances which compelled children to take out labor passes, or, in the case of Bloemfontein, the opening of a quarry in the middle of an established community. Still less did one need to belong to a particular class to resent pass laws which rendered women subject to arbitrary searches and sexual molestation by police, though the terms in which such grievances were expressed would almost inevitably differ.

In such a context, one would expect an institution like the AME Church to have attracted blacks across a wide economic spectrum, and it appears to



have done so. Not surprisingly, the church attracted its most diverse constituency in Bloemfontein, the city with the largest African population and the most well-developed class structure. While most members of the city's old elite -- boardinghouse owners, contractors, tradesmen, and the like -- appear to have remained loyal to white mission churches, a number cast their lot with the African Methodists, particularly after the arrival in the city of Rev. Benjamin Kumalo. A descendant of a prominent Natal family, Kumalo quickly became the leading champion of the Orange River Colony's "civilised" and "progressive" black bourgeois. This class alone, however, was far too small to account for the three or four hundred Africans who attended Sunday services at Kumalo's church in Waaihoek location. Still less can it account for the church's success in Kaffirfontein, a sprawling, ill-administered location housing rural refugees, or in Construction Camp, a location reserved for railway workers. In short, the Free State AME Church cannot be reduced to a simple class label, any more than its counterpart on the urban Transvaal.<sup>29</sup>

To say that the church attracted a diverse class constituency, however, is not to say that it appealed equally to all classes, or that it was 'class-neutral' in its political trajectory. In contrast to the Witwatersrand, where the church laid the foundations of a genuine mass movement, addressing the needs and aspirations of all permanently settled urban Africans, African Methodism in the Orange River Colony made its deepest impression on, and was in turn most shaped by, what one might loosely term an aspirant petty bourgeois -- a fairly broad stratum of teachers and clerks, tradesmen, artisans, and those who, in the words of one AME-sponsored petition, hoped "to do a little business." In Smithfield, for example, the church's most zealous adherent was Petrus Mothibi, a bricklayer and contractor who built the large AME Church in the location. When the municipality sought to eject the local AME minister on grounds of non-employment, Mothibi registered him as his employee; he later did the same for his own daughter, who served as teacher in the church's small school. In Vredefort, one of the leaders of the congregation was Jacob Malefatse, who used a standard three education acquired at a farm school outside Kroonstad to open an AME school. Asare and Theophilus Mareka, two young brothers who joined the AME Church in Ladybrand in the late 1890s, possessed broadly similar pedigrees. Born on a Free State mission station, they had trained as tradesmen at Bensonvale, a Wesleyan school in the Cape. Shortly after joining the church, Asare was ordained a minister; Theophilus continued to labor for several years as a carpenter, before mounting municipal restrictions on black tradesmen drove him to join his brother. Such examples, and dozens more like them, not only show African Methodism's appeal to a relatively skilled and educated

stratum of Africans, but suggest that the church itself may have represented a resource in this group's struggle to sustain and reproduce itself. <sup>30</sup>

This was not some tiny elite; on the contrary, the cities and towns of the post-war Free State were literally bursting with such people. Some, like Mothibi, had carved out permanent niches for themselves in the city; others continued to see town life as the most expeditious way to rebuild their resources for a return to the land. Whatever their trajectory, however, such people shared a congeries of qualities: they were enterprising, resourceful, respectable. Most possessed a smattering of education, and invested in the education of their children. While adept in the ways of the white world, they continued to cherish their independence from it -- a value which the AME Church epitomized. Certainly this was how white observers saw matters. "Their great teaching is that the native is superior to the White and that the native must be entirely independant [sic] of the White man," a magistrate at Thaba 'Nchu reported in 1903; "they quote as proof of their contention the fact that no white man shall ever teach in their schools of preach in their churches." The vice-chairman of the Bethulie Municipal Council offered a similar estimate of the AME Church's constituency and character, though in a singularly convoluted way. "Their followers here are all well known to me, and they consist of the worst class of natives, generally found in a location," he informed the Colonial Secretary. "[T]hey are idle and most of them unemployed -- their ideas being above that of the ordinary wage earning native -- and they certainly have as a class given a great deal of trouble to the authorities." The chairman of the Council hewed to the same line, adding that Africans' desire for autonomy had been exacerbated by imported "American ideas and notions." Such notions had no place in South Africa, a "country swarming with an easily excitable native population." They were doubly inappropriate in municipal locations, which were intended as labor reservoirs rather than "full native towns." <sup>31</sup>

To an extraordinary extent, politics in the Orange River Colony came to center precisely here, on the question of what municipal locations would and would not be. While the immediate issues at stake were often local and mundane, the struggle had broader ramifications, embracing the whole question of agrarian reconstruction and the terms under which Africans would return to the land. Inevitably, the AME Church played a conspicuous role in the struggle. For white officials, the church was a symbol of a world gone awry. Having been allowed into town to service the needs of white residents, blacks were making municipal locations their own, establishing schools, businesses, and their own churches, living in comfort and ease while farmers in the surrounding countryside were starved of labor. For blacks, on

the other hand, the church became a nodal point, an institutional precipitant around which communities could coalesce in defense of their interests.

The contours of this confrontation could already be discerned in the year or so preceding the outbreak of the war, especially after Bishop Turner's highly visible visit to Bloemfontein in 1898. The church's obvious popularity placed Vrystaat officials in a quandary. While scarcely sympathetic to black aspirations for autonomy, the Bloemfontein government recognized the difficulties and dangers of trying to suppress the movement, particularly given its own bureaucratic limitations. Determined to make the best of a bad situation, the O.V.S. State Secretary received Bishop Turner and sought assurances that the church would eschew politics, after which he extended it "recognition," a nebulous term whose precise meaning would be debated for the better part of a decade. A year later, however, the republican government passed a law regulating African marriages, a device which may have been intended, and was certainly later used, to obstruct African Methodists. Municipal officials, with a more immediate perspective on the problem, tended to be more direct. Several towns ejected AME ministers and teachers, on the grounds that municipal locations were reserved for those earning an "honest livelihood" -- i.e. those with "white masters." ("They asked me who was my Baas," one indignant minister complained in 1899, after being expelled from Heilbron.) Others refused to grant the church stands in the location, forcing ministers, in a number of cases, to convene services outdoors, a practice which doubtless conferred greater visibility on the movement. One or two municipalities barred AME services entirely. For all of that, however, official opposition to the church remained uneven and unfocused. African Methodists worked without obstacle in several locations, often building prominent churches. In one or two instances, in fact, AME ministers overcame local prohibitions by appealing to republican authorities.<sup>32</sup>

With the accession of the British, even this small measure of flexibility evaporated. One of the new administration's first acts was to try to sever the local AME Church from the baneful African American influences which allegedly sustained it. Working with their counterparts in Pretoria, O.R.C. officials crafted a special permit system on travel to their interior, designed to prevent the AME Bishop in Cape Town from entering the conquered republics. With the exception of a brief meeting in Bloemfontein in 1907, no AME Bishop ever set foot in the Orange River Colony. Imperial officials also regularly discriminated against African Methodists within the colony, often in the guise of maintaining fidelity with pre-existing law. Thus a number of ministers were prosecuted under the 1899 Vrystaat marriage law, despite evidence that African Methodists had not been uniformly barred from

conducting marriages by the act. In other cases, republican precedent meant nothing. AME ministers and teachers applying for exemption from the 1903 pass law, for example, were routinely denied, on the grounds that their church had never been "recognized," a position flatly contradicted by O.V.S. documents in the administration's possession. The new administration also flatly refused to review any local restrictions on the church, on the grounds that control of urban locations was solely a municipal prerogative. 33

The message was not lost on municipal officials, who proceeded to launch a virtual assault on the AME Church. The most common device was the municipal pass system, a system established by the Volksraad and refined by O.R.C. ordinance, but administered and policed at the local level. The system empowered each municipality to restrict entry into its location to those with employment, a requirement which most towns interpreted to mean employment by local whites. In the first decade of the century, at least a dozen municipalities, several of which had previously acceded to the presence of the AME Church, denied permits to the church's ministers and teachers. In Wepener, where the AME Church had been established in 1899, the town council determined in 1903 that the minister was "without means or subsistence other than such as could be begged from the inhabitants," and summarily ejected him. Other towns refused to grant stands to the church, or denied it permission to occupy lots already granted. Municipalities whose by-laws prevented them from barring the church invented other devices. The Springfontein council declared the AME Church's large, unburnt brick building in violation of municipal building codes and ordered it torn down. The Thaba 'Nchu council contented itself with fining the local minister's "idle" wife. In Rouxville, police broke up an AME service, citing an 1893 O.V.S. law which empowered municipalities to control location "meetings." 34

This assault was aimed not solely at the AME Church, but at the broader specter of African autonomy and respectability which it embodied. During the years of imperial reconstruction, municipalities availed themselves of a tangle of O.V.S. laws, O.R.C. ordinances and municipal restrictions to restore African dependency and reduce municipal locations, in essence, to dormitories. Restrictions on trading within locations, self-employment taxes, and special restrictions on black artisans all attacked African independence at the source. "The primary object of the Locations is to provide homes for natives who are employed amongst the Citizens in the Town," a Bloemfontein official wrote in 1904, outlining new residence and registration requirements. "[They] are not meant as convenient places for natives to come from all over the Colony to carry on trades and speculate, and generally come into competition with white inhabitants." Such policies, while rarely one hundred percent effective, could reverse an individual's

fortunes with brutal swiftness. Contractor Petrus Mothibi, for example, was prospering in the first months after the war, having just built Smithfield's new AME Church, as well as the home of the new resident magistrate. When imperial officials promulgated the new pass law in the middle of 1903, he readily invested £2 for the "tradesmen's license" which served as his exemption. A few days later, however, Mothibi learned of a new municipal tax of five shillings per month on blacks not employed by Europeans. The tax, ten times the corresponding levy on those with white employers, amounted to a surcharge of £3 per year, not only on Mothibi himself, but on every person in his employ. The bill included his teacher daughter and two AME ministers, all of whom had been registered as his employees in order to circumvent local residence restrictions. Mothibi protested to the Colonial Secretary, who regretted his inability to interfere in municipal affairs. <sup>35</sup>

Much of the postwar assault focused on schools, which white officials recognized as wellsprings of African accumulation and community life, as well as a central source of the AME Church's appeal. African Methodist teachers were harassed and ejected from locations; various pretenses were sought to close church schools, even in towns where no alternatives existed. The question of assisting AME schools, the issue which acquired such salience in Transvaal politics, never arose. The debate, rather, was over whether the state should make any provision for African education at all. The conclusion, of municipal and imperial officials alike, was a nearly unanimous no. (The single dissenter, South African Native Affairs Commission member J.Q. Dickson, had little interest in black education *per se*, but thought that a subsidy system might help undermine the AME Church.) Through the entire reconstruction period, state grants for African education in the colony never exceeded £2,000, a figure which represented scarcely a twentieth of what the Cape provided in grants-in-aid to mission schools. Most galling of all, O.R.C. and municipal officials conspired to uphold an old republican policy of issuing labor passes to all Africans when they reached their sixteenth (in some municipalities, their fourteenth) birthdays. The policy ensured that black education, even for those few lucky to acquire it, could never continue beyond an elementary level. <sup>36</sup>

If such policies were intended to dampen enthusiasm for African Methodism and restore municipal locations to some kind of pristine *status quo ante*, they badly missed their mark. On the contrary, the campaign against the AME Church, and on the broader interests and aspirations which it represented, served only to enflame black communities, and further propel the church into the political arena. African Methodists stood in the van of a dozen different local campaigns, aimed at residential permit systems, restrictions on trading, and the hated pass laws, particularly those

affecting women and students. When petitions failed, AME leaders had recourse to the courts, winning at least two significant cases. In 1904, John Phoukoutsi, an AME minister won a case establishing that the term "employment" in the new O.R.C. municipal enabling ordinance did not necessarily mean employment by a white person. At about the same time, Rev. A.A. Mareka successfully appealed his conviction for living in Smithfield location without a permit. The High Court of the Orange River Colony, having determined that Mareka was a bona fide minister, concluded that he was employed, and that the municipality thus had no cause to deny him a permit.<sup>37</sup>

The church gained a particularly high political profile in Bloemfontein, where Benjamin Kumalo and fellow minister Edward Mpela launched the Orange River Native Vigilance Association, the forerunner of the Orange River Native Congress. While many of Kumalo's petitions betrayed his mission school origins -- he spoke of his faith in the "glorious" British empire, and of his desire to go down to the "hovels of ignorance" to spread the light of Christianity -- they also represented the interest of a broad stratum of respectable town dwellers, 1,001 of whom subscribed one of his petitions. Like his counterparts in Johannesburg, Kumalo insisted on blacks' right to own land and to attend churches of their own choice; he also seized on more local grievances, from restrictions on trading in locations to the operation of municipal pass laws. (Several members of the Bloemfontein AME Church would later play prominent roles in the 1913 women's pass protests.) Kumalo was especially trenchant on the subject of education. "We are accused of having a little education, which is spoiling us," he complained to the South African Native Affairs Commission; yet the very authorities making the accusation did everything in their power to ensure that "the Native" would never "reach that point in education which will not spoil him."<sup>38</sup>

Weighed in the great scales of history, such struggles were fleeting and largely ineffectual. The Boer government that came to power in 1907-08 proved even more grudging of African rights and opportunities than its predecessor; the legal loopholes discovered by Phoukoutsi and Mareka were soon patched. Measured in the lives of those who waged them, however, the struggles of African town dwellers were momentous and profoundly liberating. Take the case of Bethulie, a small settlement in the south, near the confluence of the Caledon and Orange Rivers. Despite the town's proximity to water, the district as a whole was dry and unpromising, and rural labor was perennially scarce. Not coincidentally, the local town council was as restrictive as any in the Free State. Even before the arrival of the AME Church, the town council adopted an ordinance against the opening of schools, and actually tightened the pass restrictions on teenagers. The same ordinance required individuals to obtain explicit, written permission from at

least three municipal council members, including the chairman, before holding any public meeting, dance, or party, under penalty of 20s or two weeks hard labor. Obviously, municipal authorities took a dim view of the AME Church. When a minister arrived from nearby Smithfield in 1899, they hounded him out of town, refusing even to entertain his applications for a residence permit or church site. Much to their chagrin, the church did not disappear. The minister in question, James Ndlebe, took refuge in the hills outside town, venturing into the location at night to preach. Several other ministers apparently visited the village during the war years, pestering officials for permission to settle and open a church.<sup>39</sup>

Matters came to a head shortly after the end of the war. Like other towns, Bethulie experienced an infusion of "refugees" and "idle natives," whom the municipal council was determined "to get rid of ... as soon as possible." Late in 1902, a new AME minister, Joseph Chou, arrived to take over the Bethulie circuit. Chou approached the Clerk of the municipality for a residential pass and was rejected; a few days later, he applied again, and was rejected again. Later that same day, he returned to the office with three other churchmen, including Mareka and Rev. Edward Mpela, Benjamin Kumalo's Bloemfontein running mate. The group handed the Clerk a terse note: "We let you know we are going to preach tonight at the Location. We have been advised to acquaint you." The stunned Clerk replied with a note of his own, pledging to take "the necessary steps" to stop them. Both parties kept their words. That evening a group of about twenty people convened a prayer meeting in a private hut. White constables twice entered the house and "told those there if they did not stop the meeting at once they would be arrested." The group continued to pray and sing. The constables, nonplussed, retired outside, and waited for the group to emerge before arresting the lot.<sup>40</sup>

After an urgent meeting of the municipal council, the city decided to prosecute the four leaders for instigating an unauthorized meeting. The local magistrate accused the four of "practically hurling a challenge at the head of the Municipality," and imposed the maximum fine of 20s on each; he added an additional 20s for contempt of court, after the men arrived late for their sentencing and declined to account for themselves. (The fine for contempt was later remitted by the High Court, but the convictions stood.) Ultimately, however, what mattered was not the legal outcome, which was a foregone conclusion, but the fact that white authority had been directly confronted and, in an elusive but unmistakable way, faced down. What the magistrate correctly read as contempt might equally have been read as assurance, almost serenity. "We held a prayer meeting," Edward Mpela testified. "Trooper Malet warned us during the prayer meeting we must stop. We

continued the meeting and we shall continue." Joseph Chou's was blunter still: "I came to live in Bethulie; I have got my appointment and I must stay here. That is all I have to say." In the harsh and enclosed racial world of the southern highveld, this kind of assurance was something new under the sun.<sup>41</sup>

Even as such struggles continued, the constellation of factors which had made them possible had begun to shift. From about 1905 onward, district officials across the colony reported an accelerating movement back to the countryside. The phenomenon, as always, was most pronounced in Bloemfontein, whose black population fell by half, from a postwar high of almost 25,000 in 1905-06 to about 12,000 five years later. There was no single cause of this movement. Municipal harassment doubtless helped propel some Africans out of town. More important was the gradual recovery of the countryside, a product of adequate rainfall and massive infusions of state assistance. Whatever their motives, thousands of blacks returned to the farms, helping to trigger a remarkable economic revival. Holdings in livestock and implements soared, as did acreage under cultivation. Maize production alone increased more than threefold between the censuses of 1904 and 1911, until over 430,000 morgen were under the plough.<sup>42</sup>

Beneath this robust 'recovery,' however, lay something more sinister. The years between the restoration of Boer rule in 1907-08 and 1914 represented the pivotal years in the long struggle between white authority and the independent Free State peasantry, as Tim Keegan's work powerfully demonstrates. Landlords, politically emboldened and fattened by state assistance, launched the most concerted campaign yet against black sharecroppers and tenants. Large, highly skilled families of sharecroppers, long a vital resource for undercapitalized white farmers, found no one willing to take them on. Tenants were told to cull their herds or trek. Labor exactions intensified, and landlords increasingly demanded labor from wives and children. Such demands exacerbated tensions within families, precipitating flight and further eroding the position of black patriarchs. Waged in the name of racial supremacy, the campaign was underwritten by the new government in Bloemfontein, which issued a stream of acts and ordinances targetting prosperous Africans. Act 42 of 1908, for example, disingenuously dubbed the "Rights of Coloured Persons in respect of Fixed Property Act" took direct aim at "squatters," requiring, *inter alia*, that tenants sign contracts and register their wives and children as servants, ostensibly to secure their rights on the land. The act also outlawed the common practice by which "indigent" whites fronted for black sharecroppers in land purchases. In a letter to the Secretary of State in London, the Colonial Secretary conceded that such restrictions would have a



"demoralizing" impact on some Africans, particularly among those who possessed large herds and resisted working for whites. "This class is, however, a small one," he consoled, "considerably advanced in years." <sup>43</sup>

Tenants who returned to the land and to this onslaught were not without their own resources. African Methodist ministers always rode circuit through the farms, but in the years after 1905 the church's presence in the countryside increased markedly, not only in districts like Bethlehem, Bloemfontein and Kroonstad, historical strongholds of the accumulating sharecroppers, but in more remote areas like Hoopstad. Many rural congregants were doubtless former town dwellers, who carried the church back to the farms. Others, however, seem to have been new converts, who defected to the church as the control of landlords was cinched tighter -- a pattern which Keegan observed in several of his informants. Along with their religion, returning Africans carried with them a tradition of organized political protest: a tradition forged in the struggle over municipal locations, and sometimes a bit perplexing to white farmers, who, in all the years of struggle on the land, had never before encountered mass meetings or petitions which accused them of "enslaving" children. Among surviving petitions, the most remarkable came from the Eastern Branch Native Vigilance Association, an obscure organization based in Bethlehem district. At a mass meeting in late 1908, the association prepared a list of grievances for the government in Bloemfontein, a list which literally captures accumulating Africans in suspension between urban and rural worlds. While most of the articles reiterated the familiar demands of better-off town dwellers -- relief from the pass laws, a voice in the making of municipal by-laws, removal of restrictions on the AME Church -- others spoke directly to the concerns of African sharecroppers and tenants. The association demanded, among other things, protection from assault by white farmers, laws to ensure that children were paid for their labor, and an end to mid-season evictions, which often deprived tenants of their just share of a crop. As a final index of their desperation, the subscribers also suggested the establishment of a special "reservoir," somewhere in the colony, where Blacks could administer their own affairs under the rule of state-appointed headmen. <sup>44</sup>

The new administration, however, had no interest in entertaining any advice from organized Africans, especially from this "entirely artificial movement engineered ... from outside the borders of this Colony." Determined to speak "plainly to these native claims [and] to so called grievances," new Prime Minister Abram Fishcher personally penned a vitriolic response. He defended municipal restrictions, for example, as necessary "to counteract the natural tendency of natives generally to lead

lives of idleness resulting in evils amongst which it would seem that latterly would have to be included the one of harbouring and raising a class of native agitators." Educational exemptions were uncalled for: when Africans "arrived at an age to do honest labour," they must do it, rather than simply "squat in idleness." As for the plight of rural Africans, Fischer found the Association's proposals as unworthy of comment at best and "impudent" at worst. Under his regime, the assault on rural accumulation continued, compressing sharecroppers into labor tenants, driving labor tenants into the ranks of the proletariat. The culmination, of course, came in the South African Natives Land Act of 1913, a bill whose anti-squatting provisions were enforced rigorously only in the Orange Free State. <sup>45</sup>

Thus began the "great dispersal" of the Free State peasantry. The story has been eloquently told by Solomon Plaatje, but it is worth examining again, for it provides us with several final clues to the social composition and the enduring political influence of African Methodism on the southern highveld. Many Free State families, of course, did not trek at all, but remained on farms in declining circumstances. Others gave up cropping entirely, using what resources they still retained to carve out respectable positions for themselves and their children in town. Many found a lifeline in Evaton, a small community north of Vereeniging and one of a half dozen places in the Transvaal where Africans were still permitted to own freehold property. Residents of the community, which remained practically self-governing through the 1940s, paid £20 for one acre lots, which included grazing rights on the commonage. Evaton's appeal, however, lay not only in the autonomy it offered, but in the availability of education: the town boasted Wilberforce Institute, an AME-sponsored industrial and teacher training school, founded and staffed by South African graduates of Wilberforce University in the United States. <sup>46</sup>

Others reached Evaton by a more circuitous route. Jacob Nhlapo, for example, hailed from a farm outside Reitz, the son of a substantial sharecropping family. While most in the family had some exposure to location life, they looked down on those who had settled permanently in town. "I well remember how my father and other farm dwellers would ridicule the location dwellers as 'Bushmen' who possessed no cattle and had to depend on their rural cousins and on buying everything for their living," Jacob later recalled. By 1912, however, the pressures on the family had grown so great that the father saw no alternative but to sell off his assets, leave the farm where he had cropped since the end of the war, and settle in Reitz, where the children would at least be assured of an education. A little more than a decade later, Jacob and his brother, trained as teachers, became prominent organizers of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union in

the Free State. Two decades after that, Jacob Nhlapo settled in Evaton as principal of Wilberforce Institute.<sup>47</sup>

Some determined to continue sharecropping, searching for eddies where the process of agricultural capitalization lagged, and tenants were still welcome. Within the Free State, there was only one such place to speak of: Hoopstad, a Zandveld district in the northwestern corner of the province. Between the uncertain rainfall -- the district was perched on the twenty-inch rain isohyte -- and the absence of railways or improved roads, this "sandy waste" had long been the least settled and developed district on the highveld. That very fact, however, represented an opportunity to black sharecroppers, at least some of whom managed to negotiate tenancy agreements with land-rich and capital-poor white landlords. By the 1920s, Hoopstad had become one of the major maize producing districts in the entire province. If the African Methodism was indeed a movement of the resilient and relatively prosperous, one would anticipate an increase in church membership in the district, and this is precisely what one finds. Indeed, by the late 1910s, tiny Hoopstad boasted one of the largest AME circuits in the the entire Free State.<sup>48</sup>

An even more common destination for those with the personal and material resources to keep sharecropping was the southwestern Transvaal, especially the so-called 'Maize Triangle,' just across the river from Hoopstad. This flat, dry, perennially under-capitalized region, one of the centers of the 1914 Rebellion, continued to offer opportunities, albeit diminishing opportunities, for African sharecroppers, in some cases right through the 1930s. Here again, the link between independent Africans and African Methodism is unmistakable. The church, first planted in the maize belt in the late 1890s, blossomed in the 1910s and '20s into one of the most important institutions in the region. Christiana, Bloemhof and Schweizer-Reneke and tiny Makwassie all boasted substantial AME churches -- the local council in Wolmarannstad continued to refuse the church permission to build -- which catered to close to 400 people. Not coincidentally, it was in this exact region, and indeed among these very people, that the I.C.U. enjoyed its greatest and most enduring success.<sup>49</sup>

## NOTES

### Abbreviations

CBYB	Corporation of Bloemfontein Year Book
CO	Papers of the Colonial Secretary, Orange River Colony, OFS Archives Depot
CS	Papers of the Secretary to the Transvaal Administration, Tvl Archives Depot
G	Papers of the Governor of the Orange River Colony, OFS Archives Depot
GRD	Papers of the Central Repatriation Board, OFS Archives Depot
GS	Papers of the Goewermentsekretaris, OFS Archives Depot
HG	Papers of the High Court of the Orange River Colony, OFS Archives Depot
LHT	Papers of the Resident Magistrate, Harrismith, OFS Archives Depot
MBL	Papers of the Municipality of Bloemfontein, OFS Archives Depot
MSCE	African Estates, Natal Archives Depot
NA	Papers of the Cape Native Affairs Department, Cape Archives Depot
NAB	Papers of the Advisor to the Native Affairs Branch, OFS Archives Depot
PAS	Papers of the Office of the Provincial Administrator, Cape Archives Depot
SANAC	South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903-1905 (five volumes)
SNA	Papers of the Transvaal Secretary of Native Affairs, Tvl Archives Depot
TPE	Papers of the Administrator of the Transvaal, Tvl Archives Depot

- 1.) *Voice of Missions*, Dec., 1895. See also J. Campbell, *The African Methodist Church in the United States and South Africa*, forthcoming.
- 2.) The first Union census in 1911, counted over 60,000 AME members in the four provinces, but that number appears to include members of other independent churches as well. Allen Lea's *The Native Separatist Church Movement in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1926) estimated AME membership at just over 20,000, a figure which appears unduly conservative.
- 3.) *Report of the Proceedings of the First General Missionary Conference Held at Johannesburg, July, 1904* (Johannesburg, 1905). For typical assessments see SNA 75 2569/02: NA 497 a96; *Christian Express*, May, Aug., 1898; and *SANAC* v.2, p. 367 and v. 4, p. 313.
- 4.) Leonard Thompson and Monica Wilson (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa*, pp. 433-436. For the equation of 'Ethiopianism' and 'Nationalism,' see, *inter alia*, Lea, *The Native Separatist Church Movement*; Daniel Thwaite, *The Seething African Pot: A Study of Black Nationalism, 1882-1935* (London, 1936); Edward Roux, "The Ethiopian Movement," *Trek* 10, 2 (1945); George Shepperson, "Ethiopianism and African Nationalism," *Phylon* 14, 4 (1953); and Badra Lahouel, "Ethiopianism and African Nationalism in South Africa before 1937," *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines* 104, 26-4 (1986).
- 5.) See Campbell, *AME Church*.
- 6.) *Ibid.*
- 7.) "The history of Ethiopianism in general has made it abundantly clear that the natives are deficient in the sense of law and order, lax in their exercise of discipline, and to a large extent incapable of directing their own affairs, and in especial, their financial affairs." J. DuPlessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa* (London, 1911), p. 457.
- 8.) This paragraph -- and a great deal of what follows it -- relies on the work of Tim Keegan. See Keegan, *Rural Transformations in Industrializing South Africa: the Southern Highveld to 1914* (Johannesburg, 1986), especially chapter one. See also "White Settlement and Black Subjugation on the South African Highveld," in William Beinart, Peter Delius and Stanley Trapido (eds.), *Putting a Plough to the Ground* (Johannesburg, 1986).
- 9.) Peter Delius and Stanley Trapido, "Inboekselings and Oorlams: the Creation and Transformation of a Servile Class," in Belinda Bozzoli (ed.), *Town and Countryside in the*

*Transvaal* (Johannesburg, 1983); Colin Murray, *Families Divided: the Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho* (Cambridge, 1981); and Murray, *Black Mountain* (Johannesburg, 1992).

10.) Keegan, *Rural Transformations*, especially chapter three; and Ted Matsitela, "The Life Story of Nkgoma Mma-Pooe," in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (London, 1982). On Vereeniging Estates, see Stanley Trapido, "Putting a Plough to the Ground: A History of Tenant Production on the Vereeniging Estates, 1896-1910," in Beinart et al., *Putting a Plough*.

11.) Keegan, *Rural Transformations*, pp. 18-24, 57-60, 243 n.97. See also Charles van Onselen, "Dynamics of Paternalism and Violence" [check cite].

12.) For a discussion of this movement, and some of the gender and generational tensions it loosed, see van Onselen, "Dynamics..."; and Keegan, *Rural Transformations*, pp. 82-85, 123-130, *ff.*

13.) Keegan, *Facing the Storm: Portraits of Black Lives in Rural South Africa* (Cape Town, 1988), *Rural Transformations*, pp. 53-54, 74-84, 238 n.7; Matsitela, "Nkgoma Mma-Pooe." The classic example of this stratum is Kas Maine, subject of a forthcoming biography by Charles van Onselen.

14.) *Voice of Missions*, Oct., 1895, Aug., 1896, Aug., 1898, Nov., 1898, Feb., 1899. See also SNA 331 2445/06, and SNA 334 2565/06.

15.) MSCE 28 134/1904; *Voice of Missions*, Nov., 1898; CO 78 4499/01, CO 225 1195/03, and CO 311 5477/03. Xaba died, apparently of diabetes, while visiting the United States as a delegate to 1904 AME Church General Conference.

16.) CO 78 4499/01, and CO 110 1562/02. The church at Viljoensdrift was finally removed, along with the remnants of the community it served, in the 1980s. See Keegan, *Facing the Storm*, pp. 3-4.

17.) *Voice of Missions*, Aug., 1898, Oct., 1898, and Sept. 1899; NA 497 a96; GS 1797 r1796/98.

18.) Keegan, *Rural Transformations*, pp. 56-59, 70-73, *ff.* On the utility of the concept of moral panic, in a somewhat different context, see Keegan, "Black Peril, Lapsed Whites and Moral Panic: A Study of Ideological Crisis in Early Twentieth Century South Africa," unpublished paper.

19.) NAB 3 238/06, and NAB 4 288/06; *Voice of Missions*, Nov. 1898. On missionary restrictiveness, see Campbell, *AME Church*.

20.) T. Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London, 1979).

21.) G.B. Beak, *The Aftermath of War: An Account of the Repatriation of Boers and Natives in the Orange River Colony, 1902-1904* (London, 1906), pp. 76, 159; Peter Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Johannesburg, 1983); Jeremy Krickler [check cite]; CO 75 4353/01, and CO 81 15/02.

22.) Quoted in Beak, *Aftermath of War*, pp. 25-26. Aside from a chapter in Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, and a few references in Matsitela, "Nkgoma Mma-Pooe," the history of the refugee camps remains virtually unwritten. Material on the camps is scattered through the papers of the O.R.C. Colonial Secretary; see, for example, CO 47 2611/01, CO 58 3377/01, CO 81 29/02, and CO 90 586/02. See also LHT 2/2/1/25

23.) LHT 2/2/1/25; CO 73 4262/01, CO 79 4553/01, CO 81 15/02, CO 97 935/02, CO 98 104/02, CO 104 1251/02, CO 236 1727/03, and CO 316 5478/03.

24.) CBYB (1904), p. 40; CO 311 5447/03, CO 379 8851/03, CO 416 1783/04, CO 454 3652/04, and CO 471 4521/04

25.) Quoted in Beak, *Aftermath of War*, pp. 158-159, GRD 23 705/02; CS 1019/01; CO 165 4316/02, and CO 466 4252; Keegan, *Rural Transformations*, pp. 61-64.

26.) Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, p. 161; Matsitela, "Nkgoma Mma-Pooe," pp. 220-222; GRD 13 318/02, and GRD 23 705/02; CO 437 2813/04; CBYB (1905), p. 40.

- 27.) *Census of the Orange River Colony* (Blomfontein, 1904), pp. 120, 136-137. One reason to question this tally is the fact that census takers seem to have counted only ten AME churches in the whole colony. For the church's postwar spread, see NAB 3 238/06, and NAB 4 288/06; G 71 196/1; CO 73 4262/01, CO 255 2655/03, CO 292 4544/03, CO 311 5447/03, CO 316 5448/04, CO 484 5199/04, CBYB (1906), p. 70.
- 28.) CO 311 5447/03, and CO 988/1908. On Sinamela, see Campbell, *AME Church*.
- 29.) MBL 4/1/1/1 176/07; CO 165 4316/02; CBYB, 1904-1908, *ff*.
30. CO 321 5973/03; T.D. Mweli Skota, *The African Yearly Register* (Johannesburg, 1932), p. 50. [check cite]
- 31.) CO 311 5447/03, and CO 316 5748/03.
- 32.) GS 1797 r1796/98, and GS 2067 r4278/99; CO 79 4553/01, CO 260 2917/03, CO 316 5478/03, CO 484 5199/04, and CO 525 7238/04; NA 497 a96.
- 33.) NAB 4 288/06; PAS A29 58/3, and PAS A29 64/1; CO 128 2477/02, CO 292 4544/03, CO 316 5748/03, CO 349 7385/03, and CO 425 2221/03.
- 34.) PAS 607 1486, NAB 3 238/06; CO 292 4544/03, CO 311 5447/03, CO 316 5748/03, CO 344 7130/03, CO 349 7385/03, and CO 484 5199/04.
- 35.) MBL 4/1/1/16 183/7; CBYB (1904), p. 31; CO 321 5973/03.
- 36.) NAB 4 288/06; CO 128 2477/02, CO 292 4544/03, CO 311 5447/03, CO 344 7130/03, CO 523 7127/04, and CO 695 3654/06; PAS A30 64/2.
- 37.) HG 4/1/3/1/1 Appeal 11/1904; NAB 4 397/06, and NAB 5 666/06; CO 562 9092/4, CO 679 3257/10/06, CO 843 113/7, and CO 844 113/4.
- 38.) *SANAC v. 4*, pp. 373-374; CO 666 2899/06; NAB 1 79/a/05, NAB 3 180/6, and NAB 4 288/06; MDL 4/1/1/16 178/1908, G67 103/1. On the 1913 pass protests, see Julia Wells, "A History of Black Women's Struggle Against the Pass Laws in South Africa, 1900-1960," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1982.
- 39.) HG 4/1/3/1/1 no. 144-147; CO 316 5748/03; G.Z. Lethoba, "The African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Africa," unpublished manuscript, p. 19.
- 40.) HG 4/1/3/1/1 no. 144-147.
- 41.) *Ibid.* African Methodism survived in Bethulie, though municipal officials only conceded the church a site in the location in 1935. See PAS 329 570/55.
- 42.) CBYB (1907), p. 80, CO 311 5447/03.
- 43.) G 110 444/1; Keegan, *Rural Transformations*, especially chapter five; Matsitela, "Nkgoma Mma-Pooe," pp. 223-225, 231-232.
- 44.) G 71 1968/1; NAB 1 26/1/05; G 110 444/1, and G 110 444/5; Keegan, *Rural Transformations* pp. 137-139.
- 45.) G 110 444/5; CO 917 933/3.
- 46.) Sol Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa* (London, 1916); CBYB (1912) p. 113; Keegan, *Rural Transformations*, especially chapter six. Keegan's *Facing the Storm* provides richly textured descriptions of some of the ways in which Free State peasants survived. On Evaton, and Wilberforce Institute, see Campbell, *AME Church*.
- 47.) File C8, Jacob Nhlapo Papers, CPSA Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.
- 48.) CO 403 1112/04; Keegan, *Rural Transformations*, pp. 99-100, 103.
- 49.) TPB 1004 ta 4/7420; NTS 1434 28/214 v. 1; Helen Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: the ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924-1930* (New Haven, 1987), pp. 48-49, 76, *ff*. Linkages between the I.C.U. and older African Methodist networks are explored in van Onselen's forthcoming study of Kas Maine.