

Pan-Africanism and its Ambivalences in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Africa, 1896-1920s

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Abstract

Some scholars of Christianity in Africa have viewed the African Methodist Episcopal Church's (AMEC) incorporation of Reverend Mangena Mokena's Ethiopian Church as its South African branch in 1896 through the Afrocentric lens, perceiving it as an early manifestation of people of African descent's sense of common identity and shared destiny. The consciousness of race uplift and solidarity that pervaded this trans-Atlantic union fits the standard morphology of Pan-Africanist synergies. Significantly, African American missionaries often stated that they sympathised with African church secessionists largely because they found much in South African Christianity that resembled the factors and practices that impelled the birth of AMEC. While the African Americans articulated Pan-African ideals and expressed a desire to identify with Africans, I argue, their conduct and language occasionally alienated them from Africans' experiences and concerns. When they encountered Africans in South Africa they did not fully appreciate local political aspirations and economic demands. They marginalised their fellow African communicants. Some even looked down upon Africans and frustrated local struggles against white exploitation. Other AMEC resident bishops threatened to expel African church leaders and laity that dabbled in politics. This was quite blasé, I conclude, considering that some of these indigenous churchmen constituted the educated elite who felt morally compelled to speak for and organise their people against unjust and racist policies of the white South African government.

Key Words: Pan-Africanism, ambivalences, Methodist Church South Africa

Introduction

The African Methodist Episcopal Church's (AMEC) incorporation of Reverend Mangena Mokone's Ethiopian Church as its South African branch in 1896 has been viewed by Afrocentric scholars such as Chirenje (1987), Odendaal (1984), Shepperson (1960) and Verry (1972) as an early manifestation of people of African descent's sense of common identity and shared destiny. The consciousness of race uplift and solidarity that pervaded this trans-Atlantic union fits the general trope

of pan-African synergies. The difficulties that AMEC members experienced while trying to gain independence status made them sensitive to racism. Significantly, African American missionaries often stated that they sympathized with African church secessionists largely because they found much in South African Christianity that resembled the factors and practices that impelled the birth of AMEC. I shift the angle of analysis from this overarching and celebratory narrative by arguing that some of the Diaspora and African laity's everyday encounters and discourses within the ambits of AMEC contradicted Pan-Africanism's ethos of mutual respect and empathy among those who inhabit and constitute what Paul Gilroy (1993) has termed the "Black Atlantic." This notion refers to a cluster of cognate ideas and experiences shared by people of African descent in Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States.

While black Diasporans articulated pan-African ideals and expressed a desire to identify with Africans their conduct and language occasionally revealed their alienation from Africans' experiences and concerns. When they encountered Africans in South Africa they did not fully appreciate local political aspirations, economic demands and cultural orientations. Their world view was unambiguously Euro-American and they opted to shape Africa according to Western images. Considering the differences in life experiences between the two groups such discords were inevitable but what is problematic is that some African American communicants did not treat Africans as equals. They monopolised top positions in the South African AMEC branch. Even Reverend Mokone, the man who had instigated the Ethiopian Church's secession from the Wesleyans in 1892 as well as the amalgamation of this entity with AMEC in 1896 could not occupy any decent post beyond that of Church Elder. By the time of his death in 1931 he was a revered but marginal figure in the AMEC power structures. These foregoing socio-political disconnections motivated some Africans such as AMEC's pioneer titular head or General Superintendent in South Africa, Reverend James Dwane to secede from AMEC in 1899. Ironically, when Dwane seceded he affiliated his group to the white controlled Anglican Church that co-opted them as "The Order of Ethiopia."

Although Africans joined AMEC out of some incipient pan-African consciousness and anti-colonialism, it appears one of their motives was to get a semblance of refuge from the many socio-economic problems they faced. These included land alienation, dispersal from their homelands; lack of legal resources, poor education, poor urban housing, and harassment by the police (Etherington 1979, pp.113-15 and 120). In this milieu of havoc and disillusionment, AMEC's symbolism of black initiative and autonomy and the broader black American connection it embodied offered aggrieved South African blacks hope and a sense of possibility. In the 1880s the African elite highly regarded African Americans for their perceived economic and social enterprise. *Imvo Zabantsunda*, an independent and secular English

language paper owned and published by a black South African, John Tengo Jabavu, urged its readers to learn from African Americans lessons of economic independence. One of its 1889 editorials advised Africans to study the socio-economic conditions of their American brethren in order to appreciate the importance of acquiring an education and with it the ability to buy property (Chirenje, p.37).

The following narrative explores in detail the foregoing ambivalences in Africans and Diaspora folks' encounters within the ambit of AMEC in South Africa. The narrative is in three parts. I begin by situating AMEC and the Ethiopian Church's origins, visions and missionary endeavors within the Pan-African framework. The second section is an exploration of the discourses and policies that informed AMEC's forays into Africa before the 1890s. In the last section, I analyse African and African American relations in South Africa's AMEC branch from 1896 to the 1920s. I end my analysis in the 1920s for two reasons. First, in this period whites began to regard secular organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC) rather than religious forces as the principal threat to their domination. The 1926 labor unrests coupled with the rise of the Commercial and Industrial Workers Union (ICU) replaced fears of AMEC and the Ethiopianist Movement. Second, the attitude of African Americans towards Africans also began to change; Africans became equal rather than junior partners in the relationship. This shift can be ascribed to the hegemony of emerging Pan-African discourses articulated through the Congress System that championed African political, cultural and economic sovereignty. Thus the post-Second World War anti-colonial mantra of 'Africa for Africans' also informed the rhetoric of the AMEC leadership in the 1940s and 1950s. Several AMEC annual retreats resolved to condemn apartheid and imperialism in Africa.

AMEC, the Ethiopian Church and the Pan-African Ideal

The genesis and visions of AMEC and the Ethiopian Church conform to the trope of pan-African ideals. Pan-Africanism is a humanistic ideal whose focus is the solidarity and empowerment of black peoples who had historically endured exploitation and injustices like slavery, racism, colonialism and apartheid (Mazrui 1995; Adrian 1960). It articulates discourses of possibility for a broad range of African identities and aspirations in multiple spatial and cultural contexts (Muchie 2005, Drake 1993). Such aspirations include the desire for peace and political self-determination, an end to foreign exploitation and economic prosperity among people of African descent.

The objectives of Pan-Africanism have shifted over the years but the core element of safeguarding African people's rights has remained static. This is manifest in the

different phases the Pan-Africanist movement has gone through from its inception, especially in the formative years of the twentieth century by diaspora Africans. Initially, the Pan-Africanist movement was concerned with cultural and racial issues and the main demands were equality and non-discrimination of people of African descent. Diaspora Africans like Sylvester Williams and WEB du Bois led and espoused this anti-racial crusade whose ultimate trajectories in America were the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights movements. By the end of the Second World War the Pan-Africanist focus was on anti-colonialism and the decolonization of African countries (Legum 1995). AMEC and the Ethiopian Church's visions and union conform to these pan-African trajectories in a variety of ways.

AMEC and the Ethiopian Church emerged out of opposition to institutionalized racism practiced by white clergy and laity in the Church. Richard Allen and other African Americans such as Absalom Jones founded AMEC as a secessionist movement from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1787 in Philadelphia. It first emerged as the Free African Society (FAS) and the immediate cause for its constitution was the segregation practiced by white members of St George's Methodist Episcopal Church who excluded African American members from worshipping inside the church. In 1816 FAS formally reconstituted as AMEC after successful appeals in the courts to exist as an independent institution. From these inauspicious beginnings AMEC embraced ethnic and racial diversity within its realms; anyone except a slaveholder could join the newly born church. This libertarian ethos that recognized the "free and full salvation of everyman" (Gregg 1980, p. 49) made the church popular among African Americans particularly in the United States' Northeast and Midwest prior to the Civil War.

The Ethiopian Church or *Ibandla laseTiyipia* emerged under conditions analogous to those that led to the genesis of AMEC. During the Methodist/Wesleyan Church's 1892 Missionary Conference in Pretoria Africans were excluded from positions on the board. They were also not allowed to attend certain sessions open only to whites. This disregard for African dignity, leadership aspirations and relevance within the Church aggrieved Reverend Mokone and other blacks who immediately withdrew from the conference. They held their own meeting which led to their resignation from the Methodist Church. Breakaway groups from the Anglican Church also joined forces with Reverend Mokone to form the Ethiopian Church (Verryn 1972, pp.17-30). This racism which triggered these secessions was a manifestation of the onslaught against blacks in the wider society.

At the moment of affiliation between AMEC and the Ethiopian Church in 1896 African Americans were enduring the retraction of their civil liberties in the post-

Reconstruction era while in South Africa blacks experienced increasing land alienation, inordinate taxes, starvation wages and unemployment (Etherington 1979). In this context of state instigated socio-economic undermining of blacks, the church became a symbolic frontier of freedom (Frazier 1964, p.43). Its symbolism as a sanctuary and an avenue to salvation parallels the imagery evoked by north-bound migrations of southern based African Americans to Chicago, particularly Detroit, in the 1930s in search of economic opportunities and freedom.

Although AMEC and the Ethiopian Church were initially concerned with ministering to and resolving some of the socio-political questions in their immediate environs, they always had a pan-African outlook. This is evident in the prefixing of the organizations' names with "Africa" and "Ethiopian." Richard Allen thought that it was "appropriate for the descendants of Africans" to identify with the homeland of their ancestors (George 1973, Angel and Pinn 2000). However, the usage of the name was not without controversy. Educated elites who associated Africa with degradation opposed the name. This provoked Reverend Benjamin Tucker Tanner to elaborate on the implication of "Africa" by stating:

What then is the intended force of the title Africa? Is it doctrinal or national? It is first "doctrinal" and secondarily "national." It is doctrinal, because a whole race was systematically ostracised and the goal to which Richard Allen, founder of the A.M.E aspired, was the humanity of the Negro...a church wherein the claims to humanity of this despised class would be practically recognized. The title African is but the finger-board, the index of this sublime truth; a means only, that men of African descent are to be found there and found as men, not slaves; as equals, not inferiors. The doctrine of the Negro's humanity is its primary signification (Quoted in Essien-Udon 1962, pp.393-4).

Besides this declaratory nomenclature AMEC membership believed in providential design and race redemption and viewed Africa as a possible mission field. David Killingray (2003, p.4) observes that many believed that God's providential design had brought Africans as slaves to America in order that they might return to evangelize Africa in line with Psalm 68:31, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God."

In South Africa, the Ethiopian Church also evinced these pan-African inclinations in its name. Reverend Mokone adopted the term "Ethiopia" as a multilayered Christian symbol. In the Greco-Roman and Biblical sense the term equated to Africa, land of the black people. Thus, "Ethiopianism" became a generic term to describe a whole range of black people's efforts to improve their religious, educational and political status in society (Chirenje, p.2). Second, to some extent,

it referred to the nation of Ethiopia, the Christian Kingdom of Abyssinia, which had remained independent from the European colonization of Africa. After Emperor Menelik's Abyssinian victory over Italian troops at the battle of Adowa in 1896, Ethiopia rose to prominence as a spatial symbol of African independence. Chidester (2000, p.427) argues that "as a common motif in African preaching, "Ethiopia" represented the promise of black redemption and liberation."

Both AMEC and the Ethiopian Church became trendsetting demonstrations against discrimination and segregation based on colour in the Church in both the United States and in South Africa. AMEC's emergence was unique because it was the first major religious denomination in the western world that had its origins over sociological rather than theological beliefs and differences. Gregg (pp.12-13) argues that Richard Allen's act "was as much a hallmark in Black religious freedom as was the Boston Tea Party a hallmark in the eventual freedom of the colonies from the domination of England in the American Revolution." In line with its sociological origins AMEC attempted to address questions beyond liturgy, theology and laity. It provided educational opportunities to African Americans and perhaps the most expressive endeavor in this regard was the establishment of Wilberforce University in Ohio in 1856. This became the preeminent liberal arts college for African American youth in the nineteenth century. Daniel Payne a church historian and one of the AMEC bishops in the 1860s argued that his church psychologically empowered African Americans who had been maligned and exploited under slavery and other exclusionary racist policies. Thus he noted,

...the separation of our church has been beneficial to the man of color by giving him an independence of character which he could neither hope for nor attain into, if he had remained as the ecclesiastical vassal of his white brethren. This is evident from the training which the force of circumstances has given us. These circumstances have been such as to produce independent thought; this has resulted in independent actions; this independent action has resulted in the extension of our ecclesiastical organization (Quoted in Angell and Pinn).

Within South Africa, AMEC quickly spread into many places from 1896 onwards due to its capacity to articulate and address some of the Africans' socio-economic expectations. It symbolised the rejection of white control and AME church members who assumed leading positions in popular secular organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC) boosted the Church's proto-nationalist and pan-Africanist profiles. Such people included Charlotte Maxele, founder of the African National

Congress' (ANC) Women's League and Dr. A.B. Xuma who became the president of the ANC in the 1940s (Thwaite 1936, Roux 1945, p.13).

AMEC, Proselytisation and the Pan-African Discords, 1820s-1890s

The notion of providential design prompted AMEC to initiate a foreign missions program as early as the 1820s. Daniel Coker, AMEC's first bishop elect who turned down the post, left for West Africa in 1820 and spent the remainder of his life evangelizing in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Gregg, p.13). In the following decade Scipio Beanes and Richard Robinson were appointed by the AMEC leadership to set up a congregation in Port au Prince. Some of this evangelical work was coordinated through the Church's Home and Foreign Missionary Society formed in 1844. These autonomous initiatives were quite novel because other black churches such as the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians relied on financial and administrative back up from richer white agencies and boards.

Two of the most prominent African American missionaries in Liberia in the mid-nineteenth century that relied on white support were Dr. Edward W. Blyden and Alexander Crummell. Blyden was born in the Danish West Indies, studied in the United States and went to Liberia in 1857 courtesy of the New York Colonization Society and the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Mission. He indulged in the political and social affairs of the newly created republic and ultimately emerged as one of the major thinkers behind the incipient Pan-Africanist movement in the nineteenth century. Crummell, a free black from New York and a graduate of Cambridge University, was ordained by the Episcopalians who sent him to Monrovia in 1853 where he acted mainly as a pastor to Americo-Liberian settlers. He also became entangled in local politics.

These early black missionaries acknowledged their African ancestry, expressed concern for Africa, and proposed schemes for the economic development of the continent. Men like Paul Cuffee and Lott Cary once declared that as meritorious men of colour they could not receive due credit in racist America and this exclusion compelled them to go to Africa where they felt their potential could be recognized without racial bias. In affirming his pan-Africaness Cary also claimed that, "I feel bound to labour for my suffering race." However, this Pan African veneer conceals contradictory apprehensions in some of the African Diaspora's perceptions about the Africans and the continent.

African Americans were products of the cultural biases of their particular historical epoch. They embraced the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century missionary and Eurocentric constructions of non-whites as inferior and of Africa as a poor and

strange continent. These images led to the formulation of ideas about civilizing Africans and rescuing them from “darkness and barbarism” (Adeleke 1998, p.505). W.E.B du Bois (1983) attempted to explain these contradictions in his famous book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which he formulated the notion of “double consciousness.” He described African Americans as people of dual identity who are constantly battling with and tormented by the conflicting demands of their dual identities. Thus, “one ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body—The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self in a better and truer self” (p.3).

Lot Cary’s farewell speech before his departure for Africa in January 1821 belied “double consciousness.” He noted that, “I long to preach to the poor Africans the way of life and salvation. I don’t know what may befall me, whether I may find a grave in the Ocean, or among the savage men, or among the savage wild beasts on the coast of Africa” (Fisher 1989, p.389). At the same time Alexander Crummell argued for the regeneration of Africa by noting that, “the hand of God is on the black man, in all the lands of his distant sojourn, for the good of Africa. This continent is to be reclaimed for Christ. The faith of Jesus is to supersede all the abounding dissolution of heathenism”(Quoted in Jacobs 1991, p.42).

Fixation with erasing heathenism in Africa fuelled desires in some African American missionaries to impose western notions of order and civilisation on Africans. In consequence, some black missionaries were complicit in the colonisation of the continent. People like Martine Delany, Alexander Crummell and AMEC’s bishop Henry Turner who were in Africa in the crucial period from 1850 to the 1890s when Europeans changed their policies from minimal presence on the coast to intrusion into the continent argued for stronger and much visible European presence in Africa. On a visit to Britain in 1861, Delany persistently urged the use of force against Africans to stem the tide of what he presented as the endemic crisis among indigenous African states; a crisis that he insisted inhibited the orderly and peaceful flow of legitimate commerce. Crummell repeatedly referred to Africans as restless, violent and crude people against whom the use of indiscriminate force was legitimate (Crummell 1862, p.107). Violence was for him a rightful weapon of taming the wild barbarism of indigenous Africa, and he implored the British not to be held back by considerations of democracy or justice in forcibly subduing Africans (*Ibid*, pp.316-323, Adeleke 1998).

Although AMEC successfully managed to steer clear of white tutelage in its foreign mission endeavors, it had a sporadic and discontinuous existence in Haiti, Liberia and Sierra Leone before the 1880s. A myriad of factors such as poor organization, limited financial resources and disillusionment by the missionaries in Africa

compromised its missionary endeavors. However, the foremost negative factor was the American Colonization Society's efforts to push African Americans back to the mainland. The Society was formed in Washington DC in December 1816 and it even enjoyed the patronage of diverse influential white American groups with interlocking motives: Southerners fearful of a possible revolt by freed slaves; Northerners who did not want African Americans to compete with indigent whites; whites opposed to slavery and racial integration, and African Americans who thought their best fortunes lay in Africa. The Society's agenda caused some confusion in AMEC circles. Before the Civil War, AMEC members viewed the American Colonization Society largely in negative terms. The most common criticism against the Society was that African Americans had shed their blood, sweat, and tears in America and they had every right to remain there as the whites (Angell and Pinn).

Richard Allen also refused to have anything to do with the Society's emigrationist agenda, he viewed it as a subterfuge against blacks. His sentiments were that African Americans deserved respect and dignity in America itself (Gregg, p.49). This opposition to emigration and the colonization of West Africa for the settlement of freed men and women was condemned in AMEC media organs. For example, an editorial in the *Christian Recorder* (13 March 1890) once noted:

What do you think of making a great Negro state under this government as a way out of their race trouble? We think nothing of it; if the two classes cannot live in this country as they are, they cannot live in such relations as must necessarily result from any such plan.

However, after emancipation the situation changed, people migrated voluntarily and Bishop Henry McNeal Turner even became Vice President of the Society in the 1890s. In 1893 AMEC appointed Turner as Bishop of Africa, a man who aspired to create a "highway across the Atlantic" that would link Africans and African Americans in a pan-African Christian unity (Chidester, p.18). Turner also an emigrationist, founded and edited the *Voice of Missions*, the first periodical from an African American denomination, from 1893-1900. It was in the context of this renewed missionary endeavor that AMEC affiliated the Ethiopian Church of South Africa in 1896. The South Africa Church was to become the largest of the A.M.E Church's foreign branches.

AMEC and the Ethiopian Church in South Africa: Ambiguities in the Pan-African Encounter, 1896-1920s

The Pan-African and propitious reading of the AMEC and Ethiopian encounter apparent in the works by Chidester, Chirenje and Odendaal is an overestimation

of the nature of relations within the South African branch. It also masks some contradictions in the daily interactions between Africans and African Americans. Foremost, the affiliation between AMEC and the Ethiopian Church started through a chain of unconnected and coincidental linkages devoid of ideological underpinnings. In 1890, a South African choir went on tour to the United States where they got stranded in Cleveland, Ohio, after their white promoters abandoned them. The choir was rescued by AMEC and with Bishop Derrick's assistance Charlotte Manye-Maxele, entered Wilberforce College. Charlotte Manye-Maxele later became South Africa's first black woman graduate and the most outstanding woman of her time, eminent in the church welfare and politics, and in the struggle for women's rights. Through a chance letter to her sister Katie while at Wilberforce, news of AMEC and its educational endeavors, black leadership and ample financial resources reached a kinsman, the Reverend Mokone. This in turn prompted Mokone to write the AMEC's Bishop Turner and in 1896 the Ethiopian Church sent Reverend Dwane to the United States to cement the relationship. Ultimately, Dwane was made a full member of the AME Church in Atlanta, Georgia, in July 1896. He returned to South Africa as the General Superintendent of the new South African branch.

In March 1898 Bishop Henry Turner made a trip to South Africa where he presided over well attended conferences in Pretoria, Queenstown and Cape Town. Subsequent to this auspicious visit, AMEC appointed Reverend Levi J. Choppin as Bishop of AMEC in South Africa. He initiated the Church's availing of educational and vocational training opportunities to Africans in the Cape Colony. These institutions were a vital resource not only to those who hoped to remain in town permanently, but to sharecropping families increasingly dependent on non-farm earnings. Among such institutions was Bethel and the Evarton based, Wilberforce Institute, an industrial and teacher-training school, founded and staffed by South African graduates of Wilberforce University in the United States.

By 1912 the AMEC was successful in South Africa; it had 87 ordained preachers, 627 unordained preachers, 166 churches, 2733 Sunday Schools, 15 435 members, and 82 day schools (Gregg, p.55). These efforts triggered substantial turnout to the AME church by black South Africans, particularly in the Orange Free State and other urban enclaves. One can argue that black South Africans' proximate causes for joining AMEC *en mass* were not ideological in nature but real life calculations. By 1899 its membership was estimated at eleven thousand and by 1910 it had risen to forty thousand, a figure which haunted the imaginations of administrators and missionaries all over southern Africa; for whom the threat of what was somewhat loosely termed "Ethiopianism" was as potent as their fear of Communism in the 1920s and 1930s (*Ibid*).

AMEC possessed a potent imaginative appeal, embodying aspirations for independence and respectability which were under assault in the broader South African society. This appeal was undoubtedly enhanced by the Church's association with black America, which existed for most Africans as an almost "mythical land of black progress and prosperity (Campbell 1994, p.50)." South Africans also equated African Americans to urbanity, sophistication and progress and these popular beliefs about African American progress were seemingly confirmed by the big turnouts at Bishop Turner 's brief but sensational 1898 visit.

AMEC also attracted black laity because it had African leadership that was well versed and sensitive to the numerous rural and urban problems confronting Africans. This leadership believed their mission went beyond narrow definitions of theological questions by attempting to address African grievances against the colonial establishment. In the context of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, British authorities put nearly sixty thousand Africans in the Free State in "refugee camps" that were to become crucial for the dissemination of African Methodism (Warwick 1983). Officially, these camps were strategic hamlets, labor depots, and food provision stations but in reality they were fetid, rural slums, where thousands of people struggled to scratch out a life without adequate food, water, shelter or sanitation (Campbell 1994,p.52).

The consciousness of the people in these camps is difficult to decipher but the experience possibly increased Africans' alienation from white mission churches, which prior to 1902 made virtually no effort to minister to their converts in the camps. AME ministers, in contrast, managed to reach most if not all of the camps, braving forced recruitment into the army and even execution by Boer commandos. 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 (*Ibid*, p.53).

In the immediate aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War AMEC's indigenous leadership championed the promotion and safeguarding of African interests. At this juncture most blacks confronted intractable odds ranging from overcrowding, inordinate taxation to land alienation. The majority Africans who had access to land lived on white owned land under insecure tenancy regimes such as sharecropping. In the urban areas municipalities deployed repressive local by-laws to restore black dependency and stymie black initiative and competition they saw emerging in the post-war era. The repertoire of this exploitative legislation included self-employment taxes, prohibitions against trading within locations, pass laws that restricted freedom of movement and special restrictions on black artisans (*Ibid*, p.51).

Africans did not resign to the abovementioned economic onslaughts; they expressed their displeasure through petitions, demonstrations and appeals to the courts of law. AMEC aligned individuals assumed vanguard positions in these efforts and this raised the profile of the church as an organization geared towards the promotion of African dignity and entitlements in society. Ministers like Benjamin Khumalo insisted on blacks' right to own property and to attend churches of their choice. He also seized on more local grievances: prohibitions on trading in locations; failure to pay adequate compensation to home owners uprooted by the opening of a new municipal developments and burdensome municipal pass laws, especially those aimed at women. Together with Edward Mapela he launched the Orange River Native Vigilance Association (*Ibid*, p.61). These churchmen at times pursued politics that were much more populist and egalitarian than of those of the leading nationalists of the day. On several occasions, churchmen openly disdained the elaborate protocol which was so much a part of early nationalists' efforts to demonstrate their political maturity. Johannesburg Minister Edward Tsewu, for example, pointedly ignored proper channels for communicating with the Pretoria administration, on the grounds that one did not need "to go through the pope to get to God." He declined to doff his hat to Europeans, and left one native commissioner sputtering by addressing him directly, in English, rather than through his interpreter (Campbell 1995, p.42). Ideologically, there were also differences, nationalists preferred inclusion while the AME church people preferred autonomy or independence in the pursuit of all their affairs.

In the religious realm, AMEC offered Africans a sense of religious autonomy that unleashed evangelical energy which had long been stifled within white missions. This was evident in the activities of men like Jacobus Xaba, Henry Ngcayiya, and Marcus Gabashane who itinerated in villages and farms spreading the AME Church idea. These developments unraveled at a time when white missions undermined Africans' efforts to operate without European tutelage. The AME Church vested authority in black ministers and an army of unordained local preachers. In the Orange Free State alone such men numbered more than two hundred (*Ibid*, p.2009). Campbell observes that AMEC respected Africans because "while missionaries routinely subjected would-be converts to searching examinations, African Methodists generally accepted members on a profession of faith, trusting the seed of the Word to do the rest. In short, Africans across a broad social spectrum found in the AME Church an acceptance and inclusivity they no longer found in white missions, if they ever had" (*Ibid*). Disgruntled Africans from mission bodies such as the Dutch Reformed Church and the Wesleyan Church saw missionaries as avatars of colonialism and AMEC and other Ethiopian movements offered alternative religious space that accommodated and promoted their interests.

Although AMEC's indigenous leadership opposed colonial exactions on Africans' political and economic aspirations the position of some African Americans in South Africa was ambiguous. Such people included Minister A. Henry Attaway, a controversial figure who showed scant sensitivity to African political aspirations. His conception of Africans' handicaps in evolutionary rather than political terms made him dismiss African political action as irrelevant or even counterproductive. The AME Church's only object, he declared in a letter to Lord Milner, was to "heartily cooperate with His Majesty's Government whenever requested in bringing the benign benefits of the world's greatest civilization to an hitherto unfortunate people" (*Ibid*, p.235).

Attaway also threatened to expel Africans church leaders and laity that dabbled in politics, a move that alienated African ministers. This was quite insensitive considering that some of these indigenous churchmen constituted the educated elite who felt morally compelled to speak for and organize their people against unjust policies pursued by the racist South African government. Campbell (*Ibid*, p. 235) notes that Attaway was a rigid social Darwinist who calculated that Africans were at least sixteen hundred years behind Europeans in the race of "civilization," an assessment that placed him far closer to colonial officialdom than to his African flock.

Attaway's stance of assuaging colonialism was at variance with the perspectives of African leadership and laity who were explicitly opposed to the South African government's racist, repressive and exclusionary policies. African members of the Church could not detach their claims for autonomy and dignity within realms of the church from the broader social, political and economic problems confronting their people in society. This accounts for the assumption of leading positions by AMEC members in secular organizations such as the ANC. Such people included Charlotte Manye-Maxele, the Wilberforce University alumni and South Africa's first black woman graduate, who became the pioneer leader of the ANC's Women's League and Dr. AB Xuma who became the ANC's president in the 1920s.

At times Africans engaged in militant action against the government and local members of AMEC participated in such radical recourse. For example, AMEC members together with their brethren in other indigenous churches such as the African Presbyterian Church were complicit in the Bambata rebellion of 1906 which was prompted by the imposition of Poll tax in 1905. The rebellion started in February 1906 when two white policemen were killed on a farm south of Pietzmaritzburg when they attacked tax resistors belonging to an Ethiopian Church (Umrabulo, Number 29 July 2007, www.anc.org.za, accessed 22 October 2007). During the rebellion the native grievances cut across all sectors and unified all classes in the fight against colonialism and racist exploitation. This reinforced fears

of Natal whites that members of independent churches had instigated the rebellion (Marks 1970, pp.76, 295, 326-336).

The AMEC also marginalized and frustrated local leadership from assuming high positions in the Church's hierarchy within South Africa. In the 1900s Fanny Jackson Coppin wrote the headquarters of AMEC in the USA arguing that the branch in South Africa wanted "wise and competent" leaders "who know the discipline, doctrine and polity of the Church and have experience in governing" (Quoted in Campbell, p.219). Ironically some of the men posted by the church to South Africa were young, inexperienced and at times unable to appreciate the concerns and aspirations of Africans. AMEC fast tracked these young African American men into leadership positions ahead of elderly and experienced Africans that understood the political and economic reality of the laity. Some of these Africans even had degrees obtained from AMEC's Wilberforce University. African American beneficiaries of such preferential treatment were men like Carleton M. Tanner, the twenty-seven-year-old son of AME Bishop Benjamin Tanner, who came to South Africa in 1902.

Tanner assumed a series of influential positions and expressed controversial attitudes towards Africans. A few days before the contentious December 1903 Transvaal and Cape Annual Conferences he published an article advocating tighter American control over the church. African Ministers, he alleged, were ill-educated and often illiterate; they lacked financial sense; they possessed no understanding "of the laws and genius of the church" or of the need for circumspection when dealing with white authorities (Campbell, p.238). After the Conference a group of African ministers, including Khumalo, Henry Ngcayiya, J.Z Tantsi, and Samuel Brander, drafted a letter of protest to the AME General Conference. "Much has been said by strangers" they began, in a not so subtle a swipe at African American church leaders, "the time has now come for Africans to speak for themselves" (*Ibid*). In spite of these complains, AMEC continued dispatching resident bishops to South Africa who sounded conservative, propagated apolitical refrains and questioned African capacity for self-government. Such bishops include men like John Albert Gregg; G.B Young; D H Sims and R.R Wright Jr. who were in South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s.

Marginalisation over leadership positions coupled with African American insensitivity towards African aspirations contributed towards some of the schisms that rocked the Church in its first decade in South Africa. The most embarrassing of these secessions was instigated by Reverend Dwane in 1899 who affiliated his break away entity to the Anglican Church as the Order of Ethiopia. This secession was a result of growing frustrations rather than doctrinal differences over apostolic succession as Dwane claimed. AMEC had promised the South African funds for

the establishment of a theological college but failed to honor the promise. Africans also resented contributing to the coffers of the Church's headquarters when they had limited representation.

Campbell claims that Dwane's disillusionment went even deeper. During his second U.S visit he observed disconcerting undercurrents behind the façade African American unity and progress. Light skinned African American congregants looked down upon the darker ones; the latter were sidestepped or even marginalized in leadership appointments within AMEC structures. Dwane began to doubt the wisdom of introducing African American missionaries and teachers into South Africa, lest they infect Africans with this disdain for blackness. He succinctly captured this dilemma during his testimony to the South African Native Affairs Commission when he noted that in America "they are doing all they can to get white" (*Ibid*, p.219). Dwane also feared cultural alienation through the policy of sending African students abroad. When they returned, he complained, "Often they are at a loss" (*Ibid*). Increasing disillusionment among Africans prompted further schisms in 1908 when H. R Ngcayiya, Isaiah Sishuba, and Benjamin Khumalo, all ministers in the original Ethiopian Church of South Africa resigned from the AME Church to reestablish the Ethiopian Church of South Africa. About a dozen ministers and thousands of adherents followed. Ironically this secession was not directed at Europeans but fellow blacks.

Although AMEC was quite successful in attracting membership and in its proselytization endeavors the British authorities tried to circumvent its activities, particularly in the Free State. According to Campbell these officials resented what they termed the baneful 'Negro' influences. Thus Orange Free State officials working with their colleagues in Pretoria enacted a series of travel restrictions designed to keep African American church leaders out of the conquered territories. With the exception of a brief meeting in Bloemfontein in 1907, no AME Bishop entered the Free State or Transvaal between Turner's visit and the establishment of the Union more than a decade later (Campbell 1994, p.59). British authorities abused the pass system to restrict the AME leadership's movement in the colony. This assault was aimed not solely at the AME Church, but at the broader principle of African autonomy and self-possession which it embodied.

Conclusion

This article has revealed that AMEC and the Ethiopian Church emerged out of similar black people's exclusion within the Church. The respective founders of the two organizations, Richard Allen and Mangena Mokone could not countenance colour prejudice practiced by missionaries and white laity's failure to live by the

Christian brotherhood they professed. The formation of AMEC and the Ethiopian Church set the precedence of black self-expression within the Church in the USA and South Africa respectively. The affiliation of the Ethiopian Church to AMEC in 1896 also inspired the incipient moves to strengthen trans-Atlantic relations among people of African descent. Many scholars view the amalgamation of the two organizations as a Pan-African encounter. Within Southern Africa, AMEC attracted many people because of its proto-nationalist vision of black unity and its emphasis on educational and economic uplift for black people. However, underlying this pan-African hue were some contradictions. African Americans marginalized their fellow African communicants. Some even looked down upon them and frustrated local South Africans' struggle against white exploitation.

These contradictions also long antedate the AMEC and Ethiopian Church union because early African American missionaries to Sierra Leone and Liberia viewed the people they encountered on the continent as less civilized (Powell 1903, pp.585-95). This is understandable because these men who included people like Delany and Coke were products of a social milieu that celebrated cultural and racial ranking. These notions of evolution led some of the early African American missionaries to conspire in the colonization of the continent in order to bring civilization to the "dark continent." However, from the 1920s there was a discernible reconciliation of African and African American interests. AMEC officials in Africa and the United States increasingly opposed colonial oppression of black people and denounced the racist policy of the Malan Government, as well as "land grabs by a small minority of whites in Kenya" (New York Times, 8 June 1953; See also Coit, 1906, pp.306-16 and *New York Times*, 23 April 1958). In June 1943 Dr. Mark A. Dawber, executive secretary of the Home Missions Council of North America condemned colonial authorities during an AMEC annual retreat by arguing that "the day of the old nationalism, of "exploitative imperialism", of subjection of the coloured races and minority peoples, is gone, although many of our "highly placed public officials" seem not to know it" (*New York Times*, June 1943).

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