Interview One – Retired principle and ‘Motseta’ of the Ga-Masemola Royal Family and Masemola Tribal Authority Pseudo name: Mr Communications)

Agreed to recording and documentation of interview, but not to identify his identity.

15 June 2022

On a chilly morning in a traditionally warm winter area, the day starts with the clucking of chickens. Ga-Masemola is located between the mountains of the Sekhukhune area, give a perfect view of mountains perfectly shaped by rocks one would swear were man made. A breath-taking mountainous scene. On this day the researcher is scheduled to conduct her first interview. The said interview, with Mr Communications, a well-informed, knowledge silo of Ga-Masemola customs, history, politics and experience. Mr Communications was kind enough to come meet the researcher at her residence. Mr Communications, a teacher by professional and retired principle. Upon his approval, warm greetings were exchanged between Mr Communications and the researcher, because unbeknown to the researcher, knew her family quite well, particularly her paternal family.

The interview questions were conducted in the English language which Mr Communications has a good comprehension and mastering of; however, Mr Communications was free to respond in Sepedi. Mr Communications preferred we speak in SePedi because we were both BaPedi and the interview would have a natural flow and clear communication between himself and the researcher. The researcher begun by explaining to Mr Communications what the research study is about and the purpose of holding this interview and presenting the study information documents and interview consent forms. After all ethical matters were addressed, the researcher begun the interview.

**“The way you raise your children will mould/ guide them into the future” / “The way you raise your children will be the way they are guided into the future”**

Mr Communications is a member of the Ga-Masemola Tribal Authority. He is a messenger and fulfils a vital role in communication channels of the Tribal Authority. He facilitates communication for, with and between the Royal Family, with the people, including other stakeholders such as the church. The Ntsabeleng family have historically played and continue this role. His father and various of his family members are a pillar to the Royal Family and a liaison for especially the religious bodies in the Royal Family. This is hereditary role, that is assigned to his family. The role is done without compensation. His not only lives under traditional authority, but he is an elder who is tasked with the everyday practice, living testimony of the Ga-Masemola traditional customs inclusive of values and norms, practices and protocols of being.

**“Bogoshi/ Traditional leadership”**

Q1: What is tradition? What is Bokgoši?

‘Kakaretso ya sitso sa batho’ – The holding together of people’s way of life, or the continuation of people’s way of life. We carry together with us in our bloodline and continue with the values, norms, practices and protocols which we as people believe we can live under. The continuation of the authority we live under even after our own existence has passed.

When we are talking about Bokgoši, we are actually talking about our ancestors ‘Badimo’, we are talking about ‘diKomma’ and people. This is what makes up tradition in Ga-Masemola.

Q2: Follow up question from the statement above: Do the people of Ga-Masemola contribute to ‘the way of life’ (to the values, norms and protocols or rather customs) which they live under?

It is actually the people, alongside the Kgoši who come together in mind and spirit to determine their tradition, or the type of authority they want to live under. This is what informs the Kgoši’s authority and guides their leadership. The people’s understanding of reality, the times in which people are living under inform their conceptions about the authority they want to live under. Hence, the continued practice of these living practices and protocols. The Kgoši through their leadership is the manifestation of peoples’ way of life. Each ‘tribe” or group has their own way of life or authority under which they live under.

Q3: What is it that tradition is doing in this community that makes people opt to live under traditional authority?

According to me, we as the people saw it fit to continue to live by the ideas and subsequent prescripts which governed those who came before us because they created, mediated and developed these laws. To live under these ideas and prescripts and follow the relevant practices that come with these ideas.

Q4: Where does the authority of ‘Mošate’ Royal Family come from? What is the source of the Royal Family’s authority and leadership?

Historically, Bokgoši was taken through ‘li rumo’, the Royal leadership was won through battles and wars. Historically, leadership was won through violence and conflict, where a man’s power and authority was seen through his ability to conquer and defeat other men. Your peers would begin to respect you from this moment on. You became a leader when you have conquered and defeated others and others respect your authority. Gradually things changed, ideas around leadership changed and developed through the pre-colonial times.

As a result of the many battles and wars for the leadership position, people started determining who was to become their leader according to their ideas of leadership. Following these wars and the conquering of others, people decided that the system of hereditary leaders would be initiated because of the past which was determined by violence. The system of hereditary leaders determined that the first-born male child from the candle wife, would become king. **The candle wife is a royal born wife of the king who is married by the people of the king’s community through contribution of every household for her ’lobola’. The contribution for her ‘lobola’, i.e., cows, come from the king’s nation and not from the king’s kraal. She is not the king’s wife, but the mother of the community. It is she who will give birth to the people’s future king and leader.**

Q5: What gives legitimacy to the Royal Family?

The people’s voluntary submission to their tradition. People’s allegiance to ‘Mošate’ as the primary and supreme leadership structure and custodians of the Ga-Masemola customs and protocols.

Q6: Who supports the Royal Family in the execution of their duties and responsibilities?

The Royal Family does not lead alone, however, we lead as a group. There are ‘Bakgomma’ who are family elders, previously only the king’s male relatives. However, today also includes women. ‘Bakgomma’ are members of the Royal Family lineage, who make up ‘Mošate of Ga-Masemola’.

‘Batseta’ are the members who are the gatekeepers to the Royal Family. They are tasked with communication channels for the Tribal Authority, and the community. They ensure that the correct protocols are followed when one wants to communicate with the Royal family and the various channels within the community.

These groups of people help the Kgošikgadi lead. The Kgošikgadi does not prosecute, but rather adjudicates between the everyday matters of people of this community.

\*He made parallels to how a modern court works and the layout of the court and the respective duties of the court staff, particularly the magistrate who is adjudicates between matters.

Q7: What is the role of the community?

The community has to identify issues within the community. They then have to communicate with ‘Batseta’ regarding the issue so that it may be brought to the Kgošikgadi’s attention. The traditional leaders will then delegate ‘Motseta’ to organise a community gathering where every member of the community is called to participate in discussions regarding the particular issue. The community is tasked with not just identifying a particular issue, but also coming together and deliberating on the issue and finding possible solutions or outcomes of the issue. The community is tasked with implementing and entrenching the conclusions or resolutions reached. The community is also tasked with implementing and entrenching the laws under which they want to live.

Q8: What characterises traditional leaders and traditional authority in Ga-Masemola?

The protocols which community members and traditional leaders follow and obey are what keeps the system of traditional authority functional. Following the rules of being and behaving.

Q9: Why do you follow traditional authority?

Let me say that, when I was born, I found people in Ga-Masemola, including my own family and many others who have come before me living in this particular way. I continued to follows the values, norms, practices and protocols which governed those who have come before me. I did not want to be the exception. I want to be guided by the same protocols as my community members.

Q10: How do you practice tradition?

For instance, when something happens in the community or in the Royal Family, being a ‘Motseta’ I ensure I follow all protocols of communication for the Royal Family and the people. I ensure I follow the rules set out on communication on different circumstances and the dissemination of that communication or information. I also have to report back on each and every communication to both the Royal Family and the people. Traditional authority or the rule of tradition is living. It is what we do and practice every day because it is part and parcel of who I am. It is about mediating the everyday issues of people living together.

Q11: How would you compare your duties as a ‘Motseta’ today, post 1994 vs pre-1994? How would you compare these two eras as a ‘Motseta’?

Let me say that traditional leadership before 1994 wielded great power and authority compared to now in 2022. Many of the duties of traditional leaders today are tackled and performed by the municipality and the magistrate. Things can even escalate as far as a traditional leader being put inside court dockets and being charged, which didn’t happen before. Traditional leaders according to the constitution must obey government.

Before traditional leaders were the final adjudicator in matters between people, whereas now, he plays a symbolic role, especially in the community.

Q12: How would you describe the community of Ga-Masemola today?

Today the community of Ga-Masemola has changed significantly as compared to before the 1994 era. The community experiences different events today that did not happen before such as crime. The community has degenerated, because there are people who do as they please when they please, as a result the community itself has moved in a different direction. The Royal Family is undermined because they are no longer the mediators and representatives of the community. The Royal Family is undermined by those who believe they understand politics more the Royal Family and its various members. Even the communication channels and how people communicate has been affected post 1994.

Q13: What are the challenges which started post 1994, as a result of moving away from traditional authority?

For instance, today, if you want to build in Ga-Masemola, but you are not from here. You can negotiate with someone from Ga-Masemola whom you can enter into a property agreement with for leasing or sale. If the Queen or any member of the Royal Family or Traditional Council can approach you and sought an explanation of how this agreement took place. A person may approach the police or courts and this will cause conflict for the Kgošikgadi or the representative of the Traditional Council or Royal Family. This will cause disagreement between the parties involved. The democratic response to the situation would be to allocate a suitable place for said person, which in itself is a problem because you are removing a person from where they would like to live or conduct business.

Secondly, and most importantly, we no longer know who is ruling or leading us. It is Kgošikgadi or is it the municipality?

Q14: Given that you no longer know who is in charge, if it were up to you, who should rule or lead you?

I am a resident of Ga-Masemola, I choose to be led by a Kgoši.

Q15: Why?

Our custom dictates that a Kgoši who is to lead, has to have those who follow him. The people or community can only be that said group under the leadership and rule of a Kgoši. That traditional leader has to be a natural leader who isn’t elected or appointed, but holds such power by virtue of birth right, which is his bloodline. He is a hereditary leader. He is not like those in municipal structures who is elected or appointed. He is a natural leader who rules for as long as his lifetime. Situated at the place where he leads.

Q16: What is the value of traditional authority? What about this leadership convinces you follow and obey its authority?

Let me say that, when traditional authority or rule by traditional leadership functions properly and in order, people will respect the system, its institutions and structures. But, when it is not functioning properly and in order, people will seek other leaders, in this instance, they will seek municipal leaders. When the traditional leader leads his/her people well and with their support, there is nothing they cannot achieve as a collective. But, because today people are more self-interested and greedier, we see them going against the Kgoši in pursuit of their self-interest as oppose to the group interest.

Q17: Given what you have said above, how you describe or characterise the current relationship between the municipality and Kgošikgadi?

In some instances, there is consensus between the municipality and our Kgošikgadi, but in some instances, you will find that they do not agree on certain things because municipal workers are under the impression that they are above the Kgošikgadi.

For example, when we the residents of Ga-Masemola want water, we approach our Kgoši and tell her that we are thirsty. Her response is that by law her authority and jurisdiction on such matters does not go as far as providing water or any other service. She is only legislated to take up the matter with the municipality and be a contender for the communities’ interest without power to effect any change because they may attend municipal meeting, but they do not have voting power. Before being part of the municipal proceedings the Kgoši’s have to be voted in the municipal council.

When we approach the municipality about our matter, they will tell you that our traditional leader is the one who must give them directive or notice of such an issue and not the residents. The municipality collects levies and taxes and has the resources to bring about change. If you are understanding me, then you will see that it’s not the traditional leader who has the power to effect change, but the municipality because of the resources and infrastructure they have at their disposal. So, the municipality has power over traditional leaders because of their resources and infrastructure.

Q18: What do you think is the reason why the duties such as the collecting of levies, formerly performed by traditional leaders are now under the domain of municipality? What has changed this?

The one who controls the money controls us all. Like I have explained above, the taking up of duties formerly done by traditional leaders by the municipality is about control and power. The traditional leader is discredited today because he no longer performs his/ her duties for his people. He/she is no longer powerful because he/she has to take directive from the municipality because of money and resources. We all live under the mercy of municipalities because they collect all our levies and taxes and as a result dictate who benefits and who does not benefit. Traditional leaders, like us people are subdued by the fact that we all have to listen to the government particularly the municipality.

Q19: Given the situation you have explained to me above, given the lack of power by both people and traditional leaders, how can traditional leaders still play a more meaningful role under the status quo?

The national government, and not the provincial or municipal government, have to reinstate the powers of traditional leaders legislatively in democratic dispensation.

The traditional authority does not have power in this era because they do not wield any resources or have money, however, government does. The government collects levies and taxes from everyone, so should therefore, legislate and share budgets with traditional leaders so that they can perform the functions they previously performed outside the municipal system. If the government can recognise and acknowledge the authority of traditional leaders and their significance in their areas through the democratic processes of participation, i.e., legislation and the budget, then traditional leaders will surely lead properly without constraint. Currently, the municipality has more power than traditional leaders, which is not working as can be seen with government efforts and their failed transformation aspirations. Traditional leaders are naturally positioned in areas where they lead and live with people.

Q20: What can you tell me about the relationship between the traditional leaders in Ga-Masemola and other leaders of other affiliations such as education, the church, health, etc.?

According to me, I see the various leaders of Ga-Masemola working together in a respectable and functional way. The people of Ga-Masemola regardless of affiliations continue to collectively respect traditional authority as the primary leadership and governance structure.

Q21: Do you know the Native Administration Act of 1927?

No, I do not.

The researcher briefly explains the above act to the participant and a conversation about legislation.

Q22: If I may ask, are they any previous legislation of the former governments that you know of? Any legislation that has direct effect in Ga-Masemola? An effect to traditional authority and traditional leaders specifically?

Let me put it this way, many of the former government legislations and political configurations were mostly in the interest of whites and therefore only presented to the white world. They made laws which they communicated in the white world, but imposed, most times forcefully imposed in the black world. We were expected to obey and follows laws that we did not know of. The administrations ruled through dictatorship and authoritarian rule in the black world. I can even argue that even today, out traditional leaders are coerced into their current unidentified rules. Traditional leaders today are coerced into playing the colonial and apartheid roles in a different reality, particularly in rural areas. Very often the time traditional leaders are not consulted in anything legislation related to traditional authority or them or their people. However, government continues to give a perception, structure and modus operandi of traditional leaders without their input.

Apartheid government and democratic dispensation government have adopted the same strategy when it comes to traditional leadership. If you can look at the various legislations adopted since 1994, you will see there is a continued effort to disempower and disorientate traditional governance structures through legislation and budget constraints. The alternating of traditional authority and traditional leadership via policy, academia perception and many other ways.

“Sein Phatudi” During the Bantustan era the people of Ga-Masemola lost vast land because of the legislation of the apartheid administration and structures to the detriment of the people. Masemola use to cover a wide area and communities, however, today due to the successive administrations, are lost and the people displaced. This was deliberate because of the violent nature it had initially took, but now the coercion is unseen to those not affected by the various legislation and government’s top-down approach to leadership.

Q23: What about traditional leadership do those who don’t live under such a system do not understand?

A king is not appointed or elected, but rather has a birth right via his bloodline of past leaders. The suppression of traditional authority should tell you about the type of power and status they use to wield before. Government should by know that Kings and Queens are custodians of identity, history, custom and place. A traditional leader only leads his people, people who voluntary give allegiance to traditional leaders because of their roles in respective communities. Traditional leadership is not for South Africa as a whole, but for people in particular geographical areas who have their own identity, history, way of being and doing.

In Masemola, the majority of people still continue to follow traditional values, norms, practices and protocols for example when there is funeral or wedding, people announce first at the Royal Family before invites are sent out and the right protocols are followed, way before the event takes place. Kgošikgadi is our mother because her gates (figuratively and literally) are always open to anyone and everyone including strangers who find themselves in our community. We as her children, want to include her in all different rites of passage we individually and collectively experience. Marriage, death, unions and many other events are important events that one goes through and the blessings and presence of the Queen and the Royal Family showers the event.

Before a girl turns into a woman, she is a child and anchor in her home and for her family and community. So, as she gradually matures and grows, her role in society also changes. When she reaches the age of 35, unmarried, she can go and ask the Queen to allocate land for her and her children to build her home. She is no longer an anchor of her home, but, rather a builder of her own home and a mother figure in the community expected to lead a particular life as a woman who will teach her children the same as she was taught.

Women have always been respected in Ga-Masemola and as such certain laws were modified to support them when for instance, they are unmarried or widowed. Even in the Royal Family and Traditional Council, there are woman who are included in these structures. I must also note that legislation has also contributed to revising certain ways of doing in the community.

Historically, women were led and were not direct leaders due to the realities of the past of war and violence. Rather than seeing this as discrimination, one should also look at the reality which informed certain prescripts of history and people. As, I had mentioned earlier that those who have come before us created, discussed, mediated and developed many of our ways of life as they saw life happen to them. Every member of our society played and continues to play certain roles which also have responsibilities relative to the collective. We operated under the premise of unity and collective continuity of us BaPedi BaTau ba Ga-Masemola. When it comes to matters which involve our collective identity, self-determination and governance, we do not elect or appoint people. Our rulers and leaders are already chosen for us by those who come before us, who were far superior than us in power, authority and the ability to conquer.

Today, you will find some communities having competing claims to the Royal Family position, but, here in Ga-Masemola we have never had that because of what I explained above about those who lead us. We have always known and understood the power structure under which we live and the importance of the continuity of us as a people, well beyond those of us who are living today.

Q24: Why do you think there are competing claims to the Royal Family position?

According to me, these competing claims to the position originate from different circumstances including in areas infiltrated by the previous governments and attempts were made to dethrone the traditional leaders who were not cooperating with the governments in indirect rule. Another reason is when perhaps the one who is said to be Kgoši passes on before he can assume leadership or is not born yet. Historically a male Royal Family could occupy the position till a time in the future where the Kgoši matures to take up his late father’s role but, today a candle wife is married, who will then give birth to the future Kgoši. ‘Mohlaletsi’ as an example- Highlights matters that came up (52:32mins)

(53:32) Makes references to claims to Royal Position that have come upon Ga-Masemola. Particularly the late Kgoši Tseke V (Five) and Mabuwo III (Three) who, although he had ready passed, a candle wife was married on his behalf, so that she could give birth to the next king. Due to changing times, a leadership position only reserved for a male, can now be occupied by the candle wife, in the place of her unborn or young child who will one day be the Kgoši. We call our Queen ‘Kgošikgadi’ because she occupies the Royal position in the place of her young son, who will in the future take up the position.

Q25: What does the community of Ga-Masemola need today to alleviate the challenges faced by the community today?

We want development to be instituted by our Kgošikgadi and Traditional Authority because of their understanding of who we are, where we come from, where we are going and where we do not want to go as a people. If government could legislate that traditional leaders be guided by the laws in their respective geographical areas, and as a result, allocate funds and resources to the traditional leaders, we would be able to cater to us needs ourselves.

We want development to come to the community to lessen travelling distance and costs, infrastructure development etc., however, we want things to be guided by us as the people and not as an already prepared plan brought by municipal officials without the historical insight and localisation of the plans. There is no one size fits all plan, therefore people’s inputs when coming to the development of Ga-Masemola must be include. They should define and develop for themselves their communities. The municipality cannot punish people who do not agree with its plans via lack of service delivery, lack of funding and overriding the collective values, norms and protocols of the people. Instead, government should encourage and give space to people to define for themselves what their needs are. Development should benefit the people first and leaders after.

After matric there is no schooling institution in the community.

Q26: According to you, where do you see traditional leadership in Ga-Masemola years from now? How will it look like?

We the people of Ga-Masemola love and respect traditional authority and will continue to obey its protocols and prescripts. However, because they are people and forces who do not want traditional leadership to continue to exist, there are attempts to vilify and discredit traditional leaders. This has the effect of always spilling over to people who are lost in their identity, place of belonging and heritage, they will unfortunately be misguided by those who have bad intentions for people still respecting and living under customs. Customs that are their own, which they have created for themselves.

Q27: How are you teaching your children to continue to respect and obey traditional authority?

Every day through how they lead their lives and through the way they do and be. My very nature is grounded in tradition and the way I see and interact with the world is through the values, norms and protocols which govern us in Masemola. Who I am and how I chose to live is in the same light. My identity is rooted in our way of being and doing, which is under the leadership and guidance of traditional authority via traditional leaders.