CHIEFLY AUTHORITY AND THE AME CHURCH, 1896-1910

by

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In the early years of the twentieth century, European missions in South Africa were decimated by the spread of "Ethiopian" Churches, particularly of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Some of the factors which propelled the spread of the American-based AME Church can be glimpsed in microcosm in Kunana, a village in the western Transvaal. The AME CHurch first settled in Kunana in 1897 or '98, at the invitation of Moshette, chief of the Ratlou Rolong. Initially, Moshette's invitation reflected no disaffection with regard to the London Missionary Society, which had a church in the village. Rather, it appears that the LMS had stopped servicing the village in 1895, probably owing to the shortage of draught following the rinderpest. A local preacher of the LMS did live in the village, but he was not empowered to dispense the sacraments; according to local tradition, the LMS refused to ordain him because he spoke no Latin. Residents seeking a Christian baptism, marriage or funeral thus had to trek over a hundred miles of sandy, rutted roads to the LMS station at Kanye. When the first AMEC emissaries arrived, Moshette was pleased to extend them facilities, especially when informed that a minister would be permanently stationed in the village. The Church also apparently opened a school. Most of the people who joined the new church were probably already Christian, many, for example, were old Wesleyans who had trekked to Kunana from Thaba 'Nchu. The most noted convert of the AME Church was Moshette himself.[1] An AME minister baptised the blind and halt chief in 1905, shortly before his death.

During Moshette's decline, the duties of the chieftainship increasingly devolved upon his son, Aaron Moshette. It was Aaron's lot to rule at Kunana during the period of post-war Reconstruction. Like chiefs throughout the new Transvaal Colony, he found himself facing a concerted assault on what he took to be his chiefly prerogatives. In 1902, the acting chief, by all accounts a formidable drinker, fell afoul of the new colonial liquor laws. A year later, the Transvaal Native Affairs Department prevented him disposing of a portion of his location, on the grounds that no title for the land was registered in the records of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. In 1904, a native constable stationed by the government in Kunana reported that the chief was illegally selling wood, presumably to the Kimberley market; the NAD, looking to the possibility of mining in the location and thus anxious to preserve local timber, ordered him to desist. Increasingly, Moshette's bitterness focussed on the government constables. He complained they were "outsiders" (one was Matabele, another Zulu); that they ignored his labour exactions; that they enforced the new pass regulations so zealously that people in the southern portion of his location, which fell in British Bechuanaland, were arrested for venturing to Kunana. One of the constables he had flogged, a decision which did not endear him to the Native Affairs Department, which responded by holding in abeyance his application for a rifle. In 1908, the Department declared that the land would henceforth be held in trust for the tribe by the Commissioner of Native Affairs, a device which firmly established state control over the disposal of land and timber. As a final indignity, the government refused to register the title until Moshette and his people had paid a substantial transfer duty.[2]

In these circumstances, the AME Church in Kunana flowered, apparently with the enthusiastic support of the young chief. As early as 1902, the Rev Moffat of the LMS complained that Marcus Gabashane of the AME Church was illegally solemnizing

marriages in Kunana, and that he and other ministers of the Church were preaching against the whites. There is reason to attach some credence to the claim. Marcus Gabashane and his son, Abel, were active in the area. Abel, at least, appears to have preached a millennial version of the AME gospel, in which a black king, descended of Solomon and Sheba, would drive the whites from Africa and restore the land to its rightful owners. In the same letter, Moffat complained of chiefs promoting the movement and using their powers to pressure mission loyalists. In 1906, a missionary of the Church of England complained that Moshette refused to allow him to build a church or school in Kunana location. Officials fretted about the effect of an AMEC monopoly in "this lonely part of the Colony", but they were powerless to overrule the chief pending the clarification of title in the location. By 1910, the Native Commissioner at Lichtenburg was warning his superiors of the rapid spread of "Ethiopianism" in the area and estimating that fifty per cent of the natives in his district had already joined. The "root of this evil", he added, "is Kunana Location, where this doctrine reigns supreme".[3]

Over the same period, the "doctrine" also reigned supreme at a place called Schilpadfontein, in Hamanskraal District. Schilpadfontein, a tribally purchased farm registered in the name of the Berlin Mission Society, was home to the Bakhatla ba Mocha. Unlike Kunana, Schilpadfontein had a tradition of religious conflict, primarily over BMS exactions of land an labour. In about 1892, a group of people at Schilpadfontein seceded from the Berlin Mission, citing "rules made which were not according to the laws of God" - probably a reference to labour requirements. Most of the schismatics probably joined the Lutheran Bapedi Church. As more of the Bakhatla trekked to Pretoria for work, however, they came into contact with Joseph Kanyane Napo's African Church and Mangena Mokone's Ethiopian Church, two Pretoria-based independent churches which amalgamated with the AME Church in 1896. By 1898, there was an AME minister stationed at the farm. Among his congregants was young Robert Moepi, son of Mauban and heir to the chieftaincy.[4]

In 1904, the eighteen-year old Moepi, fresh from two years' study at the AME Church's Bethel Institute in Cape Town, acceded to the chieftaincy. He was determined to buy land. His determination was doubly prompted by his experience with the BMS and by his tuition at Bethel. At Bethel, he had come under the spell of a black American, the Rev A Henry Attaway, who preached land purchase as the key to African emancipation. In 1904, Moepi negotiated the purchase of a neighbouring farm, but the deal collapsed when the Transvaal Department of Native Affairs refused to sanction the sale. Moepi's determination was redoubled a few years later when the BMS, capitalizing on a government survey, laid claim to the most densely settled portion of the location, an area from which the chief derived considerable revenue. In 1908, Moepi and his people managed finally to repurchase the area from the BMS, at a grossly inflated price and only after the missionaries had attempted to corner water and mineral rights. It was precisely such behaviour, Hamanskraal's exasperated sub-Native Commissioner complained, that spurred "the phenomenal progress and advancement made by unrecognized Churches of purely Native origin".[5]

Robert Moepi's affiliation with the AME Church did not deter him from engaging in and asserting chiefly control over traditional ritual. Immediately on acceding he embarked on an aggressive campaign to solidify the chieftaincy. He presided over Schilpadfontein's vital circumcision school, and took an active part in the business of rain-making, among the Bakhatla a crucial mechanism for asserting chiefly authority. Indeed, in 1904, Moepi's participation in a rain-making ritual - he slaughtered a black goat and sprinkled the blood on the ground - precipitated rumours of a native uprising. In the context of reconstruction, Moepi's assertion of traditional prerogatives inevitably brought him into conflict with the colonial administration. In 1910, following a great hunt - another element in rain-making ritual - Moepi and 23 of his followers were charged with illegally shooting game. The sub-Native Commissioner, determined to enforce the new colonial prohibition on hunting and more than a little annoyed with the fractious young chief, dished out fines in excess of £60. The decision appears to have increased both Moepi's disenchantment with the government as well as his devotion to the AME Church, which flourished in Schilpadfontein at least into the 1930s.[6]

The events at Kunana and Schilpadfontein reveal a constellation of elements that recurred in many different settings in the early years of the century: a struggle over control of land; conflict with missionaries, often in league with an increasingly intrusive colonial state; a chief anxious to solidify his authority; and the appearance and spread of independent churches. The episodes, sketchy as they are, suggest a deficiency in the literature on South African independency. Without meaning to do violence to quite a diverse body of scholarship, much of the historiography on the early "Ethiopian" churches is preoccupied with assessing Ethiopianism's contribution to a rising tide of African nationalism. This approach has usually been marked by two related assumptions: first, that the Ethiopians drew their constituency primarily from "de-tribalized" Africans who no longer possessed any meaningful allegiance to chiefs; and that the Ethiopian Churches, especially the AME Church, acted as a further solvent on tradiional loyalties. Ironically, both beliefs find echoes in contemporary appraisals. It was a commonplace among government officials that the Ethiopian "ferment" flowed from a new, educated "class of Natives ... who have not the strong feelings of loyalty to their hereditary Chiefs". Missionaries generally agreed. The "quickening power of the Gospel", they believed, had dissolved the chiefs' timeless tyranny. Ethiopianism represented an "awakening" into racial "self-consciousness"; it was evidence of a "new born (albeit "misdirected") energy" among Africans.[7]

There is some truth here. The AME Church did draw much of its constituency and most of its leadership from the educated and "de-tribalized"; it certainly spurred racial or national consciousness. Yet, as the examples of Moshette and Moepi remind us, Ethiopianism did not automatically subvert traditional authority. While it is almost impossible to delineate the precise role of the AME Church at Kunana and Schilpadfontein, one cannot help but observe the way in which a broad religious movement which asserted blacks' religious majority, their right to control the education of their children, and their claim to the land resonated with the experiences and struggles of these two embattled chiefs. The two were not alone.[8] This paper briefly examines the responses of a number of chiefs to the arrival of the AME Church. The argument, in bald terms, is that many of these chiefs found in the church - or fashioned out of the church - a weapon to resist encroachments on their authority from both internal rivals and an increasingly intrusive colonial state. The argument thus suggests a kind of general pattern, though it also attempts to point to some of the variables which conditioned the way in which the AME Church became inserted into particular societies.[9]

To understand the AME Church's appeal, it is useful to look briefly at the relationship between traditional authorities and the European missions. While most European missions were initially established with chiefly protection, as the nineteenth century progressed they increasingly stood in opposition to traditional authority. The presence of missions, offering alternative nodes of rank and authority, could invert or subtly subvert prior relationships of dependence in a society. Indeed, as Norman Etherington has shown, missions in the late 19th century often became refuges for individuals seeking to evade altogether the exactions of chiefs and patrons. Moreover, in attacking "vestiges of heathenism", missionaries tampered with crucial props to chiefly authority and accumulation. Among the Pedi, for example, Peter Delius has shown that the presence of the Berlin Mission Society at the capital almost immediately sparked protests from elders who complained that Christianity undermined their control over women. And it was the Society's success among royal wives, crucial markers in the extension of the paramountcy, that precipitated the conflict which eventually ended with their "expulsion" by Sekukuni. More subtly, missionaries tended to erode chiefly authority by inculcating new concepts of property, autonomy and obligation. A chief in the Kuruman District, for example, restocking in the wake of rinderpest, was convicted of cattle raiding when one of his subjects, a convert of the London Missionary Society, testified against him in the local magistrate's court. The political and cultural dimensions of the case escaped the LMS supervisor, who saw in it only a convert's laudable commitment to truth and private property. The enraged chief's decision to expel the LMS and burn their church to the ground was taken by the missionary as only further proof of the need for a more vigorous colonial policy "to repress theft and murder".[10]

The missionary's comment was revealing. Most European missionaries in the late 19th century came to believe that the business of conversion was best pursued under the protection of a vigorous state rather than of chiefs. The reorientation of missionaries from "native advocate" to colonial agent is familiar and needs no recitation here. What is worth noting, however, is the degree to which misionaries became implicated in the campaign to break the power of traditional rulers. In the case of the BMS, for example, missionaries enforced with gusto the tax and labour exactions of the ZAR to the exclusion of traditional obligations. In Thembuland and Pondoland, Wesleyan missionaries played a crucial role in providing information and defusing chiefly resistance in the years prior to annexation. LMS officials gave their enthusiastic support to the British war against Lobengula, and extended mission facilities to the British soldiers dispatched to put down the Matabeleland Rebellion a few years later. Such behaviour reflected the conviction that traditional hierarchies were the primary obstacle to conversion. The Rev J S Moffat, son of the first LMS missionary in southern Africa and in the 1890s a colonial agent in Bechuanaland, conceded that missionaries enjoyed little success where political institutions were in their "aboriginal vigour". But, he added, "where there is a measure of disorganisation ... so there is a preparation for the seed of the word". A colleague, noting the barren results of the Matabeleland mission, reached for a similar metaphor. The mission "will yet bear abundant fruit", he predicted, but only after "the power of these worthless chieftains is at an end, the tribes as such are broken up and scattered, and each individual is compelled to look to the sweat of his own brow for a livelihood".[11]

The missionaries reaped an unexpected harvest. Within the space of a few years, AME congregations sprouted from the Eastern Cape to Barotseland, choking off European missions planted decades before. In many cases the church received the enthusiastic support of local chiefs. Missionaries frequently commented on the defection of chiefs to the new church, generally accepting it as further evidence that the movement represented a reversion to heathenism. A number of historians have quite appropriately dug beneath such cant, yet one should not dismiss missionary charges of heathenism and AMEC "indiscipline" too hastily. Evidence from inside African Methodist congregations is sparse, yet there is enough to suggest that, on issues of custom, particularly polygyny and circumcision, the AME Church was significantly more flexible than the mission churches.

The AME Church's flexibility in matters of custom reflected a variety of factors. Most obviously, the ministers were themselves Africans, and apparently free of the gnawing fears of degeneration which plagued so many European missionaries. While potential converts in the mission churches were subjected to searching examinations by European superintendents, converts were accepted into the AME Church on a profession of faith. Removal certificates, devised by European missionaries to prevent individuals under discipline in one church from simply joining another, were honoured in the AME Church in the breach, if at all. Jacob Tyeku, for example, a lay preacher in Herschel, was suspended by the Wesleyans for "persisting in heathen customs by having his sons circumcised". He was accepted into the AME Church and became a leader in the District. Motheba Maine, having lost her Wesleyan church rights when her husband took a second wife, crossed into the AMEC, which she served enthusiastically for the rest of her life. Examples could be multiplied. While most mission churches, even those with evangelical roots, had in the colonial context come to preach an astringent, Arminian gospel, the AME Church in the early years was fired by an almost millennial vision of redeeming Africa. AMEC ministers itinerated, held revivals, and frequently baptized a dozen people in a day, more than some mission stations baptized in a year.[12]

Flexibility on issues of custom was reinforced by the decentralized structure of the AME Church. In contrast to mission churches, most of which were reining in African assistants and evangelists in the late 19th century, the AME Church, like the Methodists of old, relied unashamedly on evangelists, lay preachers, and class leaders, many of whom worked with little supervision. The decentralization was also evident in church finance. In most European societies, moneys were husbanded by white missionaries, a perpetual grievance and one of the most frequent causes of schism. In the AME Church, on the other hand, congregations had almost no financial links with the central church. Ministers and deacons received no stipends, but were entitled to keep income from their circuits as

salary. All these structural features militated against a too-strict policy on questions of local custom. A newly arrived minister could quickly find himself hungry if he attempted to enforce rigid strictures against initiation or bridewealth. (It is worth noting, in passing, how far these basic structural characteristics take us in explaining the AMC Church's extraordinary local diversity, as well as its susceptibility to "capture" by local communities.)

The essential point, for our purposes, is that all these characteristics worked to reduce any inherent tensions between the AME Church and traditional authorities. We may probably dismiss as hyperbole missionary reports of a chief in Bizana District who worked as an AME lay preacher despite his ten wives, but the general point - that the AME Church was better able than the missions to articulate with traditional leadership - is sound. In cultural terms, AME ministers were less threatened by the rituals and customs from which chiefly power flowed; in structural terms, they were of necessity more sensitive to the perceptions and loyalties of their congregations. And, in practical terms, their inability to call on the protection of the colonial state made them unable to set themselves up against chiefly authority in the manner of the Europeans, even had they wished so to do. On the contrary, and as many chiefs were quick to discern, this new religion could quite easily be coupled to a defence of tradition and traditional authority.

Lewanika, paramount of the Barotse, was one chief who discerned the AME Church's possibilities. T O Ranger has pointed to the role of the paramount and Lozi aristocracy in the AMEC secession from the Paris Evangelical Mission in Barotseland. While both paramount and aristocracy coveted schools, they resented the PEM's insistence that only church-goers' children could attend. Moreover, they objected to a curriculum which emphasized singing and vernacular Bible reading rather than English and industrial and clerical skills - in short, the skills needed by an elite facing an advancing colonial world. The stock of PEM further plummeted with the signing of the Coryndon Concession, which the mission's superintendent, the Rev Francis Coillard, supported. Within months of gaining the dubious protection of the British South African Company, Lewanika began to cast about for "new missionaries". When word of the AME Church reached Barotseland a few years later, the paramount put out a call. He eventually dispatched Willie Mokalapa, a Sotho evangelist dismissed by Coillard and later a royal counsellor, to Cape Town to contact the Church. Mokalapa returned a short time later as an ordained minister of the AME Church, carrying with him a promise of an industrial school.[13]

The industrial school, an article of faith in the AME Church in America, took on a different colouring north of the Zambezi. For Lewanika, the school represented a first step in breaking the missionary monopoly on crucial diplomatic educational and technological resources - an opportunity, in Ranger's words, to wrest control of the process of "modernization" from the hands of Europeans. When Coillard questioned the appropriateness of the scheme, he received a blistering reply from Lewanika:

> What do we want with all that rubbish heap of fables that you call the Bible? ... What does your school do for us? ... it is a purposeless and unprofitable folly. What I want is missionaries ... who build big workshops and teach us all the trades of the white man ... What I want is carpenters, blacksmiths, armourers, masons ... That's what I want, industrial missionaries; that is what all the chiefs want. We laugh at all the rest.[14]

It is in this context that Lewanika's eventual falling out with the AME Church must be placed. The paramount had long hoped to develop commerce and communications within his realm, but his proposals to both the BSA Company and the PEM went unheeded. In 1905, he dispatched Mokalapa and a Lozi royal back to Cape Town with £700 raised from a tribal levy, with instructions to use the AME Church connection to purchase wagons and boats. The money was delivered into the hands of the Rev Attaway at Bethel Institute; its fate thereafter was a matter of some dispute.

Neither boats nor wagons were ever delivered. Lewanika, in an uncharacteristic act of clemency, suggested to an extremely repentent Mokalapa that he "clear out of his country", and the curtain fell on the AME Church in Barotseland.[15]

The AME Church enjoyed greater success in Pondoland. There, too, the extension of colonial jurisdiction and the progressive incorporation of the territory into the wider economy had chipped away at the power of the paramountcy. Sigcau, who reigned between 1887 and 1905, was endlessly resourceful in his efforts to defend traditional power and maintain some room for manoeuvre outside the colonial context. On the diplomatic front, he struggled to circumvent the colonial administration by opening negotiations with the imperial government, and even once with Germany. Equally importantly, Sigcau, like Lewanika, strove to wrest control of the process of economic develoment from European hands. He tried to initiate independent industrial schools; he encouraged the development of local industries - notably the manufacturing of gunpowder; he granted concessions to exploration companies in an effort to establish mines locally. Sigcau's embrace of the AME Church thus must be seen as part of his continuing struggle to locate an alternative locus of power outside the colonial context, to find some kind of fulcrum to enhance the leverage of the paramountcy. A black American church answered his needs handsomely. Like so many of his contemporaries, Sigcau appears to have believed that black Americans possessed fabulous wealth and all the technological mastery of the Europeans. The AME Church thus represented both a cultural referent, pointing a path to development outside of white tutelage, as well as a new conduit to education and skills previously controlled by missionaries.[16]

The first AMEC emissary to arrive at Sigcau's Great Place was Samson Mtintso, a former Wesleyan ordained by Bishop Turner. Mtintso, judging from surviving correspondence, was exceptionally well educated, probably at Shawbury. He settled at the Great Place in about 1898, pointedly neglecting to ask the permission of the local magistrate. There he remained for the next twenty years, establishing schools and serving as both Royal Chaplain and counsellor. He was apparently untroubled by Sigcau's continuing attachment to the "vestiges of heathenism", and laboured unceasingly to promote the paramountcy. According to the Resident Magistrate at Lusikisiki, Mtintso preached self-government and the virtues of making arms from minerals - presumably a reference to the gunpowder industry. Later, he played a central role in the efforts of both Sigcau and his son, Marelane, to extend the authority of the paramountcy at the expense of the government-appointed headmen.[17]

Mtintso was soon joined at Quakeni by a black American, Conrad Rideout, an attorney and member of the Arkansas State Legislature during Southern Reconstruction. Rideout was one among a handful of adventurers who responded to the church's call for skilled hands for the African mission. Within months of Rideout's arrival, the Assistant Chief Magistrate of the Transkei was reporting "signs of restlessness" at Quakeni. Typically, he reached for the agitator theory, oblivious to what his own narrative implied about the direction of the interchange between Sigcau and Rideout.

> On inquiry, I found that (Sigcau) is under the influence of an Ethiopian Missionary - an American Negro ... who has succeeded in persuading the Chief, that he does not receive the treatment from Government, which such a very important person as the head of the Pondo nation has a right to expect. That the subsidy he received, is absurdly small, and should be increased to at least four thousand (pounds) a year, and that much more power should be allowed him, with regard to ruling the Pondos, &c &c; and he was led to believe that if he would visit England, the Queen would speedily right matters for him.[18]

Equally menacing was the fact that the paramount, encouraged perhaps by Mtintso or Rideout, had decided to send his heir, Marelane, to an AME college in America for education. The suggestion produced virtual distemper among both colonial officials

and white missionaries, who viewed American colleges as a breeding ground for agitators. On Sigcau's death, officials, acting with the support of Mhlanga, the regent, bundled Marelane off to the more temperate climate of Lovedale.[19]

The AME Church proved a more formidable weapon in internal conflicts within Pondoland. Sigcau correctly recognized in the appointment of government headmen after the annexation of Pondoland yet another attempt to circumvent his authority. He vainly asserted his right to select candidates, and protested when the area traditionally controlled from the paramountcy was Balkanized and divided among government appointees. In one disputed Flagstaff location, according to William Beinart, he even resorted to witchcraft accusations to unseat the appointee. The AME Church offered another hammer against the usurpers. Many of the new appointees possessed only the thinnest of traditional credentials; most seem to have been drawn from the mission elite, primarily from the Wesleyans. They were thus twice vulnerable to the gospel of Ethiopianism. Sigcau was quick to appreciate their predicament. Using a variant of the paramountcy's time-worn tactic of "placing out", he encouraged the spread of the AME Church into disputed locations, oftentimes by dispatching Mtintso. Under Sigcau's patronage, AME congregations soon sprouted in Maliwa's Location in Flagstaff and in Gqubeni in Lusikisiki, both locations claimed by the paramount. In the latter place, a church was built in spite of the opposition of the local headman, Nozozo. Nozozo eventually resorted to charging the builders of the unauthorized church in his location in the magistrate's court. The decision undoubtedly loosened his already tenuous hold on popular loyalties, as Sigcau had no doubt calculated: doubly so, when the case was dismissed on a technicality.[20]

Mhlanga, regent on Sigcau's death, refrained from the tactic, probably because the colonial administration bulked so large in his own claims to authority, but Marelane exhibited no such inhibitions. The aura of Lovedale had not blinded him to the AME Church's uses in expanding the ambit of the paramountcy. Marelane's gaze fell on Tabankulu District, where he hoped to place one of his sons. Thus in 1914, following a secession from the Wesleyan mission at Cacudu, he dispatched Mtintso to Tabankulu. Mtintso's application for a church site raised howls from the local headman, a Wesleyan, who complained to the administration that Marelane was "oppressing" him. The Resident Magistrate agreed that the paramount was "furthering this intrigue", and the application was refused. A site application was then submitted for a location nearby under a Sotho headman named Ndlebe. Ndlebe, too, was reluctant to accede to the request, but as an outsider himself he was apparently less willing to challenge the paramount; in the Resident Magistgrate's words, Marelane's "displeasure he would prefer not to incur".[21]

Although Sigcau and Marelane were unique in the way they wedded Ethiopianism to the tradition of placing out, they were far from alone in using the movement as a vehicle for reclaiming traditional prerogatives. In Magogong, for example, a remote station of the LMS in British Bechuanaland, the AME Church coalesced around a deposed chief, Galiskwe, and his brother, Gasilthatiwe. A petition for a church site signed by 140 of the pair's supporters - most left only their marks - noted pointedly that, while their request had been "treated with silent contempt" by "the Native Chief holding official power", "Our Chief and Headman (who do not hold official Power) have given their consent". The application was rejected by the local Inspector of Native Locations, who reported that the "rebel" chief and his brother "are seeking under the cloak of the AME Church, to regain influence amongst the People".[22]

There is evidence that young Sekukuni also discovered some of the possibilities of Ethiopianism. During his exile, he lived in Pretoria with a sometime AME minister, Joseph Kanyane Napo. Napo - and perhaps Mangena Mokone - continued to meet with Sekukuni after he had regained the paramountcy, much to the chagrin of the Transvaal Native Affairs Department. In 1905, Sekukuni sought permission to travel to Kimberley to contact both the American Bishop of the AME Church and Pedi migrants in the compounds. The NAD, troubled more by the rendezvous with the bishop then by Sekukuni's efforts to re-establish chiefly control over migrants, refused permission. Sekukuni also may have had a hand in the growth of the AME Church in Geluk's Location, a disputed area excised from the ambit of the paramountcy on the death of the elder Sekukuni. While no direct evidence about the

church's appearance in the location survives, it is worth observing that the church's rapid spread in the area coincided with Sekukuni's continuing efforts to use his clients to foment "dissension" against his rivals. If the presumption is correct, it suggests the degree to which the AMEC's spread was conditioned by pre-existing factional cleavages. The dispute over control of Geluk's Location ante-dated the arrival of the AME Church, and it already possessed a religious dimension in that Kgolane and his party, Sekukuni's rivals, were members of the Lutheran Bapedi Church. With Kgolane enjoying state recognition, both from the ZAR and the later from the Transvaal Colony, it seems almost inevitable that his faction would spurn the AME Church while Sekukuni would deploy it.[23]

The spread of the AME Church among the Bangwaketse in Bechuanaland Protectorate points to a similar conclusion. The church was first welcomed at Kanye by the paramount, Bathoen, who may have been swayed by the promise of an industrial school. He soon had reason to rue his decision, as the AMEC was overtaken by Tsime, his brother-in-law and chief rival. The result, according to W C Willoughby, superintendent of the LMS, was a new eruption of factional conflict at the capital, with Bathoen caught in the middle: "It is ostensibly a Church row, and Bathoen tries (somewhat unsuccessfully) to persuade himself that it is merely that." According to Willoughby, however, the dispute was "Mochwana politics", aimed at securing the chieftainship for Tsime's son. At one point, Tsime even attempted to have one of his adherents ordained, an idea which Willoughby found singularly repugnant. What is striking about the AME Church's entanglement here is the fact that Tsime, in the 1890s at least, was a leading opponent of the Christians, projecting himself as a defender of traditional ritual and order, none of which inhibited him from embracing the AME Church. For his part, Bathoen was not prepared to join the church and alienate patrons in the administration and the mission; at the same time he apparently recognized that expelling the church would only strengthen Tsime's hand. Thus, Willoughby ruefully concluded, "Bathoen tries to sit on the fence, but that is an accomplishment that few men can successfully acquire".[24]

Ultimately, few chiefs could remain on the fence when the Ethiopians arrived. A few tried. Both Khama of the Bamangwato and Lerothodi of the BaSotho enjoyed imperial protection and unusually equable relations with European missionaries. Yet both, frustrated at the missionary school curriculum, responded enthusiastically to the promise of industrial schools staffed by American blacks. Khama offered the AMEC the abandoned LMS mission station at Palapwe as a school site, while Lerothodi pledged a staggering £4000 for construction. When confronted by missionaries and government officials, however, both chose the politic course and professed to know nothing about the AME Church. When questioned by the South African Native Affairs Commission, Khama lied blandly: he had "heard of the name, but so far there are no Ethiopians in my country".[25]

Ultimately, expectations that the AME Church would provide educational and technological resources to enable traditional rulers to reassert control over the economic and political fortunes of African societies were chimerical. Yet the AME Church offered something else as well. Implicit in the appropriation of the white man's religion was a rejection of the perpetual tutelage of whites. This rejection was reinforced by the psychological connection the church offered with black America, with a world where blacks were seen to have achieved their majority. There were within these ideas the seeds of a potent racial nationalism; but at the same time they answered the needs of chiefs bearing the brunt of the colonial advance. The themes came together in a letter to Koranta ea Beacona from Chief Segale K Pilane, brother to the paramount of the Bakhatla. Pilane had obtained, presumably from an AME minister, a copy of Voice of the People, a short-lived journal edited by Bishop Turner which heralded the impending return of black Americans to their African homeland. Pilane's letter reveals the extent to which colonial intrusion and missionary despotism had been collapsed into a single grievance; it also suggests the importance of Ethiopianism in providing a vocabulary and sanction for rejecting white authority, even for racial separatism. "The Laws in the Transvaal are still those of the Boers", Pilane began. Those who had expected relief from the British had been betrayed. As evidence, he cited from Voice of the People the case of a minister who had been excommunicated "only because he is black". "I say: Pray, Natives, do hear the cry of your own 'People' ... Colour was not made by man"

but by God who "was not mistaken but saw fit to do his will ... They even despise our creation and say that they cannot allow the Book in black hands", Pilane concluded. "I say, let us leave them alone."[26]

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1 Interviews with the Rev D Segwai, Deaconess Ruth Machwisa, and Shadrach Leshumu. (All interview material to be deposited at the African Studies Institute Oral History Project on completion of this study.) Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report for the Year Ended 30th June, 1905, p B35.

2 Transvaal Archives Depot, Papers of the Secretary of Native Affairs (hereafter SNA) 89 100/03; SNA 230 2030/19; SNA 263 873/05; SNA 448 3687/09; Transvaal Law Department Papers (LD) 1652 2607/08.07/08; Cape Archives Depot, Native Affairs Department (NA) 498 a96.

3 Letter from the Rev J S Moffat, 10 October 1902, in Transvaal Archives Depot, Office of the Colonial Secretary Papers (CS) 185 15733/02; SNA 328 2059/06; on Abel Gabashane's conviction for seditious preaching, see SNA 334 2565/06; Transvaal Native Affairs Department, "Annual Report for the Period 1st July 1909 to 31st May 1910" (Pretoria, 1911), p 11.

4 Transvaal Intermediate Archives Depot, Papers of the Native Affairs Department (hereafter NTS) 3471 157/308.

5 SNA 197 369/04; SNA 221 1189/04.

6 Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report ... 1905, p B37; SNA 247 3126/04.

7 The treatment on Ethiopianism as racial or national "awakening" can be seen in works from the 1920s to the present. See, for example, Allen Lea, The Native Separatist Church Movement in South Africa (Cape Town, 1926); Daniel Thwaite, The Seething African Pot: a study of black nationalism, 1882-1935 (London, 1936); Edward Roux, "The Ethiopian Movement", Trek, Vol X, No 2, 27 July 1945; George Shepperson, "Ethiopianism and African Nationalism", Phylon, Vol XIV, No 1, 1953; chapter IX of Leonard Thompson and Monica Wilson (eds), The Oxford History of South Africa (Oxford, 1971); and Andre Odendaal, Vukani Bantu: the beginnings of black protest politics in South Africa to 1912 (Cape Town, 1984). For similar contemporary comments by missionaries, see Report of the Proceedings of the First General Misionary Conference held at Johannesburg, July 1904 (Johannesburg, 1905). Representative comments by government officials can be found in SNA 75 2569/02, and in the report of the Chief Magistrate at Umtata, 13 October 1902, from which the above quote is taken.

8 The list of major and minor chiefs who consorted with the AME Church in the first decade of the century is simply staggering. Among paramounts, it includes Lewanika of the Barotse, Sigcau of the Pondo, Dalindyebo of the Thembu, Lerothodi of the BaSotho, and Khama of the Bamangwato. The list of lesser chiefs is too lengthy to recite; among Tswana chiefs alone it includes, at a glance, Moshette and Moepi, Pilane, Galishiwe, Samuel Moroka, Moffat Mossou, and Montsioa.

9 These variables included: the character of previous European missionary activity; the different mechanisms by which traditional authority was expressed and conveyed; the manner in which a society was being incorporated into the broader colonial economy and polity; and previous patterns of factional conflict, particularly along cleavages opened by the process of colonial incorporation.

10 Norman Etherington, Preachers, Peasants and Politics in Southeast Africa, 1835-1880 (London, 1978); see also, Peter Delius, The Land Belongs to Us (Johannesburg, 1983), especially chapter 5. Chronicle of the London Missionary Society, April 1894.

11 Delius, chapter 5; Moffat, quoted in H A C Cairns, Prelude to Imperialism: British reactions to Central African society, 1840-1890 (London, 1965), p 241; Chronicle of the London Missionary Society, June 1897.

12 On Tyeku, see NTS 483 6/64; the case of Motheba Maine is described in a forthcoming book by Charles van Onselen. A great deal of oral and documentary

evidence supports the general contention.

13 T O Ranger, "The 'Ethiopian Episode' in Barotseland, 1900-1905", The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal: human problems in Central Africa, No XXXVII, 1965; SNA 207 533/04. Mokalapa's hasty ordination suggests yet another important difference between the AME Church and the European missions, most of which were loath to entrust the sacraments to African hands.

14 Quoted in Gervais Clay, Your Friend, Lewanika: the life and times of Lubosi Lewanika, Litunga of Barotseland, 1842-1916 (London, 1968), p 94.

15 Speculation about AMEC fraud was fuelled by F Z S Peregrino's South African Spectator, but government investigations discovered no basis for prosecution. See SNA 207 533/04; NA 497 a96; Cape Archives Depot, Papers of the Attorney General (CAG) 1572 1557/05; Transvaal Archives Depot, Papers of the Lieutenant Governor (LTG) 144 120/07.

16 Much of the material on the Pondo paramountcy is gleaned from William Beinart, The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860-1930 (Cambridge, 1982).

17 NTS 132 f243; NA 497 a96; Beinart, p 154.

18 Asst Chief Magistrate to Chief Magistrate of the Transkei, 6 June 1900, NA 686 2610.

19 Beinart, p 104. A paper on the ramifications of American education is forthcoming.

20 NTS 132 f243.

21 Cape Archives Depot, Papers of the Chief Magistrate of the Transkei (CMT) 3/938 784.

22 Petition c August 1905; Inspector of Native Locations to Resident Magistrate at Taung, 25 August 1905, NA 479 a96.

23 SNA 140 1406/03; SNA 254 457/06; SNA 341 3257/06. On events at Geluk's Location, see Annual Report by the Commissioner for Native Affairs for the Year Ended 30 June, 1903, p B38.

24 NA 497 a96; LMS Chronicle..., December 1898.

25 The offers of Khama and Lerothodi were described by Rideout in letters to the AME Church's Voice of Missions in 1901 and 1902. Some excerpts can be found in NA 497 a96. For Khama's testimony, see SANAC Evidence, Volume IV, p 252.

26 Letter to Koranta ea Becoana, 8 August 1903, copy in SNA 186 3034/03.