

**“A Great Invitation”: publics, assemblies and opinion formation in Natal, 1900 – 1910**

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**What is at stake?**

On 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> June 1908, an assembly of more than 150 delegates from 35 mission stations (reserves) and locations presented a written response to the Rt. Hon. F.R. Moor, as Minister of Native Affairs and to his deputy Under Secretary for Native Affairs, Mr. James Stuart. In the days leading to this meeting, the delegates appointed S. Mini, S. Nyongwana, P. Gumede, Rev. W.G. Mtembu and J.H. Kumalo as their spokesmen. S.E. Kambule chairman and John Dube was the secretary of the assembly. The purpose of the gathering was to discuss what by then had become known as the Moor Bills on Native Affairs. These Bills were meant to:

- 1). Increase the number of members of the Legislative Council
- 2). Provide for the better administration of Native Affairs (this involved the appointment of Commissioners by Governor), and
3. Creation and administration of Native Land Settlements

The assembly through its representatives rejected all the three bills and requested the Minister of Native Affairs to either review them in light of the views of the assembly or withdraw them completely. According to the assembly none of the three bills addressed their key demands; first, extension of the franchise; second, right to nominate and retire commissioners; three, granting of title deeds to mission reserve residents according to the terms of the original grants. All the three Bills were important but it was on Bill No. 2 that the assembly voiced its objection quite strongly. Through its appointed spokesman, S. Nyongwana—at the time chairman of the Natal Native Congress—the assembled delegates had resolved that:

These four men (commissioners) are being given despotic powers of dealing with us Natives from which there will be no redress to anyone. When these men are appointed by the government, men may be appointed who are of an autocratic and oppressive disposition, and we would have no redress. We wish the whole Bill not to be proceeded with.

The above objection lay at the core of the assembly's political project leading to Union in 1910. In the aftermath of 1906 or what has been variously referred to as Bhambada / Bhambatha rebellion,

Poll Tax rebellion, Zulu Rebellion, War of the Heads<sup>1</sup> the delegates had formed a clear vision of the leadership they desired. However, in the following draft chapter I take a somewhat different tack by looking into the debates, exchanges and conversations that were ignited by Bill No. 3.<sup>2</sup> I explore how certain attitudes and public statements evolved into potent political discourses with telling implications for politics in the colony of Natal (and later Union of South Africa).<sup>3</sup>

### **A decade in context: “Gospel of labor”**

By the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Natal government policy towards mission reserves changed. Colonial government officials saw some reserves such as Umvoti as potential good land for European occupation. This attitude which over time developed into a potent political discourse sought to do away with mission reserves in their current form. From the time the reserves were set up, the Board of Trustees had powers to decide the composition of mission reserves residents. But towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Natal colonial government began to redefine the powers of Board of Trustees. Such a move sought to increase supervision of the work of missionaries especially American Board missionaries and evangelists. To facilitate the take-over of mission reserves, the Natal government instituted a commission to investigate issues relating to land more especially mission reserve lands, mission residents’ behaviour and the activities of the American Zulu mission, as well as other mission societies.<sup>4</sup> The commission that was formed to investigate this was called the Natal Lands Commission.<sup>5</sup> The Commission’s terms of reference included “looking into the land problems of the colony and finding ways of encouraging closer agricultural settlement of whites in Natal.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the Rebellion of 1906, see very interesting works by Jeff Guy, Muzi Hadebe, Ben Carton, Shula Marks, Michael Mahoney and an edited volume by Yonah Seleti, Thenjiwe Meyiwa and Pearl Sithole.

<sup>2</sup> I look forward to a fruitful conversation with Percy Ngonyama who is currently working on the Ward System in Natal.

<sup>3</sup> This chapter is part of studies towards a more nuanced understanding of notions of publicity, public sphere, public opinion, public-ness and political imagination in Natal before 1910. I take note of Hlonipha Mokoena’s recent insight into assembles of readers and writers. See *An Assembly of Readers: MAgema Fuze and his Ilanga lase Natal Readers*; and studies on Gandhi by Goolam Vahed, Vashna Jaganath and recent work by Keith Breckenridge on Gandhi and Smuts’s political correspondence between 1900 and 1910.

<sup>4</sup> AZM File: A608.

<sup>5</sup> See Digest of Report of the *Natal Lands Commission*.

<sup>6</sup> Shula Marks: *Reluctant Rebellion: The 1906 - 8 Disturbances in Natal*. 122.

As the commission moved across the colony listening to residents of various mission reserves, one of the commission's senior members David Don noted in his private diary:

I am completely against kafir farming. I see not the slightest improvement among natives. The gospel of labour is not preached. Umvoti with the exception of five men, the natives who have titles have not improved their holdings.<sup>7</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Commission's report reflected the wishes of government. The Natal Lands Commission recommended that "further legislation should take place to give government the widest powers that may be necessary to control and deal with mission reserves in the interests of the colony in general".<sup>8</sup> Perhaps, Don's view on what he referred to as "kafir farming" was not that of a minority in official government circles. For, a similar view was expressed at the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903 - 05 [SANAC] that was established a year after the report of the Natal Lands Commission was published.<sup>9</sup> SANAC commissioner, Sir Marshall Campbell insisted at the commission that *Amakholwa* had failed to use land which they held in freehold effectively.<sup>10</sup> Sir Marshall Campbell was a well known sugar cane pioneer and a politician of note.<sup>11</sup> He told Sir James L. Hulett, a former Natal Native Affairs Secretary<sup>12</sup> ... "that is a point I wish to bring out, that in the most enlightened station of the colony the first experiment given in individual land tenure has been a total failure".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> David Don's Misl. Notes and Letters 1900 - 1901.

<sup>8</sup> AZM Files A/608, 7. [Not dated]

<sup>9</sup> This Commission chaired by Sir Godfrey Lagden was appointed by Lord Milner, and unlike the *Natal Lands Commission 1900 - 1902* it covered the whole of South Africa. Part of its terms of reference was to look into the "Native Question", for a discussion of this see Adam Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth - Century South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Sir Marshall Campbell was also 'regarded as an expert on Bantu Affairs' - see Eric Rosenthal, *Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa* (London: Frederick Warne & Co. LTD, 1967), 92 - 93.

<sup>11</sup> D.W. Kruger (ed): *Dictionary of South African Biography* (Cape Town: Tafelberg-uitgewers LTD, 1972), 121.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Four

<sup>13</sup> Sir Marshall Campbell of the *South African Native Affairs Commission 1903 - 1905*. Minutes of Evidence, 18 April 1904, 168.

In the exchange between the two leading Natal politicians, Umvoti mission reserve was turned into a symbol of “Native” failure. So, SANAC was advised not to consider freehold title deeds as part of a “solution” to what the commission generally referred to as the “native question”.

As I suggest in the previous chapters, it was Umvoti mission’s geographical position, and the residents’ participation in the economic activities in the colony that later made them a target of aspiring local farmers. Anti-American board sentiments evoked earlier reactions demonstrated by land speculators such as Byrne towards American missionaries. This was due partly to the fact that compared to other mission Reserves or Locations Umvoti mission reserve had some of the best fertile land in the colony. Chris Lowe writes:

Umvoti’s favorable location in terms of agricultural potential and transport, and its isolation from other reserve lands, made it a particular target of settler hopes to have the mission reserve thrown open for white purchase.<sup>14</sup>

In the time that Umvoti residents participated in economic activities, they accumulated some capital, and by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they had their local church minister, Rev. Hlonono Langeni and a post master. For social commentators such as John Dube these two positions were direct results of investments that the earlier generation of Amakholwa made to the colony of Natal.

But this antagonistic attitude towards mission residents was not just a settler or Natal government phenomenon. With their power of influence threatened, chiefs saw mission reserves as places of immorality. African men in the locations particularly directed their critical gaze at women in mission stations. Chiefs did not take kind to the fact that women had access to divorce and this was approved by magistrates.

### **Dismembering Boards of Trustees**

The 1895 Act signaled the change of Natal government policy towards the mission reserves and mission reserve residents.<sup>15</sup> Through this Act the government sought to minimize American Zulu

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<sup>14</sup> Chris Lowe: “Revivalism and Independent Church Movements in Natal, 1890 - 1910.” Lowe presented this paper at the African Studies Association Meeting in Toronto, November 3 - 6, 1994.

<sup>15</sup> AZM File. A608. 81 [not dated]

Mission Board's powers over the administration of mission reserves. But certain events ensured that the Act was never put into effect for a while. In 1897, the colony was ravaged by rinderpest. And, soon thereafter the Anglo-Boer war (South African war) began. It was only after the end of the war that the Natal government returned to the question of mission reserves.

To achieve its aim of taking control of mission reserves, the government passed an Act that removed missionaries from the Boards of Trustees.<sup>16</sup> According to Act 44 of 1903, mission reserves were to be taken over and administered by the Natal Native Trust. By doing this the government wanted to ensure greater control of the population in the mission reserves.<sup>17</sup> The Natal Native Trust also controlled locations. Such a take-over did not go down well with the AZM and mission station residents after years of cultivating a working relationship. The change in government's attitude made the American Board to look back at a quarter of a century of its loyalty to the government, and realized that all had been in vain. The American Board wrote:

For years we tried to secure the required sanction of the Governor, but in vain. ... At this meeting it became evident that the government was determined to remove the missionaries from the Trusteeship and to substitute the Natal Native Trust, which is simply another name for the government.<sup>18</sup>

This was a start of a tussle between the Natal government and the American Board with the support of mission station residents. Due to demands for representation in parliament, the Board proposed a further granting of land to individual occupants in its reserves. Through this proposal, the Board thought ownership would address both the concerns of government for control and ease the tension among its congregants in their desire for individual freehold titles. However, the Board soon realized that its proposal fell short on both its desired out comes:

American Mission Board Trustees proposed as the solution of the problem the cutting up of the reserves into freehold plots for individual tenure according to the provision of the Deeds of Grant and of the Act 25, 1895. This was peremptorily refused and the Mission Trustees were obliged to seek other ground of agreement.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> AZM Files A/608. 2. [not dated]

<sup>17</sup>AZM Files A608. 3. [not dated]

<sup>18</sup> AZM Files A608, 6. [not dated]

<sup>19</sup> AZM Files A608. 3. [not dated]

After the weakening of urban influence within government, farmer interests prevailed at the capital, Pietermaritzburg. So, such interests could not be convinced by the American Board's proposals. Another factor that contributed to change in government's position on freehold titles was that "between 1891 and 1904 the white population in Natal more than doubled from 46, 000 to more than 97, 000".<sup>20</sup> For David Don and his colleagues such an increase meant that Natal had to abandon small scale farming and set aside land for large scale agriculture. And, when "the American Zulu Mission Trustees insisted upon the allotment of the lands to residents the Secretary for Native Affairs' response was brief and direct, "if you want to fight", he assured the Board, "then I am ready to fight".<sup>21</sup> This, of course, set the Mission Board, *Amakholwa* and the Natal government on a collision course for the most part of the years leading to Union in 1910. The AZM Board stood firm on its decision to retain control of American mission reserves.

The government stance was not only limited to issues relating to land. For fear of a rise in independent Church movements, government made other demands which it knew the Board could not meet. Perhaps, one of the concerns of government was the pulpit as a potential political space. Government officials thought evangelists who were in charge of mission stations would use their presence to mobilize for a political course. Government persuaded the American Board to remove African evangelists from missionary work or be under strong supervision of resident white missionaries.<sup>22</sup> A committee of Evangelists noted government's stance on their work,

there is no black man who has the right to begin work in preaching or teaching, unless he is under the white missionary: - particularly on the locations. ... It is not willing to give the native preachers school grants, if a man begins work among his own people, unless he is under white supervision. ... It drafts the preachers and the boys who are studying in the schools, and the believers, and this results in their not being willing to contribute to the work of the Lord, and they refuse to return from the towns ...<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Shula Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> AZM Files A608, 6. [not dated]

<sup>22</sup> AZM Files, A608.

<sup>23</sup> NA A/608, "The Grievances of the African Congregational Church".

However, on the part of the American Board government's demand was impossible to fulfil. For, after 50 years of working in Natal African evangelists had become part of missionary work in the locations. Unlike the 'old guard' of missionaries, the second generation of missionaries acknowledged that there were things that African evangelists did better than themselves. As one missionary 'confessed', "whatever may be said against the native preacher, however little he may know of theology, he has a power of dealing with the heathen which we have not".<sup>24</sup>

Government's demands also included a tax on those who already owned individual titles deeds.

Taking the interests of those it represented seriously, the American Board protested that,

the effect of the £5.0.0 rent has been to shake the confidence of the Native residents in the integrity of government, since this rent coupled with the refusal to permit individual tenure according to the Deeds of Grant and repeated promises, they regard as virtual confiscation of their rights.<sup>25</sup>

At this time, it was clear to the Board and mission station residents that the colonial government acted in the interest of men who had the vote and wanted land.<sup>26</sup> The Board moved closer to the residents and their interests, and ominously promised that "in the performance of its duties it will not stand alone". Indeed, both residents and the Board had a common interest to protect the interest of all residents in the mission reserves.

After a number of unsuccessful meetings with the secretary for Native Affairs the American Board realized that their chances of getting what they wanted from government were remote. From then on they could only voice their protest from a distance. The Board Committee noted, "as in other cases, so in this our representations to government have failed. The outlook is very dark."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Cited in David Welsh: *The Roots of Segregation*, 259.

<sup>25</sup> AZM Files A/608, 4. [not dated]

<sup>26</sup> AZM Files A/608, 8. [not dated]

<sup>27</sup> AZM Files A/608, 8. [not dated]

Freehold titles to mission station residents were the first of many issues the Board had with the government. The nature of disagreement centered not only on the form of administration and control of mission station residents but on also influencing the political negotiations that led to Union.

### **Of guardians & Pulpits**

Lurking behind government's concerns that residents at mission stations could "practically do as they like" was a fear of Ethiopianism. Such a belief led to officials seeing mission stations as places that provided a safe space for "bad characters and of such Natives as want to escape from the jurisdiction of their chiefs and live a life of sheer idleness."<sup>28</sup> The fact that the American Board produced the most independent church movements, justified government's suspicion of a link between "seditious behavior and American Board congregational ethos. While the American Board Congregational system encouraged self help and independence, government officials never provided any direct link seditious behavior. On the part of the Board government concerns were misplaced and were sure "to stir up the very spirit which it is sought to repress".<sup>29</sup>

Rumours of the spread of Ethiopianism and a slogan such as "Africa for Africans" emerged at the time of the formation of the Natal Native Congress. I return to the NNC later. American Board's defense of the evangelists by no means suggests that the problems within the American Zulu Mission had suddenly disappeared. There were tensions, but creative tensions. Already, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century some influential men within American mission stations had left the main body to lead their church movements. Such movements were inspired in part by the popular contemporary 'slogan' - Africa for Africans'.<sup>30</sup> Chris Lowe writes:

they (colonists) also associated Ethiopianism with "Americanism", because of the influence of the U.S. based African Methodist Episcopal church, which absorbed the

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<sup>28</sup>AZM Files A/608, 4. [not dated]

<sup>29</sup> AZM Files A/608, 2. [not dated]

<sup>30</sup>Shula Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, 60.

Ethiopian church in 1896, and because they believed AZM stations to be hotbeds of Ethiopianism.<sup>31</sup>

The church movements were led by evangelists who had left the American Zulu Mission. These men were Ngidi Mbiyana and Simungu Bafazini Shibe. Mbiyana an ordained preacher formed his own church called Uhlanga Church.<sup>32</sup> He did this after a dispute with the American Board in the 1880's.<sup>33</sup> Shibe followed suit by forming a new Zulu Congregational Church with Rev. Sunguza Nyuswa.<sup>34</sup> The reasons for the formation of these new churches varied. Some of the leaders of the new church movements left the American Board because of differences with missionaries on the interpretation of the word of God and the role of *spirits* in the church. Others left because their aspirations for leadership within the Board could not be realized. Chris Lowe suggests:

they (missionaries) also conformed to increasing colonists hostility to African ministers. Conversely, lack of ordinations, and subsequent grudgingness about both their number and the status of African pastors, became a major grievance among mission adherents.<sup>35</sup>

Some of the missionaries were not very convinced of the role of African evangelists within the American Zulu Mission as missionaries and not simply lay preachers. This can be gleaned in Kilbon's statements at the annual conference:

at the semi-annual conference with the native pastors this and other matters were brought up and the situation was clearly defined to them, coming to a climax in Mr Kilbon's statement "there are no black missionaries of the American Board" their astonishment knew no bounds at this.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Chris Lowe, "Revivalism and Independent Church Movements in Natal, 1890 - 1910", unpublished paper presented at the African Studies Association Meeting in Toronto, November 3 - 6, 1994, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Shula Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, 62 - 63.

<sup>33</sup> Chris Lowe, "Revivalism and Independent Church Movements in Natal, 1890 - 1910", unpublished paper presented at the African Studies Association Meeting in Toronto, November 3 - 6, 1994, 38.

<sup>34</sup> Collins' thesis

<sup>35</sup> Chris Lowe, "Revivalism and Independent Church Movements in Natal, 1890 - 1910", unpublished paper presented at the African Studies Association Meeting in Toronto, November 3 - 6, 1994, 38.

<sup>36</sup> ABCFM, reel 188, doc. 98, 9 - 16. Cited in Chris Lowe, "Revivalism and Independent Church Movements in Natal, 1890 - 1910", unpublished paper presented at the African Studies Association Meeting in Toronto, November 3 - 6, 1994.

Clearly, Kilbon represented the old school because another missionary, Bunker held contrary views in defense of evangelists albeit in a paternalistic tone:

in the struggle through which we have passed the old relation between the missionary and his people has passed away. We have no longer an infant but a grown boy, independent, proud, but, withal, a good boy with whom to deal. It is a time to be expected and welcomed but nevertheless a time of anxiety and danger. The word of council must take the place of the word of command authority must yield to sympathetic influence.<sup>37</sup>

African evangelists within the church realized that their role was not equated with that of the white missionaries. Such concerns occupied most of their meetings. At a meeting African church ministers held in 1905, they expressed their feelings:

the missionaries say the African Cong. Church is still a child; it has not strength yet, nor is it able to begin and press forward work itself. This important word of theirs is adverse to the statement they made to us in 1895 ... namely, the time has come for the churches to support themselves, and to push forward the work of the gospel. We accepted these works. Then, when we have commenced to push forward this work, they declare this message: we are not able. ...<sup>38</sup>

These new church movements drew their membership largely from mission reserves and their leaders had political connections to the Natal Native Congress (NNC). The Congress as it became known in Natal established a rather flamboyant (colorful) style of communication with its members and those who sympathized with its political course. For instance, the following generous notice entitled, “A Great Invitation” to all people in Natal who were concerned about the issue of freehold titles and parliamentary representation.<sup>39</sup> Martin Luthuli was the first chairman of the Natal Native Congress. He was farmer and politician of Groutville at Umvoti mission reserve, by then one of the most hated American mission stations. Luthuli occupied the position for three years and was succeeded by Skweleti Nyongwana.<sup>40</sup> H.C. Matiwane was its first Secretary.<sup>41</sup> The NNC membership was mainly based at the mission stations but its membership was open to “all in Natal”.

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<sup>37</sup> ABCFM, general letter 1898, reel 188, doc. 98, 15. Cited in Chris Lowe, “Revivalism and Independent Church Movements in Natal, 1890 - 1910”, unpublished paper presented at the African Studies Association Meeting in Toronto, November 3 - 6, 1994.

<sup>38</sup> NA A/608.

<sup>39</sup> Ilanga Lase Natali, 10 October 1908.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Luthuli before the *South African Native Affairs Commission 1903 - 05*. 28th May 1904. Minute of Evidence, vol. III, 868.

<sup>41</sup> Shula Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, 71.

While some chiefs had reservations about Amakholwa leaders, they were also part of the Congress. The most striking feature of the Congress was that from the onset it had an open membership, and this lay at the core of government's unease about its activities.<sup>42</sup> For, this was the time of the implementation of segregationist policies in Natal. One of the aims of the Congress was to lobby for representation in parliament. As Martin Luthuli explained before the Native Affairs Commission 1903 - 05:

sometimes we discuss about how we should approach the government to let the Natives have the franchise, so that the Natives can have a voice in the Parliament; because here in Natal we have no voice in Parliament whatever.<sup>43</sup>

The existence of this mission station based organisation was also one of the factors that triggered the government to adopt a very strong stance against Umvoti mission reserve. Government officials saw the NNC as a visible structure that desired to play a role in colonial politics.

### **Moral economy of property**

As I argue elsewhere, the sale of the Umvoti sugar mill to a private company from the Umvoti planters to some demonstrated a failure of the Umvoti mission reserve residents—and by implication mission residents in general and the missionary project itself—to undertake a first economic experiment successfully. The sale of the sugar mill was used to support a view that saw *Amakholwa* as unable to do economic activity with success. This wide spread view in government circles had far reaching implications for policy and political discourse generally. Such a view justified Natal government's refusal to grant freehold titles to all colonial citizens. Of all other mission reserves, colonial government officials had turned Umvoti into a symbol of economic failure. According to Campbell and perhaps many others, Umvoti mission reserve was one of the “enlightened Mission Stations in Natal”. The thinking went as follows, if Umvoti residents had failed to succeed in the processing of sugar cane no African in Natal would succeed and in the context of

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<sup>42</sup>Martin Luthuli before the *South African Native Affairs Commission 1903 - 05*. 28th May 1904. Minute of Evidence, vol. III, 860.

<sup>43</sup>Martin Luthuli before the *South African Native Affairs Commission 1903 - 05*, 28th May 1904. Minutes of Evidence, vol. III, 860.

SANAC South Africa generally. Campbell insisted at the commission that, “in that case the Natives had the best land in the colony under individual title and it proved a total failure”.<sup>44</sup>

The question of whether Umvoti mission reserve experiment failed was, at that time and in many years that followed, a matter of debate. The connection between the sugar mill and sugar cane cultivation appeared to have been viewed as one thing. However, serious observers at the time like James Hullet, having stayed near the Umvoti community for some time, found Campbell’s assertion hard to believe. James Hullet had grown up in the Victoria County, and had bought estates near the mission reserve. He grew up with some of the men who by then had become sugar cane planters, and he knew some of the Umvoti mission reserve residents on a personal level. James Hullet’s response to Campbell was direct:

if you like call it a total failure, well and good, but I should not say so, because they cultivated and have cultivated the land with mealies, and from that time the land has been cultivated by the people with mealies and other crops, for 60 years or more now. Therefore, I should not say that the land was not under cultivation.<sup>45</sup>

Here one sees a concerted effort from Campbell, SANAC Commissioner and also member of the Natal government to belittle the work of the mission reserve residents and by implication missionary work in general. There had been problems as far as the building and management of the sugar mill was concerned, but on the part of sugar cane cultivation as we have seen in the previous chapters, even in times of great economic difficulties Umvoti farmers had always planted. Even after the sugar mill had been bought by a private company; Umvoti sugar cane planters continued to plant cane. The view of the undertaking as a total failure was a pretext to take the land and give it to “European farmers”, observed Frederick Brigdman of the American Zulu Mission.<sup>46</sup> The strong criticism of the American mission stations by the Natal Lands Commissioners stemmed partly, as Shula Marks argues, from the fact that “the American Board was the oldest and richest of the mission organisations in Natal”.<sup>47</sup> But by the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century the society had some financial

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<sup>44</sup>Mr Campbell was one of the Commissioners in the *South African Native Affairs Commission 1903 - 05*. Minutes of Evidence, vol. III, 18th April 1904, 168.

<sup>45</sup>James L. Hullet before the *South African Native Affairs Commission 1903 – 05*, vol. III, 18th April 1904.

<sup>46</sup> AZM Files A/608, 5. [not dated]

<sup>47</sup> Shula Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, 80.

difficulties. Then, the colonial government capitalised on the financial problems that faced the American Board at the time.

The Commissioners of the Lands Commission and Campbell of SANAC insisted that both the mission reserve residents and the missionaries had failed. When such views had been turned into potent political discourse, it was not just a localized issue but it influenced future decisions on land ownership. So convinced was Campbell of SANAC that he insisted to James Hullet that “the original intention of the government and the missionaries has totally failed”.<sup>48</sup> But the intention was clear that between 1900 and 1910 the government wanted to change its policy towards mission reserves. The government wanted to gain more control of mission reserves.

The Commissioners of the Natal Lands Commission insisted in the report of February 1902 which was sent to the government for implementation that:

the country is locked up and blighted by a false and fatal philanthropy. Where the land is not Native location, it is reserved for college or mission purposes, and the effect so far has been equally the same, to keep it wild and waste, free from the improving operations of European effort and European industry.<sup>49</sup>

Umvoti, Umlazi, Imfume and Ifafa mission stations were identified as lands that needed to be put to good use. According to the government residents and missionaries in these areas had failed to improve the land. Such was the position of the Natal government it pronounced through the Natal Lands Commission report. But the Natal Lands Commission’s position could not be maintained. For in Natal “about 7, 600, 000 acres which amounted to 63 per cent of all the land was owned by Europeans”.<sup>50</sup> This showed that most of the land was already out of reach of Africans. Such lands were themselves not fully utilised. The American Board observed:

from the colonial year book for 1900, we learn that about 2 per cent of this land is under cultivation, and of the labour employed in cultivating it, less than 11/2 per cent is European.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>South African Native Affairs Commission 1903 – 05, vol. III, 18 April 1904.

<sup>49</sup>South African Native Commission 1904. and AZM Files A/608, 5. [not dated]

<sup>50</sup> AZM Files A/608, 5. [not dated]

<sup>51</sup> AZM Files A/608, 5. [not dated]

According to the American Board the intention of the Commissioners and government was clear as it stated:

... they saw that such assertion are based either on ignorance or a determined purpose to supplant the black man by the European.<sup>52</sup>

Mission station residents had by then been prevented from purchasing land elsewhere. The only existing land was at the Mission Stations. Some of the Mission Stations were then fully occupied. And it was feared the government wanted to confiscate them. Defending their possession, and that of the converts in the Mission Station, the Board wrote:

so here is land at Umvoti supporting a population 41/2 times as great to the square mile as the average population of the colony, 79 times as great as the rural European population on European lands, and showing a percentage of cultivated land to the total area from 10 to 20 times as great as that on European owned land, and this land is - 'locked up', 'wild and waste'.<sup>53</sup>

At the core of the government's claim was that the mission reserves had become "sources of evil" and that reserves would in turn contaminate the supposedly 'pure' locations. This argument was based on a letter written by Mr Wilcox about the Umvoti Mission Station, wherein he had stated that the place had deteriorated with most people having retained some of their pre-conversion lifestyle. The colonial government saw this as a unique situation, not occurring anywhere in the colony, and as failure of the missionaries to do their work. In response to this the Board stated:

what happens in Durban and Maritzburg? or, are there refuges for such people in the places? The fact is that bad characters are sufficiently numerous in the colony, but the reserves are by no means either their chief breeding place or principal resorts.<sup>54</sup>

The Board could not end here it wanted to show that the mission reserves were not different from any place in the colony. And, thus it did not deserve such an assault, and that Umvoti mission reserve was not uniquely occupied by rogues. The Board continues,

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<sup>52</sup> AZM Files A/608, 6. [not dated]

<sup>53</sup> AZM Files A/608, 6. [not dated]

<sup>54</sup> AZM Files A/608, 4. [not dated]

suppose someone shows that a certain village of white people in Natal is notoriously bad, would that be produced as proof that all the villages and townships were seats of villainy. Such an assumption would meet with contempt.<sup>55</sup>

Also one of the issues that occupied the minds of missionaries and colonists in general was that of polygamy. According to missionaries it went against their doctrine, whereas settlers thought the number of wives a man had gave him a great economic advantage in terms of labor. As a consequence they voiced their criticism against polygamy. By this time the regulation of the American Board on polygamy had proved not to work and most men in the mission reserves had again taken wives. This was viewed by observers as a failure of the American Board and *Amakholwa* themselves. Responding to these views the American Board stated:

he speaks of certain men who have lapsed into polygamy, even they do not bring home their polygamous wives. They have establishments elsewhere, as do some white men.<sup>56</sup>

The American Board continued in its defense of its missionary project and that of Umvoti mission residents, and this was one of the issues that made the two to come somewhat closer. It was a challenge not just to Mission Reserve residents but to missionaries themselves. The Board stated:

Mr Wilcox hints at immorality at Umvoti, comparing it with Durban and Maritzburg. He does Umvoti a great injustice by the comparison.<sup>57</sup>

The American Board went on to mention the situation at these two places, that is, Umvoti and Maritzburg. It responded to claims that Umvoti mission reserve was full of all evil doers. It stated:

... if he had seen all this, he would have understood the source from which contamination reaches the Mission Station, and he would have gone back to Umvoti as to a peaceful Arcadia of purity in comparison.<sup>58</sup>

The discourse on mission stations as places of immorality did not only come from colonial government officials and settlers, but also from African men in the locations, who felt the mission

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<sup>55</sup>AZM Files A/608, 4. [not dated]

<sup>56</sup> AZM Files A/608, 4. [not dated]

<sup>57</sup>AZM Files A/608, 4. [not dated]

<sup>58</sup> AZM Files A/608, 5. [not dated]

station women had too much freedom and were attracted to bad habits. As Duvana testified before the Natal Native Commission, 1881 - 2:

Q: What do you think of mission station?

A: I am against missionaries; they spoil our children.

Q: Would you like your children educated?

A: Yes, but not on mission stations. I should like my children taught a trade.<sup>59</sup>

Duvan's statement corresponded with that of Hloba who felt that Missionaries morally destroyed their children. Hloba stated before the Commission:

Q: do you approve of missionaries?

A: No. They make whores of our children.<sup>60</sup>

Other testimony before the Natal Native Commission, 1881 -2 was that of an *Induna* of *AbakwaMdlalose* at Greytown. He was equally against mission reserves. He voiced his views about the mission stations:

Q: What do you think of mission stations?

A: They do no good. After going to mission station they become thieves and rogues. The only good ones I know are Bishopstowe people.<sup>61</sup>

### **What was at stake?**

To understand the change of government policy towards mission reserves one has to look at the broader developments in South African politics before Union. After the Anglo-Boer war Natal wanted to consolidate its power as a self governing British colony.<sup>62</sup> In this draft chapter I have done two things; first, discussed and analyzed the deterioration of relations between government officials and mission reserve residents; second, argued that these worsening relations produced a toxic discourse that had far reaching consequences for politics in Natal and in South Africa after Union (well still to get to this point fully). But there are things that this draft chapter does not do. It

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<sup>59</sup>Duvana before the *Natal Native Commission, 1881 -2*. Evidence taken by the sub-commission for Umvoti County, 36.

<sup>60</sup> Hloba before the *Natal Native Commission, 1881 -2*. Evidence taken by the sub-commission for Umvoti County, 35.

<sup>61</sup>Umlimi, Induna: *Natal Native Commission 1881 - 2*. Evidence taken by the sub-commission for Umvoti County, 21.

<sup>62</sup> I agree with Jeff Guy on this point, See *Maphumulo Uprising*.

does not argue that missionary attitudes towards African evangelists changed drastically, it only contends that new forms of engaging with each developed around common interests vis-a-vis that of the Natal colonial government.

Well, notwithstanding the toxic discourse referred to above *Amakholwa* through the Natal Native Congress had a vision of a better future—indeed a better union. Martin Luthuli, chairperson of the Natal Native Congress, former wagon maker and farmer laid such a vision before the South African Native Affairs Commission 1903 - 05:

Q: do you mean that you would expect the Native tradesman to work alongside of the white tradesman, in the towns and elsewhere in the country?

A: We are all under one flag.

Q: Would you expect the Native, if he were educated to be a trademan, to find work alongside of the white tradesman, and to do work for the white people?

A: Yes, doing work for the white people and for the Natives. He would be a benefit to the white people and to the Natives too.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps, by the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a growing realization among missionaries and some leading men in the settler communities like Hullet, that this growing class of propertied Amakholwa had to be accommodated. But as to the form and their role, the position was not clear. In his testimony Hullet spoke of such men:

... there are individual cases of men of education, respectability, men who can hold their own - you may say almost as gentlemen - with other people, who might be given a vote; but there are very few such cases.<sup>64</sup>

But, the reality of settler colonialism was, of course, very different.

Also, apart from showing the cracks in the political discourse in the public sphere of early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial Natal this chapter shows that the creative tensions of *Amakholwa* grew out of the distance between their vision of a different society and the reality of the existing one. And, perhaps nowhere was the *Amakholwa* vision stronger, and historically more significant than at the Umvoti mission reserve.

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<sup>63</sup>Martin Luthuli (former Chairman of the Natal Native Congress, ex-wagon maker, farmer), before the South African Native Affairs Commission 1903 - 05. Minutes of Evidence, vol. III, 865.

<sup>64</sup>James L. Hullet before the South African Native Affairs Commission 1903 - 05. Minutes of Evidence, 18 April 1904.

Chapter continues ....