

A Brief biography of Madikane Cele (Part 1)¹
Heather Hughes
July 2021

A biographical approach to Madikane Cele's life reveals very quickly that he defies ready categorisation. Different Madikane 'personas' seem to surface in different forms of evidence, which may be explained in terms of the specific – often heavily-loaded – research purposes of the earliest evidence gatherers: the questions we ask shape what we find, and fail to see in ways that may not always be clear until long afterwards.²

Madikane was one of those who provided evidence to James Stuart, on several occasions through the middle months of 1903, and then again from May to October in 1905; these dates are important to reading the evidence.³ He offered Stuart observations on his background in the Qadi chiefdom, but rather more concerning the origins of the Zulu and key episodes in Shaka's life, such as whether Nandi and Senzangakhona ever married, the circumstances of Senzangakhona's death, how Dingiswayo, Shaka and Dingane recruited and treated their regiments, the story of Shaka's warrior Ndengezi and Shaka's use of the term Lala. He related his understanding of various traditions such as circumcision and the importance of *isivivane*, declaimed the *izibongo* of Nandi and Dingiswayo, remembered songs that Dingiswayo had sung, told folk stories, explained proverbs and reflected on the nature of change, for example expressing regret about the disappearance of respect for chiefs. He also replenished his knowledge for Stuart by gathering information from other very elderly men, such as Magudwini.

On the very first occasion of their meeting, according to Stuart's notes, Madikane declared himself a *kholwa*, adding that his kraal Ematata was in the Inanda district, where he had built square huts.⁴ There is one other hint that Madikane was an unusual informant: he mentioned that he had sent a son abroad to study. Yet despite these intimations of another world and worldview, the overall impression that one is left with after reading his testimony is of a deeply knowledgeable and keenly interested traditionalist – an impression that does not emerge in any other extant source about him. This sense is reinforced by the way Stuart introduced him at the start of their second batch of meetings in 1905: Madikane ka Mlomowetole ka Bobo ka Ndhlulisa ka Mpinda.⁵

From the information Madikane provided to Stuart about his own background, we learn that his father Mlomowetole had been drafted into Shaka's Ntontela regiment and fought many battles against Zwide, Sikonyana and the AmaMpondo. He had his homestead on the Nsuze River in the Nkandla forest, under Chief Dube of the

¹ Some of the material presented here is taken from H. Hughes and M. Cele, "We of the white men's country": the remaking of the Qadi chiefdom, 1830s-1910', forthcoming in C. Hamilton and N. Liebhammer (Eds) *Untribing the Archive* (Pietermaritzburg, UKZN Press).

² See the discussion in C. Hamilton, 'Backstory, biography and the life of the James Stuart Archive' in *History in Africa* 38, 2011, 319-41.

³ Exact dates were 8 July 1903, 15, 16, 17 and 30 August 1903, 26-29 May 1905, 27-28 June 1905, 11-12 July 1905 and 14 October 1905. Stuart's notes on this testimony are in In C. de B. Webb and J. Wright (Eds) *James Stuart Archive Volume 2* (Durban and Pietermaritzburg, Killie Campbell Library and University of Natal Press, 1976), 47-67. This publication is hereafter referred to as *JSA2*.

⁴ Interview 8 July 1903, *JSA2*, 47. The published order follows that of Stuart's notebooks and the conventions otherwise followed by the editors are adopted here, e.g. use of italics for material Stuart set down in Zulu.

⁵ Interview 26 May 1905, *JSA2*, 52.

Qadi. In 1903, Madikane recalled the Qadi chiefly line as Dube ka Silwane ka Njila ka Ngodoma ka Dingila and noted that the Qadi had split from the Nyuswa long before Zulu expansion, under Dingila ka Ngcobo.⁶ In 1905, he gave the chiefly line as Mqhawe ka Dabeka ka Dube ka Bebe ka Njila ka Ngotoma ka Dingila ka Ngcobo, repeating that Dingila, who had been born in the *iqadi* (junior/second) house of the chief while Nyuswa in the senior house was the heir to Ngcobo, had separated from the Nyuswa;⁷ this was why *'the amaQadi people say "Ngcobo" only, we do not say "Nyuswa"'*.⁸

The Qadi lived in peace under Shaka, even though Shaka

*used to insult us and frighten us by saying that we did not have the cunning to invent things out of nothing, like lawyers. He said that we Lala could not do it. He said that we were Lala because our tongues lay (lala) flat in our mouths, and we did not speak in the Ntungwa fashion.*⁹

Lala, he said, was applied to those within the Zulu kingdom who *tekeza'd* in their speech, whereas iNyakeni was a term similarly applied by Shaka to those who lived in Natal.

Madikane estimated that he had been born at the same time as Cetshwayo, around the commencement of Dingane's reign. He was a young herd boy when he crossed into Natal, in what he described as a time of disorder. He explained further that in Natal, they became Kofiyana's people,¹⁰ and when Kofiyana was ordered to seize a large herd of cattle brought into Natal from the Zulu kingdom, they all benefited: *'It is with those cattle that we had established ourselves, we of the white men's country.'*¹¹

There is much corroborative evidence for Madikane's account.¹² Dingane attacked the Qadi in early 1837 and Chief Dube was among those killed. Led by Dube's son Dabeka, the survivors crossed the Thukela and moved down to Port Natal. As with other immigrant groups, the men were drafted into a militia organised by white traders based at the Port – there was heightened anxiety that their arrival would 'afford a pretext for the Zulu chief, Dingane, to carry into execution his long and often threatened intention of attacking and invading this settlement', according to the Port commandant, Alexander Biggar.¹³ This militia successfully raided Zulu villages in early 1838, capturing many women and children and thousands of head of cattle.¹⁴

⁶ Interview 8 July 1903, *JSA2*, 47.

⁷ Interview 17 August 1903, *JSA2*, 51.

⁸ Interview 26 May 1905, *JSA2*, 52.

⁹ Interview 27 May 1905, *JSA2*, 55.

¹⁰ Kofiyana kaMbengana kaGwayi had fled from Shaka with the Tshabeni chiefdom; Fynn had 'brought them out of the bushes' and made Kofiyana one of his *izinduna*. He later became an important source of information and support to the colonial authorities, called by them their 'government *induna*'. See the testimonies of Bazley in *JSA1*, 58; Maziyanana in *JSA3*, 275; and Mbovu in *JSA3*, 30-1.

¹¹ Interview 28 May 1905, *JSA2*, 57

¹² H Hughes, 'Politics and Society in the Inanda, Natal: the Qadi under Chief Mqhawe, c 1840 –1906', PhD thesis, University of London, 1996, 50-55.

¹³ Quoted in J. Stuart and D. McK Malcolm, 'Epilogue' to *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1969), 260

¹⁴ C. Ballard, 'Traders, trekkers and colonists' in A. Duminy and B. Guest (Eds) *Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1985), 121

Again after Dingane's killing of the Retief party in April 1838, the militia once again marched against the Zulu king, although this time poorly armed and equipped.¹⁵ Magema Fuze included an account of its demise, possibly by an eye-witness:

Many were killed, being blocked by the drift; many threw themselves into the Tugela and were drowned. Twelve whites died, and all the coloureds except a few. Many blacks were killed, only a few being able to escape. They reached Thekwini...singly, all with the same report: "You see me, the only survivor". And such was the battle of Dlokweni.¹⁶

Fuze appended to this report, 'it was on account of this battle that there died Dabeka ka Dube, the Qadi chief'.¹⁷ Twice in as many years, the Qadi had suffered defeat, the death of a chief and the loss of a large number of men at the hands of the Zulu army. They were displaced yet again during the Zulu attack on Port Natal in the wake of this battle. Possessing few cattle, the Qadi seem to have settled in coastal forest on the northern banks of the Umgeni River.¹⁸ Dabeka's heir, Mqhawe (according to Madikane, also the same age as he), was still too young to become chief and a regent acted in his stead.

Then came the episode regarding Mawa's cattle, as recounted by Madikane, which proved a turning point in Qadi fortunes. The new Zulu king, Mpande, was focused on efforts to secure his position and one of those whom he considered a threat was Mawa, a powerful daughter of Jama, sister of Senzangakhona and allied to Gqugqu, one of the last surviving of Senzangakhona's sons, whose claims to the kingship were possibly stronger than Mpande's own.¹⁹ Following Gqugqu's death in 1843, Mpande moved against Mawa, who fled with a massive herd of royal cattle and several thousand followers.²⁰ Although their movement was partially checked by a Zulu regiment, Mawa and her entourage managed to cross into Natal and reached the Umdhloti River, where they were stopped by the Port commandant. Mpande sent a messenger to the new British colonial administration in Pietermaritzburg demanding the return of the cattle. Kofiyana was instructed to seize the cattle, most of which seem to have been distributed among those who assisted in their confiscation.

The Qadi benefited greatly from this booty, as Madikane acknowledged. They moved upstream to the Umzinyathi River, a tributary of the Umgeni, where they re-established themselves. Yet apart from passing references – one that Madikane helped to negotiate Mqhawe's marriages and another that he was Mqhawe's *insila*, or body servant – Stuart's questioning and Madikane's offering left unspoken his entire subsequent life, over all the time up until the interviews took place in the early 1900s, a period of some 60 years. This is most likely the result of Stuart's lines of enquiry and the information Madikane wished to demonstrate as an accurate record, according to his understanding.

¹⁵ J. Kirkman in F. Owen, *The Diary of the Rev Francis Owen*, Ed. G. E. Cory (Cape Town, van Riebeeck Society, 1926), 166-7; E. Smith, *The Life and Times of Daniel Lindley* (London, Epworth Press, 1949), 143.

¹⁶ M. Fuze, *The Black People and Whence They Came*, (Durban and Pietermaritzburg, Killie Campbell Collection and University of Natal Press, 1979), 76-7.

¹⁷ Fuze *The Black People*, 170

¹⁸ G.S. Armstrong, 'Family reminiscences', KCM 25650, Campbell Africana Library; J. Robinson, *Notes on Natal: An Old Colonist's Book for New Settlers*, (Durban and London, Robinson and Vause and Geo. Street, 1872), 3

¹⁹ P. Colenbrander, 'The Zulu kingdom 1828-1879' in Duminy and Guest, *Natal and Zululand*, 99

²⁰ 'Minute of the import of Panda's message, 11 February 1846', in *Records of the Natal Executive Council, 1846-1848*, 70; testimony of Mangati in *JSA2*, 216-7.

What of those 'missing' 60 years? An important contemporary published source is Robert Plant, who was Senior Inspector of Native Schools at the time his book, *The Zulu in Three Tenses*, was published in 1905.²¹ As the title suggests, Plant considered all African inhabitants of the Natal-Zululand region to be, in an entirely uncomplicated way, Zulu. The 'tenses' of the title are the heathen past, weighed down by superstition; the influences of the present which have resulted in confusion and bad example, as well as civilising success; and the future solutions to the 'native problem'. A less careful researcher than Stuart in many ways, Plant was nevertheless interested in those parts of Madikane's life story in which Stuart patently was not.

Plant described Madikane (or in his usage, Madigana) as a 'great, gaunt, rough, big-boned man, a very giant in strength... but with a kindly eye and gentle speech that at once suggests the gentleman'.²² He had become an important and valued functionary of Mqhawe's, had acquired a heading and had taken three wives. He had seen how the children learned to read and write at the nearby mission school and decided he would be able to serve the chief better if he became literate. He attended school for a while but Mqhawe recalled him before he had learned much. His desire grew and he went away to Adams Mission, where he was converted to Christianity. News spread back to Inanda as to what had occurred and two of his three wives had decided to withdraw, so that he could live a Christian life with the remaining one. Madikane told Plant that his most painful act was to cut off his heading, which he delivered to Mqhawe, together with the best beast in his herd, as formal notification of his having become a convert. He then slaughtered an ox for all his neighbours, telling them that though he had 'parted' from them in belief, he continued to be their friend. Plant concludes his account by observing that Madikane was the head of a small Christian community.

Again, it is possible to fill out this brief overview by means of other kinds of available corroborative evidence. Madikane's conversion came in the 1870s, while James Dube was still pastor of the Inanda Station, for it was to him that Madikane sent a letter requesting him to obtain Mqhawe's permission to cut off his heading. He then 'freed himself from the entanglements of polygamy'²³ and became a Christian, though significantly did not assume a new, Christian, name.

In the late 1880s, after a period at the Inanda mission completing his education and preaching, Madikane established an outstation of the mission at Amatata in the vicinity of the Khumalo chief, Bhulutshe. Further detail on this aspect of his life was obtained in a lengthy interview with Fred Msomi, a deacon in the Amatata church, in 1988: Bhulutshe had apparently accumulated a large herd from earnings working for whites and had married many wives, including Mqhawe's first-born daughter, Nomasonto. Once, he had accidentally killed an adversary in a fight and Mqhawe had negotiated with the authorities to fine him a large number of cattle instead of imprisoning him; it was this incident which caused him to take an interest in Christianity. He had sent two missionaries away, being dissatisfied with them; however, he was deeply impressed with Madikane. It was said that every Sunday morning, a cow horn would be blown outside Bhulutshe's homestead, and Madikane would preach to them all before conducting his normal service. When the

²¹ R. Plant, *The Zulu in Three Tenses* (Pietermaritzburg, P. Davis and Sons, 1905)

²² Plant, *The Zulu*, 85. Madikane's story is recounted 85-91.

²³ Report on Adams Seminary 1878, American Board for Foreign Missions Southern African Papers [microfilm], Reel 181, Campbell Africana Library.

chief died in 1887, he was succeeded by his son Sidada, who respected Madikane's work and allowed it to continue.²⁴

By 1890, Madikane had a small number of children in the school he had built and 'a fine house in the course of building.'²⁵ Whenever the magistrate or other colonial officials visited that part of the location, they put up at Madikane's settlement and sometimes used his horses.²⁶ At the time he first provided Stuart with testimony, in 1903, a chapel had recently been built at Amatata and the founding congregation of 75 members had succeeded in raising the £24.00 annual sum to maintain Madikane as their preacher.

This place is a neat and pleasant little station. With its church, Sabbath school and day school of more than forty pupils, the station is exerting and beautiful and healthful influence on the surrounding heathen population.²⁷

Madikane also encouraged the participation of women in the church, by forming their own *manyano*. Ellen Dingila, Alice Khumalo and Nomdiyo Gumbi were remembered by church women in the 1980s as the three most important founders of the women's prayer union at Amatata.²⁸

Madikane's initial description of himself to Stuart, a *kholwa* with a homestead of square huts at Ematata, contained layers of meaning all too easy to miss. While the American Zulu Mission considered Amatata to be an outstation of Inanda,²⁹ it was on location land rather than land specifically set aside for mission work, an important distinction that had particular consequences. First, as this was considered government property, he was obliged to pay five shillings a year in rent for the land upon which the chapel and school stood. An associated difficulty of being in the location was that as land hunger became more acute, so he found his station caught in bitter disputes, mostly between the Khumalo and the Pepeta.³⁰ A third problem for Madikane was that he tried repeatedly over a number of years to obtain letters of exemption from Native Law but despite the full support of local government officials and missionaries alike, his occupation of location land was cited each time as the reason for refusal, and so he continued to be subject to Native Law.³¹ Not connected directly to the land issue, it is also worth noting that although he was a full-time preacher, he was never an ordained minister: he remained an 'ordinary' *kolwa*. Further to this same point, his station was not recognised by government as a 'mission' after 1903, since there was no white missionary in attendance.

Madikane left a record about himself in his exemption applications rather different in scope to the records collected by Stuart or Plant, though once again the requirements of this official process shaped the nature of the evidence he disclosed. His parents were named as Mlomowetole and Zililo (both by then deceased) and his 'Christian' wife as Sivono. He named his previous wives as Madelwase and Mafihlwase.³² Different applications contain slightly different details about his children; the following were submitted as those borne to Sivono: Nomdingo (1877),

²⁴ H. Hughes interview with F G Msomi, Amatata, 7 October 1988

²⁵ Fayle's diary, 24 May 1890, Secretary of Native Affairs Minute Papers (SNA) 1/1/125 (632/1890)

²⁶ SNA 1/1/113 (258/1889)

²⁷ Report by Rev S. Pixley in *Missionary Herald* XCIX, 2, February 1903, 70-71.

²⁸ H. Hughes interview with F G Msomi, Amatata, 7 October 1988

²⁹ Pixley, *Missionary Herald*, 70-71.

³⁰ Hughes, 'Politics and society in Inanda'

³¹ See correspondence at SNA I/I/186 (678/1894) and SNA I/I/238 (2498/1897).

³² Application form in SNA I/I/238 (2498/1897)

Agrippa (1880) Nehemiah (1886) and Nomhlangano (1891).³³ Previous applications had mentioned Qandeyana (1878), Sopane (1884) and Whit (1891) as well.³⁴ Two sons named elsewhere, Mabhelubhelu and Muziwengcuba, had in all likelihood been born to former wives and may have come to live with Madikane when their mothers died in the 1890s. All this evidence suggests that he was in his late 40s when he first became a father; however, it is more likely that earlier children were never recorded in his applications, as they belonged to his previous life and/or had already reached adulthood.

When Mqhawe decreed that his heir, Mandlakayise, should acquire some education in the United States, Mabhelubhelu was chosen to accompany him: it would seem that an attempt was being made to replicate the relationship between Madikane and Mqhawe in the succeeding generation. Assisted by John and Nokutela Dube, who were then studying in Brooklyn, the two arrived in 1897 and entered Slater Academy. Mandlakayise remained in America until 1904; Mabhelubhelu never returned to South Africa and it is not known what became of him.³⁵

Madikane continued to deputise for Mqhawe at several meetings with magistrates and missionaries, and he and Mqhawe together served on the first Board of Trustees of Dube's Zulu Christian Institute at Ohlange. It was at this point in his life that he spoke to Stuart, a stressful and difficult time for the Qadi chiefdom as Mqhawe, now very elderly, had adopted a combative posture towards the colonial authorities. In 1903, Madikane had commented that 'always meddling with the native question will never lead to its solution';³⁶ by 1905 he was of the view that

Things change; the ways of people are not the same in all times. When Tshaka was king people went according to his ways. When Dingane came to rule they followed his ways. When Mpande began his reign, again they followed different ways. In the time of Mpande we in Natal had good fortune. The English came, and times were easy, and there was happiness... But now there is a restlessness in the hearts of all the people. What is now clear is that we shall be done harm, we shall die, we shall be done harm by the government...³⁷

This was precisely the time that Mqhawe was instructing his people not to pay the lately-imposed poll tax; after strenuous efforts by among others George Armstrong and John Dube, he altered his position and the Qadi began paying up.³⁸ Far from being critical of his chief's stance, though, Madikane's prescient remarks made clear where he saw the danger to lie: squarely with the government. It may be significant that he provided information on the Lala at this time, given that it carried strong connotations of seeking protection from the British at Natal.³⁹

On Mqhawe's death in 1906, it was none other than Madikane who arranged the *amahlambo* (cleansing) ceremonies at Ekumanazeni, Mqhawe's homestead.⁴⁰ Thereafter, it is as if he was preparing for his own death:

The Rev. Madikane called a number of men and told them that he would like to have his coffin bought while he was still alive, so that he could see it and determine whether he fitted well in it or not. His sons therefore bought him a coffin. Madikane did not take it back to the

³³ SNA I/1/238 (2498/1897)

³⁴ SNA I/1/186 (678/1894)

³⁵ H. Hughes, *First President: A Life of John L. Dube* (Johannesburg, Jacana, 2011), 83.

³⁶ Interview 16 August 1903, *JSA2*, 49.

³⁷ Interview 27 May 1905, *JSA2*, 54.

³⁸ Hughes, *First President*

³⁹ Wright, 'A. T. Bryant and the Lala', 367.

⁴⁰ SNA 1/1/356-3905/1906; report in *Ilanga lase Natal*, 23 November 1906.

workshop but kept it in his house. It is said that he would look at it each night before he went to sleep.⁴¹

He sent one of his sons, Qandeyana, to America. His experiences there, by contrast with Mabelubhelu's, was recorded in several ways. Calling himself Madikane Qandeyana Cele, he produced a short autobiography for the *Southern Workman*,⁴² in which he, like Plant (no doubt for their different reasons), described for his readers 'one of the most warlike tribes of Africa', the Zulus, who lived along the Indian Ocean in south-eastern Africa. His father was 'a governor under the King of the Zulus, until white missionaries landed there and he became civilized' – it was after this that he had been born. He described an early life herding Madikane's cattle, acquiring some book learning in the local school and assisting his father to teach other pupils. Again it was through the efforts of John Dube that he had entered first Slater Academy and then, in 1907, Hampton Institute. He proved a star at Hampton

as a stage performer and public speaker. Playing on the curiosity of Americans with 'primitive' and 'uncivilized' societies, he staged a play, 'For Unkulunkulu's [God's] Sake,' in which he dressed in Zulu garb, played musical instruments, sang Zulu songs, and regaled audiences with tales of growing up hunting 'tigers' and other wild beasts. The underlying theme of the play was how mission Christianity could elevate uncivilized Africans.⁴³

Though embellished for his audiences, much of Qandeyana's appreciation of his cultural roots would have been derived from the teachings of his father and (we must assume) his mother; in this sense, his performances represented yet another continued cultural presence for Madikane. Popular on the lecture circuit, Qandeyana shared platforms with the likes of Booker T. Washington and Robert Moton and spoke at Harvard.⁴⁴ In 1913, he married one of his Hampton classmates, Julia Smith, before returning to Natal to continue where Madikane had left off as a result of his recent passing.⁴⁵ The eldest surviving son, Muziwengcuba, tried unsuccessfully to claim the church building, believing it to be his rightful inheritance.⁴⁶ By the 1920s, Qandeyana Cele and John Dube were the two largest African landowners in the Inanda district.⁴⁷ Qandeyana won further fame as a protagonist of Natalie Curtis's *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent* when it appeared in 1920.⁴⁸

Madikane maintained close associations with the 'traditionalist' world of Mqhawe and the 'Christianised' worlds of John Dube and the white missionaries at Inanda; for him, it was a question of 'and-both', rather than 'either-or'. His ability to move freely across boundaries can only be understood by juxtaposing the contents of various archives and publications, since these tend to focus on different 'parts' of his life story. His case must lead us to reflect on a wider issue: where it was once thought that a deep and unbridgeable chasm divided Christians and traditionalists,

⁴¹ Interview with F G Msomi, Amatata, 13 October 1988

⁴² Reproduced in full in N. Curtis, *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent* (New York and Boston, G. Schirmer, 1920), 57-60.

⁴³ D. Anthony and R. Edgar, 'Religion and the (Black) South Atlantic', in *Annotation* 30, 1, 2002.

⁴⁴ Anthony and Edgar, 'Religion'.

⁴⁵ R. T. Vinson and R. Edgar, 'Zulus abroad: cultural representations and educational experiences of Zulus in America, 1880-1945', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33, 1, 2007, 43-62, for a fuller account of the Celes in America; on Julia Smith, I am grateful for the email communication from Richard Woodward, Virginia Museum, Dec 2013.

⁴⁶ Interview with F G Msomi, Amatata, 13 October 1988

⁴⁷ Evidence of T J Allison, *Minutes of Evidence of Natal Native Land Committee 1918*, 291

⁴⁸ N. Curtis, *Songs and Tales*.

we now need to be alive to the many other cases like his that undoubtedly exist in the record, for it is certain that such stories await proper recognition.