



Charred and scarred: Property, such as the Baphalane Traditional Council office (left), as well as residents (right), are in the line of fire in this battle. Photos: Simon Fidelis Luyenga

# Kgosi lineage fight drags on

The Bakwena Baphalane ba Ramokoka are being sidelined in the power struggle between three contenders

Athandiwe Saba

**A** North West community has been caught up in a bloody feud while the government drags its feet over a 2014 report into a disputed chieftainship.

The turf war between incumbent chief James Ramokoka and Bosman Ramokoka over the chieftainship of Ramokokastad formed part of the Mafereka Commission on Traditional Leadership Disputes and Claims Report, which was set up by the North West government.

Since the report's finalisation, a third claimant, George Ramokoka Mokoka, has joined the dispute. He claims his eldest uncle's son, Nathaniel Ramokoka, is the rightful heir.

The report is yet to be released, despite the commission having submitted it to the department of cooperative governance and traditional affairs two years ago. It is now on Premier Supra Mahumapelo's desk.

Half an hour from opulent Sun City along a dirt road is the village of Ramokokastad. Its residents live in constant fear while the Ramokokas fight for power.

"This issue has dragged on for years and it's not about money. It's about controlling this village — yet we are the ones living in fear. Someone will die soon," says one resident.

Another resident says: "The burning and the beatings have torn this community apart. Everyone lives in fear that they might be next."

He points to the traditional council office that was burned late last year.

"For a year now the villagers can't get services. When we need proof of address from the traditional leaders we can't get it."

Just days after the council office was set on fire, a community hall was also torched.

Then, on the other side of the village in the hills, James's four-bedroom house and his mother's house were set alight.

The village was just starting to come to terms with last year's violence when three people close to James were accused of trying to set alight George's lavish house in the village.



**Not about the money: The traditional council offices (above) and community hall were set on fire in the battle between the two Ramokoka brothers, whose houses were also torched.**

**It's about power: James Ramokoka (left) the incumbent chief, is being challenged by Bosman and also George on behalf of Nathaniel**

A police source says a gang of men arrived at the Mogwase police station, with three men in tow.

"They said the three, who were brutally beaten, had vandalised George's house so they must be arrested. The only proof they could produce was an orange Salomon sneaker [which they said] had left footprints at the house," said the officer.

But the account by Freddie Ramokoka (George's cousin) of the event differs. On the evening of September 2, he was kidnapped from his house by six men, according to a statement he made, which the *Mail & Guardian* has seen.

He says the men beat him and dragged him to a nearby bush where they continued to "torture me with spanners and sticks", saying that he had burned George's house and that he should implicate the chief's younger brother, Mogomotsi.

"I did and they took me to George's house where [they had] two of my friends [including Mogomotsi]."

George instructed people to "beat us" in sight of many onlookers. "He kicked me a lot," reads Freddie's statement.

The police source said one of the three men was sent to hospital because "his injuries were really bad. And the other, I think Freddie, was limping very badly."

It is believed the three fled to Pretoria once they were released on bail, after a police officer advised them that they were no longer safe in Ramokokastad.

Freddie and his friends said they could not comment because the matter was sub judice. But he did say he was innocent. "I know I did nothing wrong because every time George kicked [Mogomotsi], he said: 'Your grandfather stole the chieftaincy

**'Tell us who is chief or else ...'**

North West Premier Supra Mahumapelo must, by next week, commit to making a decision on the chieftainship of Bakwena Baphalane ba Ramokoka or face the consequences.

A lawyer for one of the three men claiming the title of kgosi told Mahumapelo this week that should he not do so, he will face "a punitive cost order against you, as the premier".

Mahumapelo has been sitting on a report into the leadership dispute since last year, a lawyer for Bosman Ramokoka said in a letter of demand, "disrespecting and ignoring the rights" of the Ramokokastad residents.

Both Bosman Ramokoka and George Ramokoka Mokoka are laying claim to the chieftainship of the people currently ruled by James Ramokoka. George is claiming it on behalf of his cousin, Nathaniel.

Various supporters have blamed clashes between them on the ongoing uncertainty about future leadership of the community, which controls land rich in platinum and other minerals, and claims considerable royalties and rental income.

There are also swirling mutual accusations of back-hand deals with mining companies, embezzled rental payments for farms, and salaried government posts doled out as favours.

The dispute was investigated in early 2013. By November 2014 a report had been sent to Mahumapelo, Co-operative Governance Minister Des van Rooyen told the Bosman group in a recent exchange of letters.

And the premier was supposed to make a decision within 60 days, the minister said.

Mahumapelo's office could not this week definitively say whether he had received the letter of demand from the Bosman group. He was not available to answer questions.

The disputing parties have claimed instances of fraud by one another, and at least one has demanded DNA tests to settle genealogy — with the suggestion that ancestors may have to be exhumed.

"We need to settle this thing now, or people are going to get badly hurt," said a representative for one of the groups. He insisted this was a warning, not a threat. — *Phillip de Wet*

from mine." Freddie added that "the truth will be told in court".

George claims he is the victim. "Yes, I was charged with assault, but not kidnapping, and it's all wrong."

He says the night his house was doused with petrol he found the culprits by tracking their footprints.

"I drove to his [Freddie's] house and asked him about his Salomon pair of takkies. He accompanied me to my house," said George.

He added that when residents heard that Freddie had confirmed the chief had paid him to set the house alight, people battered the gates and dragged Freddie into the streets.

But earlier in his account, George said Freddie was inside the house when he made his confession.

Colonel Sabatha Mokgwabone said that in the past two years Mogwase station has registered various cases related to members of the Ramokoka lineage. The cases include arson, attempted arson, assault, grievous bodily harm and kidnapping.