



CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF THE GA MAWELA COMMUNITY

2.1. LOCATION

The farm St George 2 JT, which is part of a greater area known traditionally as Ga Mawela, is located in the Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality (GSDM).

The District consists of five Local Municipalities, namely Groblersdal, Marble Hall and Tubatse, Fetakgomo and Makhuduthamaga, previously spreading over both the Mpumalanga and the Limpopo provinces, but now consolidated under the Limpopo Province in accordance with proclamation No. 422 dated 27 December 2005.

Ga Mawela is situated in the Klein Dwars River valley, known traditionally as Molototsi. The Dwars River (“Moletsi”), is itself a tributary of the Steelpoort (“Tubatse”) River, which is a major tributary of the Olifants (“Lepelle”) River.

The Dwars River follows the outlay of one of the richest mineral reefs in the world – the so-called Eastern Limb of the Bushveld Igneous Complex – with valuable deposits

of chrome and platinum group metals (platinum, rhodium, palladium), and is the site of major new mining developments.

The subsidiary of Anglo American plc, known as Anglo Platinum, is at an advanced stage of the planning of the der Brochen Mine, which will impact on a number of farms in the Dwars River Valley, including the farm St George.

There are a number of other mining related developments in the locality, which have been the driving force behind the recent expansion of the towns of Steelpoort, Burgersfort, Ohrigstad and Lydenburg.

These towns are located approximately 300 kilometres from the economic hub of the Gauteng Province.

Adjacent to these towns are the impoverished settlements of the former Lebowa “homeland”, also known as the “Kingdom of Sekhukhune”, which has been an historical labour sending area for the Gauteng economy.

The settlements of GaSekhukhune include a complex mix of traditional villages, with a history as long as the occupation of the area by the BaPedi and other ethnic groups, and other settlements created as a result of the mass forced removals of communities living on “white farms” in terms of the *apartheid* policy.

The Ga Mawela community is typical of many of the communities removed from farms in the Lydenburg District of the former Transvaal Province in the period between the 1950s and 1970s .

The members of the community are scattered among various settlements and tribal authorities, including Maseven (Magolego), Ngwaabe (Rantho), GaMasha (Masha Nkotwane), Strydkraal (Masha), Mare-Ngwaritsi (Phetla), Molepane (Sekwati), Tafelkop (Matsepe) and the town of Jane Furse.

Some members of the community have established homes in the townships of Gauteng Province, but have retained cultural and familial ties to the community.

The livelihoods of the members of the community are typical of population of the Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, as reflected in recent studies conducted by the municipality for the purposes of its Integrated Development Plan (IDP), and its 2025 Development Strategy.

The following section outlines the historical use of the land by the community, its governance systems, and process of land dispossession, resulting in the scattering of members of the community in the GaSekhukhune area.

HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY

The Ga Mawela community is one of many groups that moved into the area known as the Lydenburg district in previous centuries, migrating between different places depending on external factors such as climate, conflicts and even wars.

According to the oral history of the community, the Bakone Ba Mankge group moved into area known as Ga Mawela in the early 1800s, and established itself under its Chief ("*kgoshi*") Marobele, the father of Mapale who succeeded Marobele as a chief.

Marobele is buried on the farm Richmond, adjacent to St George (Figure 1).



The community was comprised of a number of clans (*dikgoro*), including Mashilangoako, Lelengoa, Leshaba, Maredi and Magane. The Ga Mawela area was divided up among these clans, and the affairs of the community were administered accordingly.

The land was allocated by the tribal council (*moshate*) under the leadership of the Bakone ba Mankge, and these practices continued until the final dispossession of the community. The white farmers gave some recognition to this situation in earlier days, and would consult with the *kgoshi* on certain decisions on land use, including the allocation of fields to new households moving on to the farm from outside.

The *moshate* practiced a system of traditional law under which matters were first dealt with at clan level, and then referred to the *moshate*, which would refer unresolved matters further to the Kingdom of Sekhukhune for adjudication.

The community was known for its powers as rainmakers, and was consulted on such matters by the Kingdom of Sekhukhune.

There are a number of sites of sacred importance to the community on the farm St George, including pools and caves, some of which remain secret to this day.



The relationships between the Bakone ba Mankge group and the other *makgoshi* in the wider area were held together by bonds of marriage between houses, and these bonds remain strong to this day, despite the effects of dispossession on these communities as a whole.

The Ga Mawela community lived on the land by grazing their cattle, goats and sheep in the valleys and mountains of the area. Although the last recorded incidence of cattle disease in the valley was in the beginning of the last century, the communities managed this threat by grazing animals on the top of mountain ranges in the area during the hottest period in the year.

They also ploughed their fields twice in the year, producing, maize, sorghum (mabele), wheat, potatoes, sweet potatoes and varieties of indigenous beans. The community also kept pigs and chickens on the farm.

There are remains on the farm of the kraals used by the community to keep livestock, as well as the places used for grinding grains (malwala).



The social lives of the members of the community was typical of communities in the area, celebrating marriages, coming of age (initiation), births, rain and harvest. Events were also held to mourn deaths. A number of rituals were conducted, including grave cleaning and intercessions for good luck and for keeping the ancestors alive within the community.

Initiation was carried out in the farm and the remains of the initiation sites (mphato) can be seen on the farm. These initiation practices were used to transfer life-skills

from generation to generation and create a sense of belonging among the male and female members of the community.

The initiation ceremonies at Ga Mawela were praised in the whole of Bokone (south of the Steelpoort River) and Sekhukhune area (north of the Steelpoort River) as there were no casualties. The traditional healers looking after the initiates were also used by most of the chiefs in the area to strengthen their communities against enemies and ill fortune.

The Mankge community was respected for their knowledge of various ailments and traditional medicines. People came to the community seeking remedies obtained in the mountains and valleys of the area which provide a diverse habitat for a number of medicinal plants and wild fruits.

The Ga Mawela community was self sufficient in many ways and there was active trading amongst communities in the area, for tools, craft materials and medicinal herbs. The valley has a rare type of river reed for making grain baskets and the community weaved for themselves and to trade with other communities in the area. Due to the secure water sources in the valley, the community was able to trade surpluses of wheat and other crops in the broader Sekhukhune area.

As was typical of the communities living in the area before occupation of the land by white settlers, the community built furrows along the valleys to irrigate their crops. The last white farmer (van den Berg) was still using the old furrow system to channel water from the various streams to the storage dams for irrigation. There are a number of perennial streams on the property, which has provided for the water needs of the community even during dry periods.

The rain making process not only provided for farming needs of the area, but was used as a way to preserve the environment. The community believed that the ritual of rainmaking would not be successful if the environment was littered and trees destroyed. As a result community regiments (mephato) took turns in ensuring that the mountains and the village were cleansed of all foreign materials.

The community was exceptionally angry when a number of ancient trees were destroyed by the introduction of commercial farming practices by white settlers.

The community, also referred as Batshwene (Tshwene =Baboon), planted crops on the outskirts of the fields to satisfy the needs of the baboons during the harvest period. In terms of the community's beliefs, baboons were regarded as highly intelligent, and could not be killed, but were to be preserved out of respect for their

status as the tribal totem. Killing baboons was a taboo in which any person who killed a baboon would have been punished severely.

However, this changed with the white farmers coming onto the land as baboons were shot at random. In the period before permanent white settlement in the area, wild animals roamed freely in the valleys.

Young men were initiated in controlled hunting practices. Hunting expeditions were organised to also teach young men about the area and the resources in the area.

During the period while the community members were labour tenants on the property, the farmers used their labour to plant and harvest crops including, tobacco, sweet potatoes, maize, wheat and soya beans.

After the development of the Witwatersrand gold mines, members of the community began to migrate to urban centres to earn wages, some of which were sent as remittances to the families at Ga Mawela. This arrangement within households was a source of conflict with later white land owners as they began to enforce government policy that all members of households, including children were required to work twelve months without pay.

In addition it became increasingly difficult for households to retain their livestock, not only because of pressures on household labour, but as a result of confiscation of livestock by white landowners. The community was also not able to maintain their fields for the same reason.

In fact, the white landowners used the cattle belonging to the community to plough their fields, with unpaid labour from the community. In response to this abuse of their property and lives, the community hid their cattle in the mountains. The white land owner then forced them to plough the fields with their own bodies, pulling the plough under the lashes of a whip (*sjambok*).

This became unbearable for some members of the community, who left the farm, and others were arrested. This placed the leadership of the community in a very difficult position as they faced expulsion from their ancestral land and, eventually, some cattle were brought back to the farm for the use of the farmer.

THE PROCESS OF DISPOSSESSION

The history of dispossession of the community is relevant in that it is typical of the experience of dispossession among communities in the Lydenburg area, and particularly in the area surrounding St George.

The timeline (Figure 2), below, was compiled from discussions with members of the Ga Mawela community as part of the lodgment of the land claim in 1998.

Figure 2

Date	Event	Laws or policy related to event
1830s	The ancestors of the claimant group occupied the area known as Ga Mawela, a part of which is now known as the farm St George 2JT, formerly 223 (according to some correspondence in the national archives, known as Saint George 1160 or 1166), in the district of Lydenburg, in extent 2640 Morgen 234 Square Roods.	The group was allocated the land by paramount of the Pedi polity in terms of the indigenous or customary laws in operation at the time.

The names of rivers, mountains and places in the locality refer to ancestors of the Mankge group. For example, a stream on the property now known as the remaining extent of the farm is still called Mapaalspruit, after the ancestor Mapale.

The Mankge group were known as rainmakers and also were involved in the ritual initiation of Pedi chiefs in the practice of rain making.

1871	The Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek issued a Grondbrief in favour of HJG Korf. Korf sold the farm within a year.	See Deeds Register The practice of the former ZAR was to grant farms to officials in lieu of salaries cf. Delius, P, 1983, p 126ff
1871-1912	The farm as a whole was transferred between 10 successive registered owners until it became the property of JJ Smith in 1912.	See Deeds Register
1916-1922	The farm as a whole was transferred to FA Booyse and in 1917 to AW Booyse.	See Deeds Register
About 1925	The first white person arrived on the farm and informed the heads of the families comprising the Mankge group that he was the registered owner of the farm and that he wanted 3 months free labour (without pay). The Mankge group agreed to this condition under the circumstances. The labour tenancy system was established on the farm. Under this regime, the Mankge group were able to maintain their fields and cattle, largely without restriction.	The Native Land Act 1913 began a process leading to the elimination of more independent forms of tenure such as rental tenancy and sharecropping, in favour of more dependant forms of tenure such as labour tenancy. Black persons resident on white-owned land, who were regarded as “squatters” by law, increasingly begin to feel the effects of the so-called Transvaal Law 21 of 1895, the so-called <i>plakkerwet</i> , particularly if they refused the mandatory requirement of 3 months free labour in lieu of wages in return for the right to stay on the land (labour tenancy).

1922-	The farm as a whole is transferred to	See Deeds Register
1955	JJ Smith (again) and is later subdivided into Portion A “Erfdeel” and a Remaining Extent. In the course of the next 33 years the two portions of the farm were divided into one-third shares resulting from the deceased estates of the various members of the Smith family.	The Masters and Servants Law (Transvaal and Natal) Amendment Act, 1926, bound labour tenants to a particular farmer and extended free labour requirements in terms of labour tenancy contracts from three to six months.

1945

At this time there are 11 households living on the farm, which have homesteads, fields and cattle.

The Mankge group was required to render 6 months free labour without pay, as was the wide-spread practice in the Lydenburg district (see Schirmer, 1994: p121).

Some members of the Mankge group refuse to work under these conditions and were evicted. These were:

Nkwapeng William Mankge
Jacob Nkgolwane Mankge

The Native Service Contract Act, 1932, extended labour tenancy contracts to the entire family for a 6 month period. The Act contains a whipping clause.

Chapter IV of the Native Trust and Land Act, 1936, was proclaimed in the Lydenburg district in 1937. Chapter IV repealed the *plakkerwet*, but enacted new eviction procedures. Section 38 of the Act gave all Black families evicted as a result of its provisions a claim on land in the so-called Native Trust area i.e. farms acquired by former SA Development Trust. Labour tenants had to be registered at a Native Commissioner's office, and in terms of the state-regulated contracts, labour tenants had to provide at least 4 months free labour. In terms of the practice of the time, an average farm was said to require five labour tenants working for six months a year. Labour Tenant Control Boards could order farmers to evict surplus labour tenants. A "native" unlawfully residing on the land could, after an enquiry by a local native commissioner, be ejected from the land summarily by the police. In 1938, the Native Affairs Department agreed, as a result of pressure from white farmers in the Lydenburg district, to increase the required period of free labour from four months to 6 months (see Schirmer, 1994: p 123)

1955 The various **shares in the two portions of the farm were consolidated** (Certificate of Consolidated Title T31480/5) and the **farm was divided into three portions, 1,2 and a Remaining Extent.** See Deeds Register

These portions were divided among three members of the Smith family: Willem Abraham Smith (**Portion 1**), Jacomina Hendrina Ackerman (**Portion 2**) and Elsie Margaretha Susanna Claasen (**Remaining Extent**)

1956 EMS Claasen sold the **Remaining Extent** to JH Ackerman, owner of Portion 2. See Deeds Register

1945-59 The farm was visited regularly by police from Lydenburg who conducted pass inspections.

In 1957 pass arrests were made, and people not working on the farm were jailed for 3-4 months. Some people refused to provide labour under these stricter conditions. They were evicted with their households. These included:

Buti Mankge

Mohlogoane Mankge

Tšhubelela Mankge

Lekgema Mankge

1958 **Portion 1** was divided into shares among the heirs of WA Smith. See Deeds Register

1959 JH Ackerman sold **Portion 2 and the Remaining Extent** of the farm to George Edgar Barnes. The Mankge group gave Barnes the name “Tang”, alluding to his cruelty.

Families were required to work 12 months without cash wages, although they did receive some payment in kind e.g., bags of maize. They were also required to reduce the number of cattle grazing on the farm. As a result of the restrictions imposed, they did not have enough time to grow crops independently.

See Deeds Register

The Native Trust and Land Act, 1936, was amended by the Native Trust and Land Amendment Act, 1954, particularly to ensure stricted enforcement by Labour Tenant Control Boards of provisions on labour tenancy, particularly to encourage farmers to employ Blacks as full-time labourers. The amendment required farmers to register labour tenants annually, and the registration fee for labour tenants was increased progressively. The number of labour tenant families was restricted to five.

The amendment removed the provision in the 1936 Act placing a binding provision on the Native Affairs Department to find alternative land for Blacks evicted as a result of the law.

During this period the state purchased a number of new farms within the “released areas” defined under the Native Trust and Land Act, 1936, was amended by the Native Trust and Land Amendment Act, 1954.

These farms were used to resettle thousands of households removed from farms in the neighbouring white areas in so-called “closer settlements” (rural townships) with minimal access to land for farming purposes.

- 1963** GE Barnes sells **Portion 2 and the Remaining Extent** of the farm to Jan Christiaan Nel. Families are still required to work 12 months without cash wages. Families manage to grow crops on their fields.
- Native Trust and Land Act, 1936, as amended
- 1967** The last remaining member of the Mankge group living on Portion 1 (on the border of the neighbouring farm Richmond) is evicted. He is:
- Shere “Boy” Mankge
- 1969** JC Nel sells **Portion 2 and the Remaining Extent** of the farm to Johannes Hermanus van den Berg. Van den Berg, known as “Mogatiane”, a name which refers to his cruelty, started to pay people cash wages (10c/day for adults, 5c/day for children).
- The Bantu Laws Amendment Act, 1964, repealed the Native Service Contract Act, 1932, and further amended Chapter IV of the Native Trust and Land Act, 1936, effectively setting the scene for the final abolition of labour tenancy in most parts of the country by the mid-1970s.

1959- By 1959, after persistent pass
1986 arrests, only five of the original
eleven households living on Portion 2
and the Remaining Extent of the
farm remained.

Members of these families are
subjected to increasingly harsh
conditions over time until in 1986
families were not allowed any fields
for ploughing, and families left the
farm gradually under the
circumstances. They were:

Gantshe Mankge

Tsibiši Leshaba

Lepono Mankge

Mpurana Mankge

In 1986, only the household of
Burwana Mankge remained.

The Native Trust and Land Act, 1936, was
amended by the Native Trust and Land
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labour tenants was increased
progressively. The number of labour
tenant families was restricted to five.

1987

After Burwana Mankge died in 1986, his widow remained on the property until she was arrested and evicted, together with the members of the household i.e. children and daughter-in-law, from her home in 1987. The reasons given for the eviction was that she was old and her children were working elsewhere. She did not have time to harvest her crops.

Those who stay on the farm today have become ordinary farmworkers.

The eviction was probably done in terms of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, 1951, alternatively the Trespass Act, 1959.

The members of the community are scattered among various settlements and tribal authorities, including Maseven (Magolego), Ngwaabe (Rantho), GaMasha (Masha Nkotwane), Strydkraal (Masha), Mare-Ngwaritsi (Phetla), Molepane (Sekwati), Tafelkop (Matsepe) and the town of Jane Furse.

RECONSTRUCTING THE COMMUNITY

The land claim process has resulted in the reversal of the process of dispersal of the members of the various clans and their component households.

The community, under the leadership of the late *kgoshi* Maruping Isak Mankge, and his brother, Mabutswe Lazarus Mankge, who was elected Chair of the Ga Mawela Land Claims Committee, has held numerous meetings of the clans in various locations to obtain a mandate to proceed with lodging the land claim, as well as for subsequent decisions.

This process has resulted in the recording of oral history, which had been submerged in the diaspora, initiating the healing of the pain felt by members of the community as a result of humiliation by the white landowners and the apartheid state, and the restoration of various traditions among the younger generation.



This has included the recruitment of specialized skills among the different generations, particularly youth who have overcome their context and studied in institutions of higher learning.

It needs to be stated that, despite some progress made by the broader community profile is consistent with the demographics of the Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality.

The next section will set out in detail the demographics of the area and its settlements of which the community have become a part in the decades after dispossession.