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Exploiting the Contradictions: The Life Story of Ndae Makume

Timothy Keegan

Viljoensdrift is a hot place, in the middle of the South African Highveld. It is the place at which the railway line from the Cape crosses the Vaal River. There are a few shabby railwayman's houses, a dusty police station, a cluster of impermanent-looking buildings containing a black junior school, and an erratic spread of gum trees to indicate the proximity of water. Unless you are especially observant you could pass through without realising that a river of some size meanders nearby. Dirty trails of smoke skirt the horizon, excreted from the collieries and refineries of the industrial towns in the vicinity. For the rest, the landscape is flat: flat and unengaging. But it is across this hot, flat, unengaging landscape that the great drama of South Africa has been played out. Ndae Makume knows that; for that is where he lived.

We went seeking Ndae there in May 1984. Through the broken windows of the school we saw the black children chanting away, their words echoing out past the forlorn gum trees, across the endlessly flat fields of stubble - the remains of last year's maize crop, perhaps destroyed by drought before it could be garnered. But Ndae Makume's church of corrugated iron, built in 1898, had disappeared as if it had never existed. Some rubble, overgrown with long grass, was all that remained to remind us that, once, here was a building, a mission, a faith, a community, a church. The 'Board' had come, we were informed by the black head of the school, his moist, earnest face set off by his shining, worn suit. They had pulled down the church, and the old man had been carried off to Sebokeng in the back of a truck. Whatever happened to his cows, his dilapidated yokes, his rusted harrows and ploughs, we never discovered. When we eventually found him a few weeks later, sitting alone in his grandson's small house, he was a tired shadow of himself, tired and worn out: a tired old man, wondering behind his listless eyes what we wanted of him. He remembered us; he remembered Flatela who had first visited him; he was prepared to talk to us again. It seemed that the past no longer interested him: the future less so. But as we probed with our rude, ignorant, intrusive questions, something of his old enthusiasm for the past returned. When we went back, hoping to find him in better spirits, he was dead.

I remember Ndae as a big bear of a man in brown overalls, tending his motley herd of cows at Viljoensdrift. When I met him he was past eighty, keen, interested, with a delight in talking of his and his forefathers' lives. He died as he had lived - an obscure, uneducated old man who could not be traced by the local Administration Board officials in Sebokeng because they had too

much else to do. But the obscure story of his life encapsulates a whole world of social experience which exists only in the memories of old men and women, and which finds no echo at all in the conventional, narrow sources of evidence on which we rely for our more formalised image of the past. For that reason alone, it is worth recording.

* * * * *

Family memory has it that the original bearer of the Makume name was a Motaung, who had his eyes pierced out during the wars of the Difaqane by the Batlokoa marauders - the original 'Mantatees' of colonial mythology, led by their legendary warrior queen Mantatisi (- whose reputation as a woman of massive proportions with flowing locks and giant ears belies her real achievements). This dastardly deed was supposedly avenged by the Bataung chief Moletsane. Ndae Makume's great-great-grandfather, Nkgatho, fought under Moletsane as an ally of Moshoeshoe in his wars against the burghers of the Orange Free State Republic in the 1860s, participating in the battle of Thaba Bosiu in which the Boer hero Louw Wepener was killed; and Ndae particularly remembers the stories told him of Ntoa ea Dihela - 'the war of the self-destruction' - when Moroka's Barolong from Thaba Nchu, the traditional allies of the Boers, threw themselves down the sandstone cliffs rather than be killed by the Bataung.

After the Caledon River was established as the border of a truncated Lesotho in 1868, the Bataung, including the Makume lineage, lost their lands around Mekoatleng mission station on the Orange Free State side of the border, and found themselves inside the boundaries of Moshoeshoe's state. The Makumes, like so many others in Lesotho, moved back out of the Matsieng area of Lesotho into the Orange Free State well before the turn of the century - during the wars of Lerotholi and Masopha in Ndae's memory, meaning probably the civil strife of the early 1880s. The intensive cash-crop economy of the fertile Lesotho lowlands, particularly after the opening of the Griqualand West diamond fields, exacerbated the land shortage. The possibilities for re-establishing an independent productive base on the farms of the Orange Free State, free of chiefly exactions, but at the cost of entering tenancy agreements with white landholders, were very inviting. This large kin group migrated with their livestock, bringing with them sickles and shears in order to perform piece work on the farms as they travelled, and thus earn some money or enlarge their herds with the odd bullock.

The group consisted of Ndae's great-grandfather Motetesi and his brother Sefako and their respective families. Motetesi's sons were Mohlakala (Ndae's grandfather), Gafa and Mosimane. Sefako's sons were Taunyana, Koeranta and Tebellong. Motetesi, whom Ndae (born in 1903) remembers well, could never speak the white man's tongue, and horrified his sons by loudly proclaiming on their arrival at a white farmhouse 'What is this Hottentot

saying? It seems that these Hottentots are problematical.' They lived for some time on a farm remembered as Phofong, belonging to Chrisjan Esterhuis in the Ladybrand district, where they could graze their cattle, horses, sheep and goats, and cultivate wheat, maize and beans (but not sorghum, which they bought as the soil was not suitable for it). In return, they ploughed for Esterhuis, and tended and sheared his sheep. But the family was not yet as wealthy as it was to become.

Ndae's father, Molefe, married a distant cousin, a daughter of Teletsane, once they had arrived in the Lindley district of the Orange Free State. Ndae was born on 2 February 1903 on Karel Serfontein's farm near the later town of Edenville. He was the youngest of six sons. Significantly perhaps, he refers to his brothers by their Afrikaans rather than their Basotho names (Jan, Andries, Isaak, Piet and Abel). Ndae himself was always known to whites throughout his life as Jacob. The only one born after him (in 1905) was his sister Elizabeth, who married a Rampai and died a few years before Ndae.

Ndae's earliest memories are of life on the land of Christiaan Rabie, where they settled soon after Ndae was born. Rabie had an extensive transport business, carrying consignments from the railway line to the stores in the small towns of the region. He only wanted people on his land who could tend and drive his spans of oxen. But as he hired a number of grazing farms, strategically situated to enable his transport wagons to take on new spans on their journeys between towns and railway stations, those in his employ had no shortage of land for their own farming enterprises too. Rabie had fourteen ox wagons on the road, sometimes requiring five different spans of oxen each for one round trip. The wagons would load up at Kroonstad or Lindley Road stations (on the main Cape-Johannesburg, and the connecting line to Natal from Kroonstad respectively) and carry their loads to Lindley, Senekal, Reitz or Heilbron. Wagon space was hired by the small storekeepers and others to whom goods had been consigned by rail. Bags of maize and bales of wool would be carried on the return journey to the railway. Rabie also had the postal contract for the surrounding districts, and his horse-drawn carts distributed the mails to the postal agencies.

The Makumes lived at Brandhoek near the town of Lindley, a farm Rabie hired to provide grazing for his trek oxen between trips. Ndae's father and his four uncles and their cousins were employed as span drivers. His great-grandfather Motetesi was still the patriarch of the kin group and in charge of its farming activities. Living in a nearby homestead on the farm was the Teletsane family, also of the Bataung clan, but of a senior lineage to the Makumes.

The family's cattle resources were not very considerable at the time, as Ndae's uncles were getting married, and bridewealth (bohali) commonly amounted to twenty head at the time. He thinks the family's cattle resources amounted to about thirty head on average during their years on Rabie's farm. Ndae remembers as a

child helping to weed the fields, milking the family's cows, loading cream, butter and eggs on horse carts to be taken and sold in Lindley, and accompanying the carts into town. But it was while in Rabie's employ that the Makumes split up. Ndae's great-grandfather's brother Sefako and his sons and their families moved eastward to settle at Skietmekaar, a farm belonging to one Naude. Now that Ndae's father's generation was marrying and producing families, the kin group was becoming very large and fission seemed inevitable. This was a process that was taking place commonly on the farms, and the day would come when the large homesteads would disappear completely in the Highveld arable districts. But for the Makumes that day was still far off.

Ndae's father earned a widespread reputation as an expert in training and handling spans of oxen, and won for himself the sobriquet Jan Drywer amongst the whites of the district. Properly constructed bridges were few and roads primitive. Considerable skill was required in getting cargoes safely over the many gullies and streams. Jan Drywer was often called out to help some rider whose wagon had got stuck in the sands, and Ndae occasionally accompanied him. 'He knew how to make the oxen co-ordinate their pulling strength' says Ndae.

> My father would ask the driver to talk to the span in his own style to pull. Then the man would try to make the span move but to no avail. Then my father would tell him to wait. He would then start changing the positions of the oxen in the span by taking perhaps one from the front and inspanning it in the middle, one from the back was moved to the front, and so on. After this he would take the whip and start calling out to the span to be ready to pull. He would move towards the back and clap the whip as if he were giving those at the back a spur, then he would go to the ones in the front and do the same thing, and he would then move to the middle of the span shouting and howling; then he would jump backwards and stand there shouting. To everyone's surprise and amazement, the span would pull that wagon out of the donga and on they would move.

Makume never struck his oxen but always issued orders to them by their individual names.

Another vivid memory that remains with Ndae from the years of his youth was of the older men sitting around the evening fire tanning animal hides. Sharpened spikes from umbrellas would be used to break the blood vessels and prevent the hides from drying and becoming hard; then ox brains would be smeared on the hides to soften them. 'The group would kneel on the ground and while singing they would prick the hides with these sharpened spikes until they became soft, smearing them with this brain fat.' Blankets, women's dresses and coats would be made from the tanned hides.

But Ndae has less pleasant memories of farm life as well. He particularly remembers the stories told of the Wessels brothers, elected field cornets in the Lindley district, whose reputation for extreme cruelty was widely reported. White farmers commonly relied on the Wessels' informal brand of justice to strike terror in the hearts of recalcitrant tenant workers. Blacks who had incurred the wrath of their employers would be sent to the Wessels farm with a note placed within the crack of a split piece of wood, in which the victim's misdemeanours were spelled out.

> It may have happened that you contradicted what the white man said, as if you were on the same level as he; then you would be given a letter to be taken to Baas So-and-so. He would read the letter after which he would ask you to go into the storeroom to help his people clear up, and you would go without suspicion. Whilst busy there, they would come in, a group of strong white men, and they would ask you where you got the right to talk like that to a Baas. You would try to explain, but they would insist on asking you where you got the right. They would then hold you and make you lie with your stomach on a wine barrel - those old wooden ones. Around the barrel they would nail pegs in the ground, two in front of your head and two behind. They would then tie your hands and feet to these pegs with a piece of rope. They would take a <u>borsketting</u> - the strap that goes round the chest of a horse when it is pulling a cart. You could find yourself being by one person, but with these cornets it was usual for four whites to punish you. They would hit you so severely that your bowels would work and the whole place would be a mess. After such a beating the victim had to be carried home and was unable to walk. Even sitting was difficult and your family would have to nurse you for some time before you could resume work. A victim of such treatment would sleep on his stomach for up to three weeks. Those Boers knew their job.

Ndae remembers hearing of people who died after falling victim to the field cornets. Often there was no reason given for such punishment.

> If they were afraid of you and thought you were strong and bold they would just make you work hard, and if you grumbled or displayed some unwillingness to do what you had been ordered to do, they would punish you.... That is why the old people who lived on the farms in those days are so afraid of the white man; we think much of such things.

But the inexorable grip of white domination was all the time gathering around the Makumes. The first time that they began to experience the intensifying forces arrayed against rural blacks was in 1913, a year of crisis in relationships between black and

white on the land. This was the year of the 'great dispersal' in the Orange Free State arable districts, when white farmers, taking advantage of the 1913 Natives Land Act of that year, launched a concerted, collective effort to change the terms of tenancy in their favour, and greatly to extend their control over the labour, the resources and the productive enterprise of blacks living on their land. Perhaps Ndae was too young (he was ten at the time) to recall the exact circumstances of the family's move away from Rabie's employ. It is likely that white farming in the vicinity was becoming more intensive and capitalised, and the wide-open spaces of past years were becoming fenced in. Rabie sold his business shortly hereafter, so it is also possible that the leases on his farms were expiring. But Ndae does recall vividly that their move at this time was caused in part by the forced sale of their goats. Goats were regarded as especially destructive creatures, as they tended to wander into nearby orchards and nibble at the young shoots. The Makumes were obliged to sell their fifty or so goats to travelling speculators, taking advantage of the plight of the blacks on the farms, for some 10 shillings each.

Thus in 1913 the Makumes reaped their crop, gathered their livestock, their goods and chattels, loaded their ox wagons and left Rabie's employ. As was the case throughout the arable districts in the winter of 1913, many of the tenants in the neighbourhood were also turned off the land rather than submit to the demands and exactions of landlords. 'They started scattering in all directions' recalls Ndae. As the Makumes trekked to their new farm, Kleinfontein, they found many others on the road, moving from one tenancy to another; but unlike the Makumes, most of them were unlikely to find better terms than those they had left behind.

Ndae's father and uncle Sefako had already entered an agreement with their new landlord, Danie du Brill, to move on to his land. 'When a group intended moving' says Ndae, 'they sent out at least two members to go and negotiate accomodation with landowners first. Once this had been obtained, they came back to the family group to report this and then the trek began.' Du Brill was impressed by the Makumes' credentials as trainers and handlers of animals, as reflected in the testimonial written by Rabie on their 'trek pass'. He was prepared to allow the entire kin group of four generations to settle on his land, He lent them a wagon and a span of oxen to supplement their own to help transport their possessions. Two trips were required by each wagon to complete the move.

Not surprisingly, the trek to du Brill's farm features large in Ndae's early memories. He remembers the outspan on Jan Swanepoel's farm; he recalls collecting dry cow dung for fuel and water for cooking. He remembers sleeping under the wagon, its wheels chocked with stones to prevent it from moving, and the sleeping oxen lying nearby, fastened to the yoke to prevent them from trudging off into the night. On their arrival at Kleinfontein the next afternoon, the entire family had to go and

'greet the king' - Danie du Brill, to whom they were each introduced by name.

Du Brill, to whom Ndae habitually refers as Danie and who was known to the Basotho as 'Sebata sa Mampabale', was a patriarchal figure who loomed large in Ndae's young life. He had lived in Lesotho for a long time, buying Basotho horses for resale on the diamond fields of Griqualand West, and had learned to speak Sesotho as well as something of Basotho law. He applied justice to his Basotho tenants in much the same way as a chief might, ordering for instance that the father of a seduced girl be compensated with six head of cattle, which he chose himself from the guilty party's herds. He would say to the girl's father after listening to all evidence, 'Take these now and get your men to help you brand them with your own mark.'

Du Brill's farming operations were clearly highly capitalised by the standards of the day. His imported breeds of wooled sheep were shown at the local agricultural shows, and farmers came from far and near to buy lambs born of his imported ewes. These special sheep, which grazed close to du Brill's homestead, were not allowed to get wet in the rain; they had to be covered with special coats whenever rain threatened. 'Even in handling them, we were not supposed to grab them anyhow; Danie would be very cross if he saw you doing that. Their bodies were not to be touched by hand; we had to hold them by their legs'. Ndae still expresses his amazement at the fecundity of Danie's milk cows, imported from Holland, which were milked three times a day and yielded five gallons each milking. Other farmers in the district sold him their milk, as Danie had cheese-making machinery, and exported his cheese to England to feed the troops during the First World War. Those farmers in the district who were not sympathetic with the imperial war effort refused to sell Danie their milk, Ndae remembers. The plant was worked by men whose language was incomprehensible to Ndae, indicating to him that they were Englishmen. He also remembers helping to load cheese on a cart pulled by eight mules, which took it to Loboth station. After the war the machinery was dismantled and sent back to England.

The size of du Brill's landholdings were such that no real limit was placed on the extent of the land available to the Makume family for grazing and ploughing. By the First World War this was a most unusual situation on the Highveld. Only the luckiest - or the most valuable - black families could still hope by 1913 to have access to the landed resources available to the Makumes. Du Brill, who was undoubtedly a very wealthy man, owned (or hired) a number of farms - stretching in Ndae's memory from near Lindley to close to Steynsrust, a distance of perhaps twenty miles. 'This was not a farm but the whole world' enthuses Ndae.

It was at Kleinfontein that the Makumes' stockholdings became very large, especially when they exchanged their horses for cattle. Ndae remembers that the family owned 170 head of cattle and over 500 sheep. The animals were all regarded as being

under the control and authority of the family head, no matter who had earned them. Their wool was despatched to Durban from Lindley Road station, fetching about 1s 6d per pound. They also made butter and sold it at the station. The only restrictions on the black-owned livestock was that they were not allowed near Danie's herds and flocks. Danie loaned his bulls to his tenants on condition the Africans did not keep their own bulls which might get amongst his own prize cows.

Furthermore, seven or eight hundred bags of maize and sorghum from the family's fields were not unheard of in good years. It took four months to plough the land - from September to December. They would plough every day except Sunday until late in the evening. Ndae remembers beer being brewed and meat cooked to pay the harvesters who flocked to their fields in the winter. Danie would loan them a threshing machine. By now the Makumes also owned two bok wee - transport wagons pulled by fourteen oxen each, which cost 125 pounds new, as well as two horse carts which they hired out for weddings to other tenant families. Although sharecropping relationships between black tenants and white landholders were common in the district, they were not practised on Danie's lands. Sharecropping was more likely to be found on the farms of less prosperous and undercapitalised white landholders.

The young Ndae began working in the fields as an adolescent, feeding Danie's horses, helping with the ploughing and herding the calves, in about 1914. He remembers working in a group of sixteen youths (perhaps all from the same kin group) who lived together closer to their employer's farm house, while thw Makume homestead and fields were situated much further away, on the other side of the Valsch River. The older members of the extended family did not render labour, but paid for their tenancy with the labour service of their juniors. Amongst those living nearby, also on du Brill's land, was the Teletsane family, also of the Bataung clan, of whom Ndae's mother was a member. It might have been the Teletsanes who lured the Makumes to Kleinfontein in the first place; and their success as arable farmers might have had more than a little to do with the larger network of kin already established there.

Ndae's father, Jan Drywer, did much of the transport work on Danie's land, in between attending to the family's extensive farming activities. He also seems to have had a particularly close relationship with their landlord. He was called upon to advise on the adjustment of the ploughs or the arrangement of the ploughing spans. He was called in to fix the ploughing equipment or to sharpen the shares. Danie would bring Ndae's father a sheep as a Christmas present, saying 'Hier is jou skaap ou Drywer'. Ndae remembers others on the farm were hurt by Danie's acts of benevolence, and suspected Ndae's father of currying favour.

Such relationships of convenience between wealthy white farmers with very extensive and underutilised landholdings, and

black kin groups controlling considerable labour resources, were still to be found in parts of the arable Highveld into the 1920s. Nevertheless, these relationships, allowing to the black homestead community access to considerable landed resources (as well as occasional access to seed or the services of a threshing machine), and guaranteeing to the landlord access to a steady and dependable supply of labour from the junior members of tenant families, were already becoming rarer and more and more tenuous. As land was subdivided, so white-directed farming became more intensive and the resources available to black tenants declined. As pressures were brought to bear on tenants' own productive activities, as the village settlements of the extended black kin groups were broken up and the nuclear family became more common as a unit of tenancy on the farms, so the authority of elders over juniors eroded and the shift of young men and women away from unremunerative and exploitative employment on the farms to the towns became a steady flow.

Portents of things to come appeared when Danie started apportioning his farms to his children. It was not long after the First World War ended, Ndae thinks, that the land on which the Makumes lived fell under the control of Danie's son-in-law, a Hollander named Fritz Richter. They were invited to move so as to remain under Danie's control, but decided to remain where they were. At first this development did not greatly change the family's circumstances. By now Ndae's great-grandfather Motetesi had died at a great age, and his son Mohlakala, Ndae's grandfather, had become the senior patriarch of the family group, in name as well as in fact.

The division of Danie's land was accompanied by the division of the wild herd of blesbok which roamed over Danie's land. The herd was chased by a posse of mounted men, black and white, until it split in two. One part of the herd was then driven on to Richter's land, and fencing was erected to prevent the herd from reuniting. This was a common practice as the substantial landholdings of an earlier date were subdivided, according to Ndae. Richter got from his father-in-law 200 blesboks, as well as 2000 sheep, two ox wagons and four spans of oxen. It was not long before the inexorable process of subdivision advanced a further step, when Richter's son-in-law, Willie Austen, a Scot, became the Makumes' landlord. Although Austen called his farm Kismet, to the Makumes their home remained known as Kleinfontein. The extensive tracts of yore were becoming more and more crowded.

In 1924 Ndae married Anna, the daughter of one Mokwita, a Mokoena of Molibeli descent, who lived on a nearby farm further up the Valsch River, belonging to Gert Meyer, a cousin of Danie du Brill. The bridewealth cattle were mostly provided by Mohlakala, Ndae's grandfather. In October of the following year they confirmed their marriage by Christian rites. Ndae's new wife moved permanently to his parental homestead. In May 1926 their first child - a girl - was born. When asked if this meant that he became independent of parental authority, Ndae dissents vigorously:

> No, it was still one combined family.... Children of olden days used not to leave their parents immediately after getting married. They were supposed to stay on and work under their parents' authority. Even your wife was supposed to stay with your parents and cook for them. We had a separate hut where I slept with my wife, but during the day she had to work at my parents' home. In those days my wife was regarded as my elders' wife, not mine. The old man had authority over both of us.

However, the fortunes of the Makume family really began to change at about this time. Ndae recalls that it was after General Hertzog's government came to power in 1924 that blacks were forced to dispose of their animals on the farms. Africans had to sell off their cattle, except for a couple of milk cows and perhaps some draught oxen. Newly born calves had to be sold. Only one horse was allowed to blacks who did not own carts. Ndae recalls that that inspectors (quite probably census enumerators) came around counting how many cattle, sheep, goats and horses the black farm tenants had.

The terms of tenancy increasingly being imposed upon blacks, as described by Ndae, precluded any independent production, but payment for labour took the form of the produce of a couple of acres, ploughed in common with the landlord's fields under the landlord's direction, the produce of which would belong to the tenant worker. The produce of a couple of acres might be fifteen or sometimes twenty bags of maize. Black tenants also recieved money wages - 15 or 20 shillings for a month's work, 5 shillings per month for boys, 2s 6d per month for girls employed in the kitchens. 'That was the death of the black people' in Ndae's memory.

> What else could they do? If a person expressed dissatisfaction where could he go? It was better to keep quiet rather than talk. There was no longer any opportunity to plough as we liked. Those big tracts of land we used to plough were a thing of the past.

Ndae's memories in this regard are no doubt exaggeratedly apocalyptic. But in the longer term these were the changes that his people were experiencing. Needless to say, though, these experiences were not universal; many a white landholder did not possess the capital resources (and others did not have the incentive) to seek to do away entirely with the productive equipment and oxen of their black tenants - as Ndae's future life was to show. The dispossession of blacks was directly related to the accumulation of productive capacity in the white rural economy (- a function to a large degree of government succour); and white accumulation was never sustained indefinitely, as the years of the Depression were to demonstrate.

Nevertheless, the second half of the 1920s (like the years

leading up to the First World War) were years when the advance of white farming and the retreat of the black peasant economy took on dramatic dimensions. By the mid-1920s white agriculture on the Highveld was entering a renewed phase of boom and expansion. The coming to power of the National Party, with its strong populist roots in the Orange Free State countryside, might have provided the moral impulse for white landholders seeking to extend control over the land and over the black families on the land; and elderly informants like Ndae commonly ascribe to Hertzog's government transitions in their experiences of life on the farms which were rather more complex in their causation. An example of this tendency is Ndae's assertion that it was as a result of Hertzog's 'cruel laws' that at this time the prices they received for their maize collapsed, to 6 or 7 shillings per bag. But this might have been due to the fact that one aspect of the tightening of control that blacks were experiencing was the insistence that blacks sell their produce to their landlords rather than to the storekeepers in the rural towns and at the railway stations. This enabled the landlords to make an extra profit from paying their tenants below market prices, and also enabled them to exert greater control over the mobility of tenants and their tenants' ability to profit from other forms of petty trade. This change was certainly taking place over the longer term, but it is quite likely that there were particular moments of heightened conflict, such as the mid- to late-1920s, when whites were able decisively to extend their control over blacks in this way.

Another factor in the gradually narrowing opportunities for profitable farming experienced by the Makumes was the fact that the old landlord, Danie du Brill, was now dead. Not untypically, the younger generation of white farmers was less inclined to tolerate large settlements of relatively well-off black farmers on their land - not only because they used landed resources which could more profitably be put to alternative use, but also because of the moral opprobrium against 'Kaffir farming' and against whites who lived off it. This sense of moral outrage had been assiduously preached by Afrikaner leaders, particularly in Hertzog's National Party. Ndae says that Danie's sons and sons-in-law had been indoctrinated against the blacks on their land, that they were jealous of black successes, and that they were determined to rob the black tenants of their freedom.

> Now it was the sons who wielded power, and Hertzog had influenced them by saying that if they kept on allowing us to plough and practise pastoral farming on our own, it would not be long before we took those farms away from them.... They were called to meetings and at those meetings they were so brainwashed that when they came back they would tell us 'From now on, you cannot keep cattle on the farm; you must plough and work for us, and whoever does not understand that had better leave this place.... It was about 1926 and 1927 when the world changed for us. Those were bad times.

There was no open hostility shown toward them - 'because after all we grew up together; they simply said your possessions are too many, you would be wise to try and find another place'. Under these pressures the Makume family group began to break up, with individuals moving off with some of the livestock to seek tenancies elsewhere. By distributing their animals in various places in this way, they hoped to protect them against forced sales or death through shortage of grazing. Ndae's father and elder brothers moved back to Kleinfontein in 1933, after spending a few years in the employ of Jakob Rotten. (Mohlakala was now dead.) Austen welcomed them back to their old home, insisting that he had never told them they should leave, but only to get rid of their livestock. Ndae still regards Kleinfontein as his family home, and there many of the Makumes lie buried. 'Whenever I return there' says Ndae, 'I take my hat off.'

This period coincided with Ndae's conversion to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, a powerful separatist black church founded in and run from the United States. It is likely that the timing of this conversion, in 1926, was not fortuitous, for the AME Church was born out of black nationalist ideals, and it seems to have grown most rapidly as a political and cultural expression at precisely such times of disillusionment with the white man's world and the white man's values. Many blacks on the land had to some degree imbibed ideas of individual self-improvement through diligence and effort. When such avenues seemed to be closing as a result of white hostility and greed, new forms of political and religious expression arose to accomodate the sense of disillusionment and lost pride which resulted. The AME Church was one such expression, and not surprisingly one which was increasingly regarded with suspicion and intolerance by whites.

Another such expression which Ndae remembers vividly and which further provoked whites to take concerted action against their black tenants, was Clements Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, the first mass black trade union in South Africa which had a spectacular if short-lived success in mobilising support in rural areas. The farm tenantry was ripe for political mobilisation at this time. Ndae remembers that many of the tenants donated cattle to Kadalie's organisation, and his representatives held meetings on the farms at which Ndae like so many others had their first schooling in the large historical forces confronting them and shaping their lives. Kadalie's appeal was unashamedly messianic in Ndae's memory. The whites had taken their country and they should fight to repossess it, they were told. 'I have come to take you out of Egypt' was the message. Perhaps inevitably, this heady experience was not to last, given the general insecurity of farm life and the hostility of the whites. The required level of self-confidence to sustain such a movement could not long survive the dispossession of resources and the undermining of their economic independence which confronted blacks on the land.

But there is no limit to the determination of the strong-willed to survive in the face of hopelessness. One of Ndae's

clearer memories of this period is the year he and his father hired a government-owned farm in Lindley district by getting a white man - an impoverished blacksmith in Lindley - to hire the farm for them in his name, on which to plough and graze their livestock. The rent amounted to 360 pounds per annum. Of this they handed over 180 pounds to the white man, Loot Jan Graaff, with which to pay the first instalment. Ndae got two ploughing spans of oxen from his relations. He remembers the farm as 'fertile and beautiful with a stream running through it'. It was the best farm in the area, asserts Ndae with perhaps a touch of retrospective exaggeration, and was capable of producing 2000 bags of maize. But the arrangement did not last. Ndae remembers:

> I suspect that while I was ploughing, some whites became suspicious and started investigating. They employed the services of a lawyer, a certain de Wet, and we were called to court to answer their allegations about that farm and the nature of my involvement.

It was alleged that the poor white, Graaff, could not possibly have paid the rent himself as he had no money, that Ndae had in fact paid the 180 pound instalment, and that the spans and equipment being used for ploughing belonged to Ndae too. In fact, even the two cows which supplied Graaff with his daily milk belonged to the Makumes, and they had been lent to him for this purpose. The lease was cancelled, and Ndae was turned off the farm. Ndae lost his 180 pounds. He and Graaff commiserated with each other, Ndae took the cows back, and they parted.

The ambiguities of white supremacy were forcibly brought home to Ndae by this episode; for the lawyer de Wet came up to him afterwards

> and told me that I should have consulted him first and he would have leased that farm for me, and nobody would question it because he was a lawyer and had money. It was too late because my money was gone already.

The magistrate, too, told Ndae that he should have leased the farm 'through the lawyers', and that his mistake had been to rely on a poor white. Clearly what Ndae had done was formally illegal according to the 1913 Natives Land Act; hiring or buying land was a privilege for whites only. It was also in flagrant opposition to populist white perceptions of the proper relations between white and black on the land. But there can be no doubt that such relationships between black farmers and white landholders were not uncommon at this time, and were often connived at by the absentee landowners who knew that black tenants, ploughing typically under informal sharing contracts, were reliable and productive farmers. Law in a racially ordered society is often a symbol rather than a practical code regulating real relationships. De Wet and the magistrate knew this, and Ndae knew it too. As long as whites (lawyers were as well-placed as any) were able to make profits from black tenant enterprise by

sharing in the harvest, the law was a flexible tool at best. But Ndae had erred in flouting the rules of class privilege in the white rural community by turning to a poor white as his partner and as the beneficiary of his enterprise.

These were the sorts of arrangements which remained available to enterprising black farmers in the interstices of the white-controlled rural capitalism emerging in the 1920s. By their very nature they were also very insecure and temporary arrangements in a world overwhelmingly hostile to any manifestation of independent economic enterprise by blacks. But the blacks were not without weapons of their own. Ndae recalls a quarrel he had with a certain Pretorius whose land he had agreed to plough with his own oxen and equipment, in return for the yield from two bags of maize seed - amounting to one third of the crop. After threshing, Ndae claimed 330 bags as his own. But Pretorius allowed him to take only 200 bags, declaring that he would give him nothing more. Pretorius hired a transport rider, Isaac Botha, to carry the remainder to the co-operative overnight without Ndae's knowledge. However, Ndae was now wise in the ways of the white man's law, and had obliged Pretorius to write down the agreement and append his signature to it. He also knew a lawyer named Ellenberger, a scion of a French missionary family from Lesotho, who in Ndae's words 'did not care about Boers'. Ellenberger told Ndae that the case was clear-cut and took the matter to the local magistrate's court in Lindley (perhaps to the same official who had ordered Ndae off the government-owned farm). Since the arrangement amounted to a contract of service rather than of tenancy, the magistrate decided in favour of Ndae, and Pretorius was ordered to deliver 100 bags of maize to Ndae's house, as well as to pay Ellenberger's fees. Such cheating by whites was common according to Ndae, but the blacks were generally afraid to sue, and usually did not have access to sympathetic and fearless lawyers like Ellenberger.

But this Pyrrhic victory was also a very costly one. For this episode made a public enemy of him in the eyes of the local white farmers. 'They were so angry that they wanted to kill me by shooting me.... They said that I was a spoilt Kaffir to have done that to a white man.' It was directly as a result of the case that Ndae left the Lindley district for good, fearing the consequences of his continuing to stay in the midst of the aroused and angry white community. Many of his relations stayed behind, scattered around the district, mostly as labour tenants much reduced in status and wealth.

The Makumes had managed to maintain their large flocks of sheep by spreading them around the farms on which members of the kin group had settled; but this was a temporary and unsatisfactory expedient - not least because loyalty to the kin group was unlikely to survive once it had effectively broken up. Thus it is not surprising to find Ndae and his young family, together with the young son of one of his uncles who came along as a herd, taking refuge in Lesotho in about 1929 with the family's sheep - 480 at that time, he recalls. This task was

entrusted to Ndae, as his father's youngest son. He had been allocated his share of the livestock already; but his elder brothers were still expected to work for their elders on the farms.

Just as his forefathers had emigrated from Lesotho to seek more land and better conditions on the farms of the South African Highveld, Lesotho was now a refuge for those fleeing the forces of dispossession sweeping across the South African countryside. Ndae settled at Malibamatso under Chief Mafeketsane. It would seem that the Makumes, like many others on the farms of the Orange Free State, had maintained or resurrected clan affiliations or political allegiances in Lesotho, which could be utilised in times of trouble. But Lesotho, like the black reserves in South Africa, had long since ceased to be able to sustain its own population without massive resort to labour migrancy. The opportunities for independent, full-time farming in the villages of the lowlands had long since eroded - except perhaps for the chiefly lineages. Further, the decline of the rural economy in black reserves and territories like Lesotho bore a direct relation to declining opportunities for independent farming by blacks in white-settled rural areas of South Africa.

Ndae did not enjoy his stay in Lesotho. He was not used to having to use pack animals over long distances to sell a bag or two of maize, and having to sleep on the road in the process. He was used to the short trip to the local town on a wagon or cart to offload produce. He did not like the way cattle and donkeys were illtreated, overworked and underfed in Lesotho. He continued paying his tax in South Africa as he realised he could not stay in Lesotho. Furthermore, Ndae soon discovered that his family's livestock was no more likely to survive in Lesotho than on the farms. The sheep population of Lesotho was already very dense. The colonial administration was just then introducing mandatory dipping to combat the disease of 'scab' which was rampant in the emaciated flocks of the Basotho, and which was threatening the sheep of the white farmers of the border districts. White officials from the Orange Free State were deputed to undertake the dipping. Given the inevitable rate of mortality amongst ill-fed sheep, the suspicion quickly spread that the South Africans had been brought in to kill the animals. Ndae still believes this to have been the case.

> They pretended to be improving the quality of our wool in Lesotho, but everybody soon realised that the real reason for dipping our sheep was to make us bankrupt and very poor, in order to make us dependent on them so that they could take Lesotho from us. That is how clever these people are.

Before the dipping, many people in Lesotho owned more than a thousand sheep; afterwards there were virtually no sheep or goats left, asserts Ndae, and the people were left destitute. (It needs to be added though that this was at least in part a result of drought and overgrazing - but Ndae's conspiracy theory

is not unreasonable seen in the larger context of his life experiences.) He remembers that 'After that dipping the sheep were so lean that they could not be skinned when they died. When you tried to skin them, the skin would tear off in pieces.'

Ndae lost all his family's many sheep during his unhappy couple of years in Lesotho. But he still remembers one celebrated event with undisguised glee: the day in 1930 when the future king Seiso dipped a 'Boer'. Seiso had set aside ten animals which he had instructed were not to be dipped as they were to be slaughtered for meat. The white official refused to be deflected from his purpose by this royal instruction. On hearing that his orders had been disobeyed, Seiso rode in a rage to the dipping tank. The ensuing argument ended with Seiso pushing the white official into the tank. When the latter was allowed to climb out, he staggered away, fell and died, probably having swallowed some of the toxic dipping compound. Seiso went into hiding with Chief Motsoeneng at Matlakeng, a chief who hated whites according to Ndae. Motsoeneng dared the administration to come and arrest the refugee, but to come prepared for war. 'He then instructed his men to prepare their guns and be ready to fight.'

But these small, sweet victories against the encroaching tentacles of white domination were inconsequential; and Ndae soon had to join the throngs of his fellow-countrymen taking the train to the Witwatersrand gold fields, getting a job as a mine worker in Brakpan. Before that he had not thought of selling his labour; he did not even know where the Witwatersrand was. The year was 1932, and the terrible drought of that year put paid to any hopes that he might recoup his losses in Lesotho. Like all Basotho of his generation, Ndae remembers that drought as 'the great winds of red dust'.

At the mine he made 6 or 8 pounds per month. He made extra money by selling cloth which he bought from a wholesaler in Johannesburg. During this period he lived in the Germiston location known as Dukathole. He worked for a couple of years for a manufacturer of borehole drills in Church Street, Johannesburg, earning 27 shillings per week. Ndae then went to work in Vereeniging for a small building contractor named Terblanche, a quarrelsome man under whom he was to work for eleven years, earning 30 shillings a week to start with. As we shall see, this marked the beginning of an important new chapter in Ndae's life. Meanwhile, his wife and two young children (Miriam and Julia) were living with her parental family, who were still at Doornkloof in the Lindley district.

All this while Ndae was biding his time, awaiting the opportunity to return to farming. Like so many others in his position, he fully intended reaccumulating the resources required to return to the land, and was determined not to capitulate to the forces of dispossession. He was soon the owner of a span of sixteen Afrikander calves, paying 5 or 6 pounds per bullock. These he bought at a sale from one Petrus Muller on whose farm,

Boskop, between Vereeniging and Heidelberg south of Johannesburg, he settled in the latter half of the 1930s, hoping to rebuild his life as a farmer. At the same time he continued to work for the builder Terblanche in nearby Vereeniging and Vanderbijlpark. On Muller's farm lived Abraham Mokale, as well as one Setlabela and some other Kgatla families like Makani. These had spans of oxen, and were engaged in ploughing on shares and transport riding in the vicinity. Ndae claims that the oppression of the blacks was not as bad in this industrial region as in Lindley district further south in the Orange Free State. There were still opportunities here and there for blacks to prosper in a small way and to live independently.

Indeed, Ndae lived contentedly at Boskop for perhaps sixteen years, farming maize with his Afrikander oxen which he had trained himself, and sharing his crop with his landlord Muller. He built a house on Muller's farm and fetched his wife Anna and children from her parental home at Doornkloof. Her parents were now dead, and her brothers were beginning to suspect Ndae was 'playing a game with them' by leaving Anna in their care. Ndae's daughters Miriam and Julia helped in the fields, even tilling the land with his span of oxen. Ndae would tend his cattle and his fields on his return from work in town in the evenings. No doubt there was also a lot of co-operation between the tenant families. With one span and limited family labour, this was not arable farming of the kind that Ndae had known in the old days. Nevertheless, he did manage a crop of 160 or 170 bags in good years.

Ndae remembers Muller as a kindly and tolerant man. Undoubtedly Muller's farming practices were the cause of much hostility from neighbouring whites who resented the superior and diligent black farmers on his land. But there can be no doubt of the gratitude felt toward him by his black tenants, who managed to escape the axe of dispossession for a few years under his protective patronage. Ndae remembers Muller sitting outside his (Ndae's) house, drinking coffee and eating Ndae's maize porridge, obsessively counting the bags of grain as they came from the threshing machine, in case he be cheated of his half share of the crop. 'Jy gaan my verneuk, Ou Jacob' he would mutter.

Meanwhile, in Terblanche's employ he was developing an interest and a skill in the craft of building. Ndae had realised that there were no long-term prospects on the land for a black man in South Africa, and certainly none for his children. In the light of the alternative opportunities that were to open up for his younger children in later years, Ndae's new career as a builder seems to demonstrate an unusual prescience. For while most of his peers were being sucked into the proletarian vortex of industrial South Africa, Ndae was learning to exploit new and unintended consequences of the economic development of South Africa.

Ndae began in Terblanche's employ as a common worker. But he had other ideas. He was convinced that he could learn

building skills himself, and apply them independently. However,

building skills himself, and apply them independently. However, the idea of a black man learning how to lay bricks and apply mortar was abhorrent to the white artisans with whom Ndae worked. A racially defined closed shop was strictly applied, and the racial division of labour was enforced by law. Just as independent black commercial farming flew in the face of the ideal of racial supremacy being enshrined in white popular consciousness and in the statute book, so did any form of black entrepreneurial initiative in urban areas threaten the roots of the racial order.

But Ndae had spent a good part of his life fighting the forces of dispossession in the countryside, and had learned a thing or two. He had the resourcefulness and insight to know that the white man's law was not so impermeable or impenetrable as the whites liked to think. There were ways in which blacks could survive and even prosper in a hostile environment, and there were opportunities that could be exploited in the nooks and crannies of economic and social life where the white man's law could not reach. Ndae also knew from his experience of Petrus Muller and many others that there were whites who were prepared in practice to flout the formal and informal rules of racial interaction. This was not entirely for selfless reasons; there were profits to be gained by whites at little cost or risk from black tenant production. Similarly, the prohibitions against the acquisition of skills by blacks and against black entrepreneurial initiative raised the expense of, for example, home-building.

So Ndae watched carefully as he went about his work in Terblanche's employ. But he did more than just observe:

> Whenever the whites were having their lunch and talking amongst themselves, I would lay four bricks and paint them just as I had seen my baas do, and I would then run off and sit as if I had done nothing. When the whites resumed work after lunch, I would watch to see if my baas noticed and removed my four bricks, but to my joy he would continue without noticing them. Then I realised that I knew how to build, and I was determined that when I left that contractor I was going to buy building tools for myself and start building.

The white bricklayer under whose authority Ndae was placed must have had some inkling of this, and was prepared to encourage Ndae's talents - not from humanitarian motives, but due to his own want of diligence. He instructed Ndae to help him by building from the inside when the other whites were not present.

> He told me as soon as the inspectors appear, I must stop and behave like a labourer. He was always in a position to see them from afar as he stood on a trestle. We knew the inspectors by their big cars.... You could be arrested if an inspector saw you. But if the owner of the company caught you building he would be very angry with the white builder for allowing

> Kaffirs to spoil his job. They never caught me building.... [The inspectors] would impose a fine on both, the black man and his immediate white baas, who would be fined so heavily that he would never again allow a Kaffir to handle a trowel in his presence. But they could not stop us from learning how to build.

Again, Ndae knew how to exploit the gap between the law and its implementation, between principle and practice. What white men believed in their collective perceptions often conflicted with their private interests. Ndae was ultimately appointed a foreman over the other black labourers by Terblanche, and now earned the princely sum of £4 18s 6d per week. 'I then went to work with polished shoes and a neat appearance' recalls Ndae. Terblanche still knew nothing of his ambitions or of his secret accomplishments.

Ndae left Terblanche's employ after the end of the war. He was now able to set up independently as a builder. He bought trestles, wheelbarrows and all the tools required for his trade. He built some outhouses for his landlord Muller; but his first major accomplishment was to build a house for Hendrik van der Merwe on his farm Houtkop on the outskirts of Vereeniging. What brought Ndae to van der Merwe's attention was, it seems, the latter's reluctance to pay the going rates commonly charged by the recognised white contractors. Ndae, for all his skills, had no legitimacy in the eyes of the law, no contractual standing, no protection against exploitation or deceit. Indeed, when he built van der Merwe's house, the relationship between them was that between master and servant.

> I did not charge him because he was my master and he could pay me any amount he wanted to pay me. Actually he paid me quite well. He would confidentially ask me to go to his house to get some money. He would always ask me not to tell anybody that he had paid me money. I would then go to his house in secret and he would give me, say, 50 pounds, and remind me not to talk about it.

Ndae was soon building for others in the vicinity, on the farms and in the new industrial towns of Vanderbijlpark and Sasolburg, at rates well below those which white contractors would have charged. His vulnerability, the illegitimacy of his enterprise, was also his strength. He was always dependent on the good will of employers, in strictest confidence, to pay him commensurately with his labours and his skills. There was always the danger of local whites closing ranks against this appalling breach of racial ethics. Van der Merwe had good reason to insist on complete silence on Ndae's part about the true nature of their relationship.

Ndae hired labour to help him, but remembers his workers as an unreliable lot who could not be trusted to turn up to work on Mondays. 'I was always angry with them because I was still

expected to pay them.' Nevertheless, Ndae did comparatively well. He says with perhaps a touch of nostalgic exaggeration: 'As soon as I had finished one job, another white was waiting and would rush for me and my tools and trestles and equipment.' Some of his clients, like Albert van der Westhuizen, even wrote testimonials for him. Some whites were clearly less sensitive than others about the opinion of their peers.

Meanwhile, Ndae had continued living on Petrus Muller's farm until Muller died in the mid-1950s. 'A kind man does not live long' comments Ndae. Again, Ndae discovered that the generational transition bore only ill for the blacks. Muller's son told Ndae that he was not responsible for his father's death: '"I am not going to be like my father to you people".... He told me that under his rule, I would never again enjoy what I had enjoyed when his father had still been in control.' Even small gestures like the occasional sheep for meat which had been given them were now out of the question. The younger Muller was unhappy about Ndae's building activities and had 'developed some jealousy' says Ndae. He insisted on having access to Ndae's services before others, even when Ndae was engaged in a building job.

Sharecropping agreements were done away with. The workers on Muller's farm were now paid 2 pounds per month plus rations. Ndae's farming activities came to an end when the new landlord forced him to sell his oxen:

> I sold them whilst they were very lean. I tried to persuade him to allow me to stay there for only that year, but to no avail.... He would not allow me to fatten them before I could sell them. He told me that it was none of his business that they were lean.

Ndae sold his animals at an auction sale for the paltry price of 15 pounds each. His two harrows, three weeders and two double-furrow ploughs were bought by a white farmer. But whereas the generality of black farmers in Ndae's position had no alternative but to accept the inevitability of having to sell their labour as unskilled workers, Ndae had his building enterprise to fall back on.

Ndae and his family moved across the Vaal River to Rooirand near Heilbron, a farm belonging to Hendrik van der Merwe, for whom he had already built a house near Vereeniging. Van der Merwe, on hearing that Ndae was leaving Boskop, invited him to go to Rooirand and build another house there. Ndae took with him his two remaining cows, a few chains, yokes and some other equipment, so that, as he puts it, he could show his young children when they grew up the 'old way of living before things changed'. These were still in his storeroom at Viljoensdrift when we found him there.

Ndae and his family stayed at Rooirand for about nine years. He was now a full-time builder. On his arrival at van der

Merwe's farm there were no buildings there at all. Ndae built not only a farmhouse, but a number of other buildings and even dams. While he practised his building skills, travelling widely through the countryside, his wife worked periodically for Mrs van der Merwe as a domestic servant. She was given a hundred chickens, the eggs from which she sold in Heilbron. Meanwhile, their family had grown. A son, Isaac, had been born while they were still living on Muller's farm, and another daughter, Elizabeth, two years later. They were surprised to discover that they could still parent children.

But once again, Ndae's building activities raised the ire of a younger generation. Van der Merwe's grandson, a 'little boy' Ndae calls him contemptuously, demanded that Ndae stop building and work on the farm. Ndae responded that this was not what he had agreed to with the '<u>oubaas</u>', demanded his reference book and left Rooirand. This was in the 1960s. Ndae was also getting fed up with the labour problems involved in his building business, and thinking of retirement.

After leaving the van der Merwes, Ndae and his family moved to Viljoensdrift on the Vaal River near Vereeniging, in the employ of the black separatist African Methodist Episcopal Church, of which he had been a member since the 1920s. His job was to look after the corrugated-iron church and serve the local farm community between visits by the minister from Sasolburg, who stayed in Ndae's house on his periodical trips to Viljoensdrift. He was sent there by Reverend Tansi, president of the Church, whom Ndae had originally met in Germiston in the early 1930s when they had both been members of the local congregation in the location. Tansi had become an official of the Church in Bloemfontein, and then took over the Heilbron circuit where Ndae again got to know him during his years at Rooirand. Amongst Ndae's achievements as a builder was the construction of the AME church in the new industrial town of Sasolburg south of the Vaal. His relationship with the Church seems to have grown in his later years, especially after his farming activities had ended in the 1950s, eventually earning a certificate as an evangelist. Perhaps the appeal of the Church is revealed in the fact that Ndae did not regard his affiliation as in any way inconsistent with resort to a traditional diviner when, at Viljoensdrift, one of his cows became ill, due, he says, to 'evil spirits' sent by an ill-disposed person who was jealous of him.

Ndae was now a man of relatively substantial means - sufficiently so to provide his younger children and grandchildren with a good education. The lasting legacy of Ndae's enterprising spirit must lie in the fact that Isaac graduated with a B.Sc. degree from the University of the North at Turfloop, and is teaching at a high school in Qwa Qwa; his daughter Julia's daughter graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1984 and her son teaches in a high school in Sharpeville; and Elizabeth, Ndae's youngest daughter, teaches in Bethlehem, where her husband, Simon Tlale, is an inspector of schools. Ndae, who recieved no formal education himself and who taught himself to read the Bible,

remembers with amusement how surprised the white lecturers at Turfloop were to discover that their star pupil's father was a simple peasant. He proudly asserts that he never allowed his children to work for any white man while they were living on the farms. But he still regards his investment in his children's and grandchildren's education partly as an investment in his own security in old age. Perhaps another investment in his old age was the 500 rand he gave to Miriam's son to pay the deposit on a house in Sebokeng - the house in which he eventually died.

Ndae lived out his declining years quietly at Viljoensdrift, tending his few cows, and supplying the neighbouring black junior school with milk. He gave his building equipment to his son-in-law once he could no longer use them himself after a long illness in his seventies. His wife Anna died in about 1978. When we visited him, Ndae showed us his storeroom full of bags of stock feed - jelluway, groundnuts, lucerne, barley, beans. He introduced us to his cows and calves, each with its own name (Stompie, Vaalmuis, Blommetjie), its individual temparament and physical characteristics, which Ndae discussed with us as if discussing his own children. Now that he had got over his illness he wanted to draw money from his bank account and buy some Jersey cows from a white man in Edenville. Dairying, mused Ndae, was a profitable business.

But in the end optimism and faith were not enough. The forces of dispossession caught up with Ndae even in the ninth decade of his life. It was perhaps too much to hope that this old man would be left to see out the measure of his days, secure against the rapacity of apartheid's dictates. He was not welcome in South Africa's industrial heartland, surrounded by the factories and mines of Vereeniging, Vanderbijlpark, Sasolburg, Coalbrook. His unimposing church, his humble home, his sheds, his cows, his acre of earth, constituted a 'black spot', and hence an unwanted anomaly in this white man's country. Where was he to go? To Lesotho, he was told, for that was where he had been recruited in the early 1930s for work in the gold mines. Instead, he went to live in Sebokeng with Miriam and his grandson's family. He was dead within the year.

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In many ways Ndae Makume was an exceptional man. But he was also a typical product of a peasant society. He had no formal education, and he worked with his hands all his life. He saw the world simply and graphically. He explained the great events of history during his lifetime in personalised, moral terms, a characteristic of illiterate people. For instance, he explained the downfall of General Hertzog's government in 1939 by telling the story of how Hertzog collected money from the Boers to send to Hitler (Ndae called him 'Hertzog's nephew') in a coffin; but the coffin was opened by some suspicious Englishmen, precipitating Hertzog's demise. As soon as Ndae talked of the

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larger world of the twentieth century, he revealed the limitations of his perceptions. Nevertheless, he had a strong, vivid memory of the details of his life, as well as a shrewd, if unsophisticated understanding of the historical dynamics of racial domination that shaped his world.

Ndae's life story is in part an admission of defeat. Ndae knew and understood the meaning of the battle of Thaba Bosiu against the Boer commandoes in 1868, in which his great-great-grandfather Nkgatha fought. He knew and understood the forces of destruction unleashed by the development of the white man's capitalism. He had no answer but to shrug off the imponderables of life and delight in the small, inconsequential stories which demonstrated his people's refusal to abandon their world willingly. Always they were recounted with a remarkable lack of bitterness or rancour, with no discernable indication of racial hostility, and with a keen eye for human foibles and idiosyncrasies.

But the true significance of the story told here lies in the legacy that Ndae left behind for the generations that succeed him. The transition from peasant to urban middle class in the turning of a generation is forged in ways that are generally unnoticed and unapplauded; but nowhere is there to be found a finer demonstration of the human capacity to understand and exploit great historical forces. Ndae Makume's life remains a lesson in adaptation to defeat, of hope in adversity.