

# 'We cannot believe that you would make us foreigners in the land of our birth'

Text by Marj Brown



*We have lived and farmed at Braklaagte since 1906.*

Photographs by Gill de Vlieg



*Our children will be locked into unemployment ...*

**T**he Bahurutse ba ga Sebogodi of Braklaagte have lived on their land since before 1907, when they procured their title deed. Braklaagte is an established Tswana village, nestling in the hills of the Marico in the western Transvaal. It has a population of approximately 9 000 people.

There is a great history of resistance amongst these people. They first fought removal in 1938 when a headman and 40 families were removed from a neighbouring farm. The village was saved by the outbreak of the Second World War.

In 1958 their chief was imprisoned, in Pretoria, to try to break his resistance to removal. The chief was imprisoned again, with his wife and a headman, for resisting the introduction of passes for women. No strategy succeeded in breaking the fierce resolve of these people to keep their land and their South African rights.

Then, when the people had come to feel that the threat of removal was over, the South African government devised a new plan

forced incorporation to lock them into the homelands. Without consulting the people, the South African and Bophuthatswana governments decided to redraw the boundaries of the homeland states and to include the Bahurutse ba ga Sebogodi in Bophuthatswana.

This will mean that overnight the people of Braklaagte will be robbed of their chances of South African citizenship and they will be treated as aliens in South Africa.

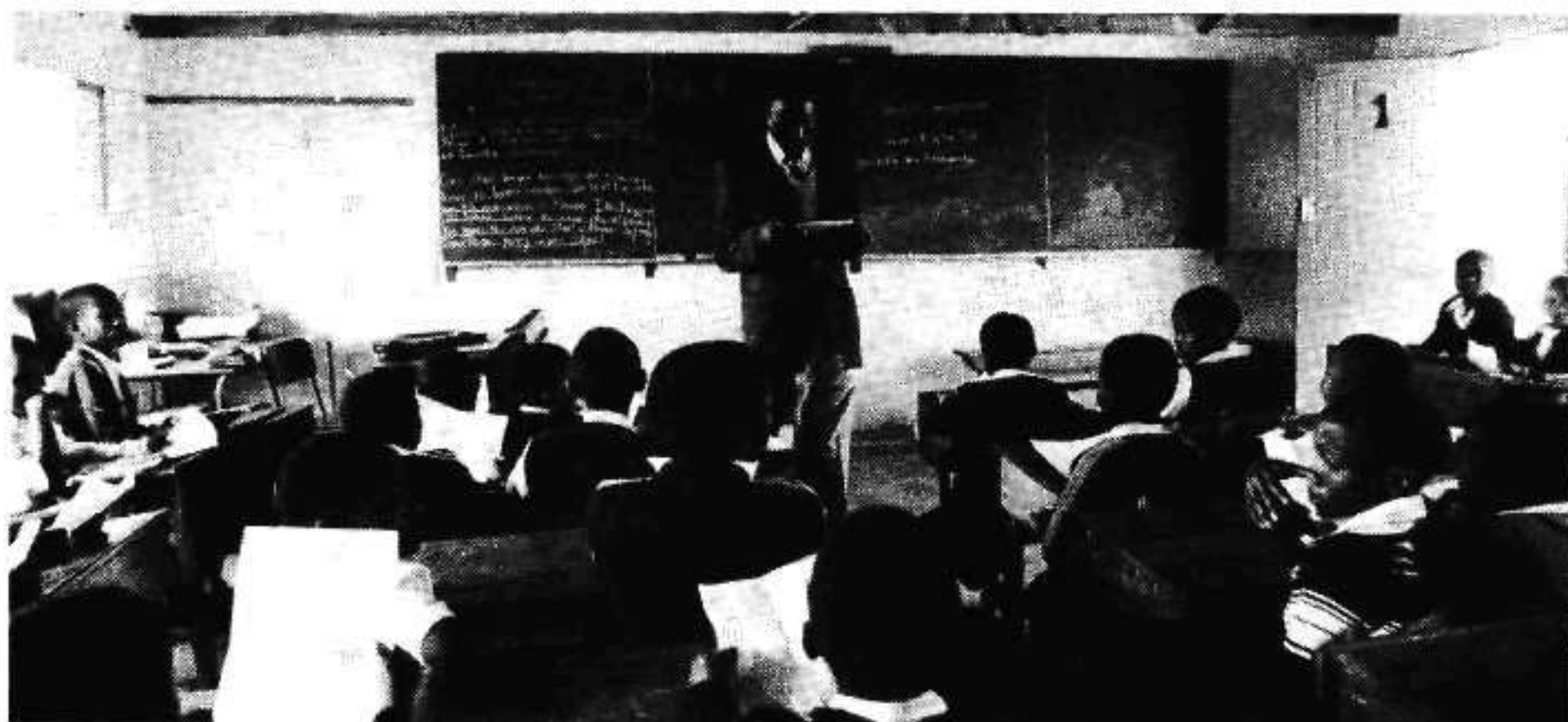
Last year the Bophuthatswana government sent a 'replacement chief' to Braklaagte in an attempt to depose John Sebogodi, who has ruled his people since 1949. Should the Bophuthatswana government succeed in this, the new chief will no doubt agree to incorporation. Thus forced removals, in the guise of forced incorporation, continue. □

*In 1986 the Bahurutse ba ga Sebogodi addressed a letter to the state president in which they explained their position and asked to be left as they are. The letter is reproduced here and the heading and captions are extracted from it. (Ed.)*



*The peace in our village will be totally destroyed.* ▷

*We have developed our land, built schools, windmills, and wish to remain on it.* ▽





*We were very glad that we would be secure in our country as a result. Δ*

*He (President Mangope) has already tried to depose our chief, who has ruled us since 1949. ▽*





◁ ... our entire village has applied for our South African citizenship to be restored to us ...

▽ We and our children consider ourselves part of South Africa ...

Bahurutse be ga Sebogodi  
P.O. Box 570  
ZEERUST  
2865  
1986.

President P.W. Botha  
Union Building

Dear President Botha,

We are writing to you because we are deeply concerned about the news that we are to be incorporated into Bophuthatswana. We cannot believe that you would make us foreigners in the land of our birth, without speaking to us first. We feel sure that if you knew our feelings about the matter you would stop this terrible event that is sure to endanger our survival.

We have lived and farmed at Braklaagte since 1906. We have developed our land, built schools, windmills and wish to remain on it. We and our children consider ourselves part of South Africa, and our entire village has applied for our South African citizenship to be restored to us, as you promised. We were very glad that we would be secure in our country as a result.

But now this incorporation will destroy everything. Our children will be locked into unemployment in the homeland of Bophuthatswana. We will be punished by President Mangope for resisting incorporation and applying for South African Citizenship, because he rejects dual citizenship. He has already tried to depose our chief who has ruled us since 1949. The peace in our village will be totally destroyed.

At a time of unrest in our country, we feel it is criminal for the government to create more problems, as we have never had any quarrel with it, except when it has tried to take our land, which we purchased legally.

Please reconsider this terrible situation. We know you have it in your power to leave us alone and that we can stay in peace in South Africa.

Yours sincerely

*Handwritten signature:*  
Mogamatze  
NA Mogamatze

