Interview Eight - Ga-Masemola Royal Council member

(Pseudo name- Royal Elder)

Agreed to recording; documentation of interview and disclosure of his identity.

22 June 2022

Place: Masemola Traditional Council Court Hall

The interview questions were conducted in both the SePedi and English language. The researcher then followed ethical protocols presenting the study information documents and interview consent forms. After all ethical matters were addressed, the researcher then begun the interview.

Q1: What does the structure of ‘Bokgoši’ look like in Ga-Masemola, what is the hierarchy, from the Kgoši to his advisors, what are their roles, how do they work together?

Meaning that you are asking me, how does the Kgoši lead? How does he do it?

Firstly, the Kgoši works with ‘Bakgoma’, they are his male siblings, his father’s children from the smaller homes. Meaning the previous Kgoši’s wife or wives who are not the candle wife’s children. Then we have ‘Bakgomana’, who are the Kgoši’s father’s male siblings and cousins. They all help make decisions. When something is brought to the attention of the ‘Kgoši’, ‘Bakgoma’ and ‘Bakgomana’, it is brought to their attention via a ‘Motseta’. ‘Motseta’ is a royal messenger. You cannot approach a ‘Kgoši’ yourself, you have to inform the ‘Motsetsa’, who will then take up the matter with the ‘Kgoši’ on your behalf first.

You cannot just go to the ‘Mošate’ and say I am here to report this or that. There are protocols you must follow. The ‘Motseta’ will take the matter to ‘Mokgomana’. They will take the matter to the Kgoši.

The Kgoši will take up the matter further. If there is a need to consult broader, the Kgoši will do so. If she has to advise, she’ll do so depending on the matter at hand. If it needs to be referred to the Royal Council, she’ll do so.

Q2: Who are the ‘Bakgomane’?

They are the male bloodlines from the ‘Mošate’. They include other royal elders as well.

Q3: Do any of these groups include women?

Yes, there are similar royal structures for women. They handle all matters regarding and related to women and children.

As you know there is a Kgoši and Makgošikgadi/ Kgošikgadi. They both rule and lead together. Hence, there are processes and structures for women and men.

We have a Traditional Council, which is the council for the community at large.

We have the Royal Council, ‘le kgotla la bakgomana’, which is loosely translated as ‘the body of Bakgoma’. The Royal Council consists of the royal kraals, and is at ‘Mošate level.

Q3: How are traditional council members chosen?

The norm is that they are chosen from the respective ‘Kgoros’, for example the Masemola ‘Kgoro’, the ‘BaNtsabeleng’ ‘Kgoro’ in the community of Masemola. In each ‘Kgoro’ they will nominate someone who will represent their ‘Kgoro’ in the Masemola Traditional Council. The council members Masemola Traditional Council, must live in Ga-Masemola. In each of ‘Kgoros’, i.e., different groups in the nation, people will choose individuals they know or are of the perception that they will represent the Masemola community’s interest and their respective group interests. We do not vote for these members; they are chosen by the ‘Kgoro’ in which they originate from. Before it was only men, but together, people can choose a male or female to be part of the council. People look at that person’s ability to read and write, if they can listen, their level of disciple, their level of empathy, the principles they believe in, etc. A lot is considered when one is chosen.

The Kgoši cannot simply say that I want so and so to be in the council. There are processes to be followed. There are certain requirements and standards that the community looks for in these members.

Q4: Where does ‘Bokgoši’ come from?

‘Bokgoši’ is conceived/borne out of the people. It originates from the people. A person cannot be a Kgoši if he/ she does not have those who follow him. Even the people, they cannot be ‘Sechaba’ without having a Kgoši. That is how ‘Bokgoši’ is conceived.

Every nation according to their customs knows which kraals to marry into. You will never hear of our ‘Kgoši’ marry to the baPhulani nation because, they do not form part of the royal kraals we marry into. We have not record of such a marriage.

There has to be an agreement between our ‘Mošate’. The ‘Mošate’ we marry into have a long record of intermarrying. Our respective ‘Mešate’ have to agree with each other.

In our ‘Mošate’ we have to agree on where we are marrying and who we are marrying as Mmago Kgoši. We need to agree on the person who will bear our future ‘Kgoši’.

Once we as the Mošate agree on the kraal, we then take it to the nation.

We first discuss the matter as the royal family with the ‘kgadis’ who are the ‘Rakgadi’s’ of the royal family. We discuss amongst each other that we are going to marry a wife from a said kraal who will give birth to the ‘Kgoši’. Including the ‘Bakgoma’ and ‘Bakgomana’.

Q5: How did ‘Bokgoši’ function in the pre-colonial times, before external influence and interference?

When white Europeans came here, they found different black people, nations following ‘Bokgoši’. ‘Bokgoši’ that was far superior and complex then we have today. ‘Bokgoši’ that was very systematic. Black people of different nations and groups followed their own ‘Bokgoši’ specific to the group or nation and its history, place and people.

Q6: How did ‘Bokgoši’ change with the arrival of whites?

Let me say that all the laws changed, especially how we lived, our natural laws. Our total existence as black people, not just in Ga-Masemola, but everywhere. ‘Bokgoši’ like everything else changed.

Let me say that when whites arrived, they found people living and working according to their ancestral lines. Not according to books, or according to education or according to the church. People worked and lived according to their forefathers. They did so according to the prevailing laws of their ancestors.

From there on, there were contestation and negotiations, rather than domination, about how we lived and work. Our ideas of wrong and right changed.

Let me make an example, you see with a ‘Komma’, previously it could only be conducted by the ‘Kgoši’ and the royal spiritual leader of the ‘Mošate’. They were in charge of it. They conducted it strictly according to their customs and the prescribed periods. But, over time, and through changes in the society, the ‘Kgoši’ and the royal spiritual leader were consulted regarding the duration of the ‘Komma’. As a result, the duration of ‘DiKomma’ changed. ‘DiKomma’ are not hosted for long periods of time like before. Changes that influenced people’s ideas about ‘DiKomma’ was influenced by changes such as the introduction of education to rural communities. Being away from school during the schooling calendar often for the majority of the schooling calendar. People’s perception regarding DiKomma was also influenced the introduction of the church system. People were also influenced by the introduction of the western public health care systems such as the introduction of public clinics and hospitals.

The church and education were introduced by the foreign missionaries, the Lutheran church. Whites introduced their systems through the church and education because during this time all the different missionaries were white. So the different Christian teachings. They taught people about the bible and Jesus Christ. They taught people that the bible says people should do this and that, but refrain from certain things. These things often involved the customised lives people lived and how some of those customs conflicted with their religious teachings. The bible defined who people were, right and wrong. The bible enlighten people to ‘the word of God’. ‘The word of God’, and the some of their teachings were useful because it changed some of the wrongs and ills that people committed. People stopped some of their wrong behaviours. That is how, we as nations followed ‘the word of God’.

Even with schools, before their introductions, previously people did not care for school because they believed that this would teach people to be dishonest . A dishonest person who knew about things that happened in faraway places that did not involve him. But, after some time and through changes, people came to the realisation that without an education, you cannot access things like jobs due to changing patterns of labour, you couldn’t access work if you did not go to school. We realised that you remained ignorant if you didn’t have education.

People were exposed to many things due to the church and its education system. They modernised people. The bible modernised people via ‘the word of God’. This was beneficial to us. School taught you the importance of work and knowledge systems, while the bible teaches you about the wisdom God and being a just person. They go hand in hand, even if they are not the same thing.

Before people planted and harvested their own crops for sell and personal consumption and there was no need to offer your labour for profit. You worked on the field that feeds you. People had a lot of livestock which they owned for various reasons including own consumption, leasing and selling. The white government introduced the livestock tax system which negatively affected people’s ability to own livestock. Not just stock, but the ability to share and live in community with each other. We shared harvested crops, we loaned each other cattle, we shared slaughtered cattle among the community. We prevented overconsumption and waste, as well as greed.

Something else that has changed, is where we choose to build our houses or where we settled as a group. Before, we built them on mountains because to us, land is a very sacred commodity. Land is important to us. We wanted to spare the land for farming and harvesting. We didn’t just build on any open field or piece of land. The other important reason for building on mountains was that, if the enemy launched an attack, we’d be able to see them coming and hide in between the mountains. The mountain was where we lived.

The white governments co-opted people to move away from the mountains. With the introduction of the new systems mentioned above and people’s changed perceptions about things, we came out. The white governments argued that they couldn’t bring education or health care to the mountains. If people want access to these services, they would have to come to the service centres.

The white governments introduced the ideas of owning land, of building magnificent houses on the land or open fields, and of these homes having access to water.

Q7: How did the apartheid ‘homeland’, ‘Bantustans’ system affect Ga-Masemola? What were some of the changes that you witnessed here?

That white government system changed how we organise our communities and the state of those communities. The previous white governments changed where we lived and influenced how we lived; this government changed the organisation of our houses from scattered arrangements so living in compartmentalised line forms. So households with equally sized land, back-to-back and side-to-side neighbours. They dedicated the services of these communities, whether they had roads or not. If they would build infrastructure for electricity or not, if there is infrastructure, whether you will receive power or not. Water pipes and the supply therefore.

Q8: Do you recall all the ‘Kgoši’ of Ga-Masemola?

Yes, I’ll dot down a vertical diagram for you.

[[[[[HE SHARED THE GA-MASEMOLA BRIEF PROFILE HISTORY WITH ME.]]]]]

The first Kgoši of Ga-Masemola was Masemola himself. His son Mokwena was the second Kgoši. His son was Baphela. Baphela gave birth to Tseke. Then Tseke birthed Maboewe. From Maboewe, he gave to Tseke II. Tseke II gave birth to Maboewe II. And so on. (See brief profile).

The current Kgošikgadi is the MmaKgoši to Tseke V. Tsek V is the current ‘Kgoši’. His father was Maboewe IV.

The supreme ‘Kgoši’ of Ga-Masemola have other sub villages under their authority. Kgoši Tseke I was a great Kgoši who fought in the wars of Ga-Masemola.

Maboewe I was a standalone Kgoši who was very strong and militant. He fought and won over other groups in and around this area. He conquered other groups.

Kgoši Sefuka, Kgoši Ntabeleng,Kgoši Maphuta, Kgoši Mokapa, Thalane, they are all under him. He is the great Kgoši of the Batau people of Ga-Masemola.

Q9: According to you, how does the Constitution define ‘Bokgoši’ and its roles and functions in South Africa post-apartheid?

According to me, the Constitution is there, it was written by certain people for certain people, but it was certainly not written for us or our benefit. It has prescribed what ‘DiKgosi’ can and cannot do. They areas of jurisdiction.

It dictates that whatever traditional leaders are doing in their respective communities; they must involve the state. ‘Dikgosi’ do not have the final decision-making power in their communities.

Take for example the collection of tax and levies from community members by DiKgoši to finance community projects and development. This was a role performed the Kgoši. You collect taxes and levies from community members to fund community projects and development. In our community, our first clinic was built by us through ‘Kgoši Tseke V’.

Today the state is mandated to do. Clinics, roads, any infrastructure. The state collects taxes and levies, and you have to wait on the state’s discretion for projects and development via a municipality and its municipal council.

The Constitution prohibits any ‘Kgoši’ from serving out punishment for wrongdoing, especially public beatings summoned by former ‘Kgoši’. This is unlawful.

Before when ‘Kgošis’ deliberated that a public beating was a suitable punishment for a crime or offence committed, we were disincentivising community members from undermining their family rules, community rules and the ‘Mošates’ rules. We were instilling respect for authority and obedience. We believed that ‘kgati e la hlesha motho makowko’.

In the same breathe, what if you are beating someone, and that person has diabetes. You beat them on their backside, only for them to suffer a diabetic attack. This person can even die on the spot. Who will be held accountable here?

So you see, there is also positive change that the constitution brought, because we had to reconsider some of the things we did and their implications and consequences.

The Constitution has transformed some of our practices in positive ways. Made us think different about some of the things we do. A person cannot just be beaten because they have committed a crime or done wrong, rather, we can find other ways of discipling the person and changing their behaviour.

The Masemola Traditional Council is responsible for this role now. They bring parties to the table and hear all sides. The members of the council will adjudicate after hearing all matters relating to the case at hand.

Before people gathered at known public gathering spot and listened to cases and adjudicated there and then as a group.

We have changed the way we handle case, where they are heard, by who and have recourse in the western courts system if you find that you are not happy with the judgement and/or appeal outcome.

What I must also highlight is that, the Constitution has also created new problems for us as leaders and the community. The idea of abuse and what is means and how it translate has caused much confusion. Let me make an example, when a 13-year-old boy decides to kick you out of the blue. You as an adult cannot hit him back, you cannot report them at the police station because they are underage. The parents cannot disciple him by hitting him because the child can say that they are abused. How do you stop this child from kicking other strangers? How do you get him to understand that hitting others is wrong and there is consequences to it.

Q10: How do you interpret, “under Constitutional imperatives”?

This means that there is no one under the law of the country. As a ‘Kgoši’ you must ensure that you adhere to the constitution and the guiding laws of the country. As a ‘Kgoši’ you have to consider the consequences of your decisions in the future. You do not want to see yourself behind a docket in court as a plaintiff or the defendant.

Before, in our customs when a judgement was decided on and you were instructed to pay a fine, let’s say a goat. The following Sunday after the judgement and a time frame was given, if it was found that you did not pay the goat as instructed to the person you wronged. We would send ‘Bakgoma’ to your place to get the payment. If you did not make arrangements for your fine before then and have not communicated to anyone regarding your inability to pay at the specified period. You were fined and also penalised. You would now be liable for a goat to the person whom you wronged and a goat to the ‘Mošate’ because ‘Bakgoma’ were now sent after you to find out what is going on and retrieve payment.

We believed in just action to each other. If you were not just, you would be liable to a just compensation to whomever you wrong and the people who must now take away from their duties and roles and resources to follow up with you to make things right with the person you wronged. However, we can no longer do this.

The democratic government has taken away the power of ‘Bokgoši’. We have authority and legitimacy derived from those whom we served, but we now lack the transformational power to serve them according to modern standards and the Constitution itself.

‘Makgoši’ can no longer dictate for themselves how the institutions of ‘Komma’ are operated. If, you will notice, today there are issues happening at ‘Dikomma’ that did not happen before. More and more initiates are dying at ‘DiKomma’ because of some of the measures introduced by the state. The customs and practices which we followed for over thousand initiates at a time, can no longer be practiced in their sacredness. The protection that came with strictly following the guidance lines of the ‘Komma’ can no longer be adhered to in full or correctly. There are now loop holes in the institution and these deaths are the result.

In our custom we know that after the Komma, after hosting 700 or 1000 people, we have to prevent the spread of any illnesses that this group might have. The 700 or 1000 people come from different villages, they have different inherited and contracted diseases or illness like TB, diabetes, asthma one has fits, etc. there are people who also have to wake up during the night because their families are ‘Baloi”, and they have to do certain things during the night.

We have to have measures to cater to the different possibilities with this large group. We performed and did certain actions to prevent illness and the spread of disease.

We have researched and investigated the reasons for the issues that happen in ‘Dikomma’ and have identified these loop holes and where they started.

People have the option of doing circumcision at the clinic which is fine, however, the doctor performing the circumcision is only there to do his job and get paid for the number of boys that he circumcises. However, what happens to the skin removed? Where does it go?

Again during the procedure did the doctor keep up or notice something more than their job at hand?

once the procedure is done, can the doctor mediate in the spiritual issues that may arise due to undergoing this process?

How we hosted ‘Komma’ was to ensure that every initiate who came was protected from the group spirits of different people from different places coming together to perform a sacred right and also protected under the group spirit to whatever that may want to attack him while there. If he had to be on medication, we ensured that, if he had demons or spirits, we had to protect him and others.

Healthcare workers do awareness and school visits to recruit people to go the clinic route and have special days reserved for those who may want to go to Dikomma, but the problem is that they go there in numbers just before Dikomma and attend Dikomma with medical problems from the clinic procedure. They are cut, but are not taken care of during the process and after. This is a problem.

How we practiced DiKomma included a lot of preventative measures and foresight in how we conducted them.

We can no longer practice a lot of our customs and traditions because of our current laws. The law does not recognise and illegitimates some of our customs and traditions.

Development of ideas, behaviour and society is very important, but equally so, the preservation of the ideas, behaviours and customs which work and are useful based on their continued use and proven results or outcomes. Our customs served to prevent things from happening before they happen. The focus is action before action is needed, rather than action after something has happened.

Q11: How can traditional leaders and other leaders in the community, i.e., religious, health, education, etc. together to do more for the community?

We currently work together in certain ways and include each other in our various programs.

However, cooperation is often hard. Members from ZCC and members of Lutheran do not see eye to eye, even though they use the same bible. We interact with all of them but we cannot force them to interact with each other.