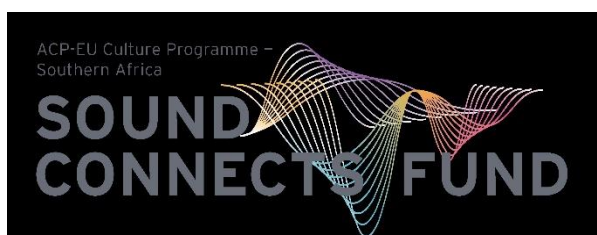


RE-APPROPRIATING SEVEN OF LESOTHO'S MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Research Report for the Sound Connects Fund Project
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A. Introduction

Morija Museum & Archives (MMA) is one of the institutions in Lesotho mandated to preserve, protect and in some respects revive or re-appropriate aspects of Basotho and Lesotho culture that are in danger. Towards fulfilling its mandate in this regard, MMA realized that among the cultural aspects that are disappearing rapidly are Lesotho's traditional or indigenous musical instruments. This realization emerged from our work in promoting cultural performance through the nationwide School Cultural Competitions (SCC) for primary and high schools which began in 2001, itself an off-shoot of the Morija Arts & Cultural Festival which had begun in 1999. The SCC revealed that although prizes were awarded to schools for good performance for a number of traditional instruments, in truth there were very few entrants, the only instrument with meaningful numbers of participants being the *lesiba*. With encouragement from Educational Authorities with whom we worked closely, it was agreed that other initiatives were required.

One of these initiatives was carried out in 2007/8 when MMA requested the Austrian Embassy in Pretoria to fund an proposal to resuscitate Lesotho's indigenous musical instruments in which the Lesotho College of Education as well as three schools within Maseru participated. However, the project was not able to fulfil its objectives once funds dried up as a result of the global economic crisis. Nonetheless, the motivation remained to resuscitate these instruments that were once an integral part of Basotho culture/ identity, and thus MMA continued working to secure funds to research the instruments thoroughly and document them in depth. Partnerships over the past decade with Altamira, University of Cape Town and others have helped in this regard, but these were ultimately inadequate because they did not address other salient aspects of the challenge.

Such aspects included, among others, the need to incorporate indigenous musical instruments into the school curriculum, the training of teacher-trainees on a regular basis, and the popularisation of this music through the training of contemporary artists and its performance in new contexts, including its incorporation in digital media like animation so as to appeal to a younger generation.

It was against this background that MMA applied for funding in 2021 to initiate a more ambitious project to help realize this dream. Funding was secured from Music In Africa Foundation under the theme, Sound Connects, to implement a year-long project entitled "Reappropriating Lesotho's Cultural Heritage Through New Media".

Fortunately, the policy framework / education curriculum has become, over the past decade, far more conducive to such initiatives. Under the Department of Culture, much greater emphasis is being placed on Intangible Heritage, as well as Creative and Cultural Industries. In Education, even more far-reaching changes have occurred. Among major changes to the curriculum which have been pioneered by the Ministry of Education through the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), for example, is the requirement that students learn to make and play traditional instruments.

This new requirement in the curriculum is a massive challenge given that the vast majority of teachers have no skills in this regard, and community resource persons are now so few. The Lesotho College of Education (LCE) has only just begun to grapple with certain requirements of the new curriculum, such as indigenous musical instruments, and thus the Sound Connects Project comes at a time when LCE is also desirous to collaborate as this project could be the beginning of a process of capacitation that will enable instructors and teacher-trainees to become competent in terms of traditional instruments.

Moreover, with many in the younger generation seeking greater authenticity through decolonisation, the time is ripe for meaningful efforts to revive and adapt indigenous musical instruments as well as popularise these more broadly.

The main purpose of this paper is to provide an overview and reference material that can be used in the compilation of a learning module or workbook on traditional musical instruments for schools. This paper also seeks to briefly highlight the history of the Basotho nation within the larger regional setting so as to provide greater context for a discussion of musical instruments. Thereafter, the seven traditional musical instruments, selected on the basis of their endangered status as well as cultural importance, will be dealt with individually in terms of their history, manufacturing and performance.

Given the larger common legacy regarding certain indigenous musical instruments across the Southern Africa region, this paper may be of wider value to others concerned with such music.¹

B. The Bantu migration and cultural sharing

NOTE: For many decades, PR Kirby's *The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa* (1934 and later editions) has set the framework for the study of such instruments, including their history. Much of the emphasis was placed upon the Khoi as central to the proliferation and diffusion of these instruments. The context was confined largely to Southern Africa, with almost no reference to the wider continent, or the flow of technology or cultural practices from north to south or along other vectors. What follows is an attempt to broaden the framework so as to encourage efforts to connect contemporary research in Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone counties of Africa, as well as deepen the time horizon. In this way, it may be possible to lay a stronger basis for a new synthesis which will greatly enrich that of Kirby regarding the origin and spread of musical instruments, especially the chordophones, over the past few millennia.

Before dealing with Basotho in particular, it is important to lay a broader foundation for understanding the underlying cultural base that in some respects tends to cut across linguistic, cultural and national barriers throughout much of the region, at least from south of the Limpopo.

Two main theories exist regarding the origins of the Bantu-speaking people from which Basotho are derived. A century ago, it was common to believe that the Bantu migrated from the Middle East, or more particularly Egypt or Ethiopia. These proto-Sotho, viewed either as Barolong or Bafokeng or other unnamed clan formations, were thought to have sojourned for a period at the Great Lakes of East Africa before moving down into the southern portion of the continent.²

¹ This paper is not about music theory or musicology. Those with such expertise are welcome to enrich this overview.

² See for example DF Ellenberger and JC MacGregor, *History of the Basuto: Ancient & Modern* (London: Caxton, 1912), p. 15. According to the ideas then in vogue of a dispersion of all peoples from the Middle East, even the Bushmen were seen as having originated there. See *ibid.*, p. 5.

Such assertions were based partly upon ancient tales of Bantu-speakers which alluded to a previous migration from the north, the exact location of which was unknown, combined with a certain reading of the book of Genesis, or the growing knowledge of ancient civilizations of the Middle East and Egypt to which explorers, missionaries and others sought to make connections. That theory, though now discredited by academics, still resonates with many Basotho as it has been popularised by DF Ellenberger, whose *History of the Basuto: Ancient & Modern* (as well as his shorter *Histori ea Basuto*) proclaimed this connection with Egypt. After a century during which these books have been widely read and digested, views of an Egyptian connection are now firmly established in the minds of many.

A second theory, based upon modern archaeology, linguistics, and historical evidence, proposes a very different model, a model which is still being refined. It posited from the 1960s that the Bantu-speaking peoples originated in the western grasslands of present-day Cameroun/eastern Nigeria from around 3000 BC, before moving gradually south into the Congo Basin while another group went east around the northern part of the Congo Basin and into East Africa. Eventually, the western branch and the eastern branch met in Zambia before moving south.³ Previous occupants of these regions were gradually absorbed or dispersed. In this theory, the clan names so familiar today (e.g. Bafokeng) only emerged later from within the context of southern Africa, probably over the last 800 years.

During the past decade, this second theory has undergone further modification based upon the most recent findings of linguistic as well as genetic research. It posits that the migratory stream coming down from Cameroun through the western Congo Basin is the dominant stream. South of the Congo Basin, this main stream split into different groups, some going directly south into Angola and Namibia, while others went south-east into Zambia. Here further divisions occurred, as a portion moved northeast into the Great Lakes, culminating in Uganda and Kenya. Another stream or streams flowed east, or into the area south of the Zambezi. In this model, the assertion made in the original theory from the 1960s which highlighted the stream flowing from the Cameroun directly east and around the northern Congo basin into the Great Lakes of East Africa has either been removed, or its importance diminished.⁴

Regardless of one's understanding of the probable route or routes utilized during the Bantu migration,⁵ it was here south of the Zambezi that these Bantu pioneers who settled southern Africa found that others were already present, these being i) the Khoi pastoralists, themselves originally hunter-gatherers from northern Botswana, who it is believed had acquired domesticated livestock from Nilotic peoples who had come down through the Great Lakes of East

³ Oliver, Roland (1966). "The Problem of the Bantu Expansion". *The Journal of African History*. 7 (3): p. 361–376.

⁴ Rebecca Grollemund *et al.* (2015), 'Bantu expansion shows that habitat alters the route and pace of human dispersals', <https://www.pnas.org › doi › pnas.1503793112>. Without belabouring the point, none of the models proposed by the latest research is completely satisfactory, and thus the process of refining such models continues. See for example Miguel González-Santos and many other authors, 'Exploring the relationships between genetic, linguistic and geographic distances in Bantu-speaking populations', a research article published in June 2022 by the American Journal of Biological Anthropology and available online at <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.24589>.

⁵ The Bantu migration, which is often coupled with the spread of Iron Age technologies, certain domesticated animals and other features, was complicated as both peoples, languages and technologies spread, but at unequal rates, and probably came in waves. In other words, it did not occur as a package nor did it flow as a river from one region to the next. It is for this reason that all current attempts to reconstruct these movements based upon a variety of scientific disciplines have not yet yielded the desired results, results which may well elude us even in future. Nonetheless, such studies do help us to improve upon our theories and avoid gross errors.

Africa,⁶ and ii) the Bushmen, hunter-gatherers who spoke a number of distinct languages and covered the entire southern region, the last of a long series of previous hunter-gatherer cultures that occupied the region for many millennia.

It is not clear what type of interaction took place with the arrival of the Bantu-speakers at that time, some 2,000 years ago, between the new arrivals and their predecessors. What seems apparent from rock art research from northern Namibia is that the ancient hunter-gatherers did possess a hunting bow which served equally as a simple bow instrument, but that its elaboration into a range of chordophones took place only after contact with the newcomers.⁷ Over the centuries, despite major linguistic differences, certain underlying similarities in terms of cultural inheritance have emerged across the southern region.

Unfortunately, school textbooks tend to focus on contrasts between these cultural groups and thus overlapping commonalities in terms of musical traditions, healing therapies, cosmology and other aspects of culture are minimized or overlooked. This is particularly so with regard to musical instruments because the San, Khoi, and various Bantu groups came to share much in common.

This common inheritance in terms of certain musical instruments used by different cultural or linguistic groups was recognized by various writers during the 19th century.⁸ This recognition was greatly extended by Kirby's research during the 1930s, a portion of which is summarised in the Table below. It provides even more striking evidence in this regard by listing a number of instruments and giving the names attached to the same instrument by different cultural groups in the sub-region.

Even this Table is not exhaustive as Kirby's documentation and analysis is drawn from an even wider region than that shown below, including as well some of the peoples of Namibia, as well as the Ndebele, Swazi, Venda, Tshopi etc (see Appendix A for further elaboration in this regard). The fact that not all groups in Southern Africa play all of the chordophones listed below should not surprise us as regional differences and preferences exist; the diffusion of knowledge regarding various instruments from one area to another was apparently uneven; and some areas have also been influenced by neighbours further to the north, where other musical traditions exerted a profound influence.

In this regard, it must be stated that it is not clear by any means what instruments or musical traditions the first mixed-farmers to southern Africa brought with them two millennia ago, neither can we be certain when or how knowledge of these instruments was diffused from one group to another. By the time external literate observers began to record their experiences with peoples of the region from the 15th century along the coast, and the 18th-19th century among inland peoples, many of the musical instruments had probably already become a common cultural inheritance across the region.

⁶ See Richard Elphick, *Khoikhoi and the founding of White South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), p. 10-22 where he provides a useful overview of the now dominant theory in this regard.

⁷ See for example Oliver Vogels, 'Rock Art as Musical Artefact: Prehistoric Representations of Musical Bows in Southern Africa,' in Ricardo Eichmann, Fang Jianjun and Lars-Christian Koch (Eds.): *Studies in Music Archaeology VIII*, 2012, p. 177-194.

⁸ See for example G.W. Stow, *The Native Races of South Africa*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1905), p. 106-111.

Basotho	Batswana	Bapedi	Zulu	Xhosa	Khoi	San⁹
1. lesiba	losiba or kwadi	lesiba or kwala / kwali	ngwala	ngwali	gora	//hǎ
2. thomo	segwana	sekgapa	ugubu	uhadi		'kopo
3. setolo-tolo		lekope	Isitontolo isiqomqomana			'kan'gan
4. lekope	lengope	lekope	umqangala	inking	!gabus	
5. sekhankula or 'mamokhorong	segankuru	sekgobogobo	ubhel'indhela	uhadi or isankuni		
6. mokhope			umrhubhe	umrhubhe		/khou
7. sekebeku (Jaw harp)	This jaw harp is actually not a chordophone but a lamellophone.					

From P.R. Kirby, *The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa*¹⁰
 These seven instruments are those on which this study is focused. Others, including the drum (*moropa*), the flute (*lekolilo*), a horn whistle (*lekhitlane*), leg rattles (*merutlhoana*). *lehofu*, *setjoli* and *sekatari* are mentioned in the text but not discussed in depth.

For anyone who has searched the historical record in terms of musical traditions in southern Africa for which written records are available, and then sought to draw inferences as to the movement or diffusion of instruments from one area or group to another, the quest is by no means certain. It is abundantly clear from these archival sources that particular instruments were played at a certain time by a particular community. Trying to discern larger patterns through the centuries involving different communities across the wider region becomes far more challenging. Kirby among others has made some attempts in this regard, but caution is required lest our generalisations run far beyond the evidence. Archaeologists, rock art specialists and others may be able to contribute further to this debate.¹¹

There can be no doubt, however, that diffusion from one cultural group to another has taken place, as well as adaptation over time, leading to more 'modern' instruments like the 'mamo-

⁹ San names for these instruments are derived from the text of Kirby (p. 179) for the first instrument, but the others are from G.W. Stow, *Ibid.* p. 105-111, and repeated by Marion Walsham How, *The Mountain Bushmen of Basutoland* (Pretoria: van Schaik, 1962), p. 48-9.

¹⁰ Kirby has stated in his 2nd edition of *The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa* (1965) that 'A comparison, undertaken by the writer, between the musical instruments of the Native races of southern Africa and those of the inhabitants of the central and northern areas of the continent has revealed to him the fact that whereas the northern districts have for centuries been powerfully dominated by Near-Eastern influences, and the central by those of the Far East, the southern portion, that south of the Tropic of Capricorn, has largely escaped such influences.

'Apart from instruments such as the resonated xylophones of the Venda and Tshopi, whose origins are clearly Indonesian, and the simple transverse flute, which is found chiefly in the northern areas of the Republic and adjacent territories, it has become apparent to him that the musical instruments of the Bushmen, Hottentots, and Bantu reveal to us three of the early stages of the evolution of the art of music which must have been practically universal at one time in the history of the world, but which cannot now be observed in most other countries.' p. 277.

Whether musicologists and anthropologists of the current generation would fully concur with such comments, however, has still to be determined.

¹¹ It should be noted that simple bow instruments, including those with gourds, are ubiquitous in Africa from the southern portions of West Africa across to the southern portions of Kenya, and then south to the Indian Ocean. What is not yet certain, but seems to be true, at least for the past two centuries, is that the multiplicity of single-stringed chordophones is more characteristic of the region south of the Zambezi, and the *lesiba*- and *setolo-tolo*-like instruments, for example, are apparently not found north of the Zambezi. Personal communication with Remy Jadinon, Curator of musicological collections, Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium.

khorong, or the adoption of the modern Jaw harp (*sekebeku*) made of metal which has then been adapted and then manufactured using locally-available materials such as bamboo.¹² In addition, it may well be that some instruments have been lost through cultural and social changes. That, in any case, has certainly been the trend over the past two centuries as missionisation, colonial policies, migrant labour, urbanisation, and other factors have tended to diminish the performance contexts for, or prestige of, certain indigenous musical instruments.

Mokhope, among all of the 'traditional instruments' utilised in Lesotho, a very popular one among the Xhosa / Xhosa-speaking communities (*umrhubhe*), remains a bit of an enigma as it seems peculiar to the Nguni alone; that is, although it has entered Lesotho by the Xhosa-speaking peoples in the south, other groups in Southern Africa like the Tswana and Pedi are not known to use it.

C. The Sotho-Tswana-Pedi

Although archaeological evidence of Iron Age settlements of mixed farming communities exists in the Pretoria area from the 5th century AD, scholars are by no means certain of the language spoken by such peoples though it was probably a Bantu language. Nonetheless, researchers are more confident to assert that the Sotho-Tswana-Pedi emerged during the past millennium from a belt of settlement stretching from what is now eastern Botswana to the Pretoria area, a linguistic and cultural cluster which has retained its basic roots (with modifications of course) until the present day. Parallel to the formation of the Sotho cluster was the Nguni cluster that was located along the east coast stretching from the hinterland of Delagoa Bay south to the eastern Cape.¹³

With population growth, a stronger emphasis upon cattle rearing, growing economic stratification and the strengthening of ruling lineages, as well as environmental changes, the Sotho-Tswana-Pedi gradually settled much of the interior of South Africa. In terms of those who came

¹² Strictly speaking, *sekebeku* is not a chordophone but a lamellophone.

¹³ The dispersion of Bantu-speaking peoples may have come in waves at different periods. See for example, with regard to 'time-line patterns' in music, how some scholars have reconstructed these waves: "The asymmetrical time-line patterns of African music are, no doubt, an ancient cultural heritage along the Guinea Coast and in western central Africa. They were most likely invented by peoples who spoke ancestral forms of Niger-Congo languages [Bantu]. It is likely that the area of origin was the Guinea Coast. One explanation for the absence of time-line patterns in the northern half of East Africa is that they were unknown among the first wave of Bantu-language speakers moving eastward from the Cross River area in eastern Nigeria along the fringes of the equatorial forest toward the East African lakes region circa 100–400 BCE. Another explanation could be the influence in East Africa of Nilotic cultures. The knowledge of time-line patterns might have been brought to western central Africa with a second migration of Benue-Congo [Bantu] speakers from eastern Nigeria during the early Iron Age, a time when time-line patterns had already spread eastward across the Niger River. This second migration could have been responsible for the introduction into western central Africa of a set of cultural traits that include asymmetrical time-line patterns, the single and double bells, masked dancing, secret societies, and certain initiation ceremonies.

"With the beginning of the later Iron Age in central Africa (c. 1000 CE), a second nuclear area for time-line patterns apparently developed in southern Congo (Kinshasa); both the 12- and 16-pulse patterns still play an enormous role in the musical traditions of that region. With the third Bantu dispersal, this time from southern Congo and carrying with it trade connections, the practice of time-line patterns could have reached the Zambezi valley and the Nyasa-Ruvuma culture area of Tanzania, Malawi, and Mozambique—the only areas in the eastern part of the continent where time-line patterns are prominent today."

[African music - Musical instruments – Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com> › art › Musical-instruments](https://www.britannica.com › art › Musical-instruments)

Information on time-line patterns from Southern Africa seems elusive by contrast, but those more conversant with modern music theory may be able to provide greater insight in this regard.

south, the Bafokeng in particular moved to establish themselves south of the Vaal River in what is now the Free State in the 15th or 16th century before crossing the Caledon River. One of their renowned settlements was Ntsuana-tsatsi near modern-day Vrede in the north-eastern Free State. The immigrants (Bafokeng) found the area already occupied by Baroa (Bushmen) and they intermarried and employed the latter's sons as herds.¹⁴

While Bafokeng were sojourning at Ntsuana-Tsatsi where they were later joined by Bakoena, and then many other Sotho groups, the first groups of *tekela* Nguni origin crossed the Drakensberg into the present-day Lesotho from the East.¹⁵ These were three sub-divisions of Amazizi namely, the Maphetla (pioneers), Mapolane and Baphuthi respectively. They too found the Baroa already occupying the area, with whom they maintained good relations. These Nguni groups were followed by others, for example, smaller numbers of Hlubi who traded in metal objects and also became permanent features of the Caledon River valley.

Thus, the Caledon River valley became home to Nguni groups, larger numbers of Sotho groups, and Bushmen, the original inhabitants, whose numbers remained relatively small as the economy they practiced did not support a large population.

Towards the end of the 18th century, the founder of Basotho nation, Moshoeshoe I, was born in the northern part of the Caledon River valley in what is present-day Lesotho. From his early childhood he aspired to be a great chief despite his humble origins. To achieve his ambition, he consulted the renowned sage called Mohlomi who advised him to practice wisdom and goodness of the heart as sources of true power, not violence or charms.¹⁶ He started building his chieftom by amalgamating different ethnic groups or clans under his leadership. He left his home at Menkhoaneng together with his followers to establish himself at Botha-Bothe. His nation-building effort was thereafter disturbed by the eruption of the Lifaqane wars that ravaged the region.

The upheaval was caused by large numbers of *tekela* Nguni who entered the Caledon River valley from 1822, mainly Hlubi under Mpangazitha, then Ngwane under Matiwane, as well as Bhele, Zizi, and others. Moshoeshoe was forced to abandon Botha-Bothe as his fortress because of these invasions and migrate southwards to occupy Thaba-Bosiu Mountain, a plateau with many springs that had precipitous sides, one that offered security to his followers while posing serious challenges to his enemies. His migration to Thaba-Bosiu in 1824 is regarded as the turning point in the history of Basotho as a nation. Over the coming few decades, other groups entered into Moshoeshoe's growing sphere of influence: these included small groups of mixed-race Korana or Griqua, as well as Batlhaping, Barolong and other Tswana groups; the Amavundle, Thembu and various other Xhosa-speakers; each of whom has contributed to Lesotho's broader cultural make-up.

Thaba-Bosiu, the fortress of Morena Moshoeshoe, withstood all attempts to conquer it, ranging from attacks by various Nguni groups, the British as well as the most concerted efforts by the

¹⁴ This is the statement is made by DF Ellenberger and Marion How in their books, *History of the Basuto*, p. 18 and *The Mountain Bushmen of Basutoland*, p. 11 respectively.

¹⁵ Tekela Nguni was spoken by those, like the Zizi, Bhele, Hlubi, and Ngwane, all of whom lived along the eastern side of the Drakensberg, whose language (and customs) had been modified by long-term contact with Sotho peoples, as distinct from Zulu, the language of Shaka which became the dominant Nguni language across Kwa-Zulu Natal during the 19th century, which, together with many other Nguni dialects, is called zunda Nguni because it uses a 'z' instead of the 'ts' of the tekela Nguni.

¹⁶ Gill S J, *A Short History of Lesotho*, (Morija: Morija Museum & Archives, 1993), p. 64.

Boers of the Orange Free State. At Thaba-Bosiu Moshoeshe was able to build the Basotho nation by a variety of methods, among others by receiving and incorporating remnants of groups shattered by the upheavals of the Lifaqane into his kingdom, whether Nguni, Sotho, San or mixed blood (Griqua/Korana), marriage alliances with many different groups, the loan cattle system (*mafisa*), and so forth. All adherents were allowed to rule their followers according to their traditions but Moshoeshe was the supreme leader who then placed his close relatives and sons as regional chiefs / overseers.

From the same period of the Lifaqane, many Caledon River peoples sought refuge far away in what is today the eastern Cape, western Free State/northern Cape, or Kwa-Zulu Natal. After years of 'exile', many returned. During the mining revolution starting in 1870, Basotho sought employment in large numbers at Kimberley, and then the Goldfields where they once again became exposed to different cultural influences. Thus, although Lesotho / her people have a strong sense of identity, diversity has always characterized Moshoeshe's people, while the long-established pattern of economic migration to urban (and rural) parts of South Africa has continued to impact on the cultural evolution of Lesotho and her people.

D. Basotho Musical instruments – General references

It is clear then that Basotho are composed of diverse remnants of the Lifaqane wars, many Sotho clans, as well as large numbers of Nguni, and rather smaller numbers of Bushmen, the mixed-race Korana and Griqua, and others who came during the 19th century. Borrowing took place between these different ethnic groups, thus strengthening a process that had already been taking place for centuries. Although the Basotho nation is not homogenous, yet a greater 'fusion' of cultures gradually took place, which ultimately contributed to the formation of the present-day Sesotho culture.¹⁷ Among some aspects of culture that the present-day Basotho inherited from their forebearers is music and musical instruments.

Documentation regarding the musical traditions and instruments used by Basotho, that is, the diverse peoples amalgamated together under the suzerainty of Morena Moshoeshe, is far from adequate for those tasked with providing a fuller account in this regard. What follows are a limited number of references to these traditions as recorded by early travellers to the region and long-term missionaries, as well as by Basotho themselves. Such references only span the past two centuries because, unlike the western half of South Africa and the coastal regions, the eastern interior remained largely unexplored to those from the Cape who were literate and could record their observations, until the 1820s.

Music was an integral and important part of life for Basotho as it was for other groups across the sub-continent, although external observers did not necessarily document such cultural expressions fully or fairly as we shall see below. When Basotho men were preparing for war, for example, they would sing and dance *mokorotlo*. They would also recite praise poems with great skill where expressions were carefully selected for recital. Different feasts were marked with dances and performances involving song.

¹⁷ Although others also came to settle in Lesotho, Indians, Europeans, and then during the latter half of the 20th century people from Zimbabwe, other African countries, the Chinese, and so forth, these have not yet made an impact in terms of the indigenous musical instruments of Basotho.



Figure 1: Thomo hanging in the family courtyard of Morena Letsie I (from Christol, p. 71)

instruments, the drum, *lesiba* and *thomo*.²² DF Ellenberger stated: 'He [Moshoeshe] composed several panegyrics [praise poems or *lithoko*], which his men used to sing to the accompaniment of the *thomo*'²³ In his book, *Au Sud de l'Afrique*, Frederic Christol has drawn two pictures of *thomo*. The first picture is of Letsie I in a *lelapa*, the present-day *seotloana*, where a *thomo* is hanging (see above).²⁴ The second drawing depicts a Mosotho girl playing *thomo*.²⁵

Dictionaries are also revealing, though those who collect the words, that is, missionaries and their local associates, may not necessarily have been comprehensive in their work. Nonetheless, it is quite revealing that the 1893 Sesotho-English Dictionary by H. Dieterlin and A. Mabile (2nd edition) only records the following musical instruments: *lekoliloe*,²⁶ *lesiba*, *moropa*, *setolo-tolo* and *thomo*. Three of these had been previously mentioned in other sources, but not *lekoliloe* or *setolo-tolo*, though we have reason to believe that these, plus *lekope*, had probably already been established among the peoples of the Caledon River valley. The same cannot necessarily be said of the other instruments to which this paper is devoted, that is, '*mamokhorong*, *mokhope* or the *sekebeku*.

When explorers such as Andrew Smith were entertained by Moshoeshe and his forces in 1834, a performance of *mo-hobelo* was made which Smith refers to as a 'war dance'.¹⁸ Other than dancing and singing, Smith noted a musical instrument, the 'tomu' (*thomo*), being played which was included in a sketch of Basotho women making pottery.¹⁹

Missionaries such as Casalis, who lived among the Basotho for 23 years from 1833, made mention of musical instruments such as *moropa* (drum), *lesiba* and *tumo* (*thomo*)²⁰ while his close colleague Arbousset only spoke of *tumo* (*thomo*) which he found being played by a blind Lighoya (Lihoya) woman at Matlaking (Matlakeng) in the present-day Free State.²¹

An Anglican missionary John Widdicombe who spent fourteen years in Lesotho during the last quarter of the 19th century also talked about three

¹⁸ Lye F W (ed), *Andrew Smith's Journal*, p. 75.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁰ Casalis, E, *The Basutos*, p. 148 – 49.

²¹ Arbousset T and Daumas F, *Relation d'un voyage*, p 400 -1.

²² Widdicombe J, *Fourteen years in Basutoland*, p. 58.

²³ Ellenberger D F, *History of the Basuto*, p. 297.

²⁴ Christol F, *Au Sud de l'Afrique*, p. 71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁶ Also called *lekolilo*, and *lekolulo*.

Colonial officials also played a role in documenting Basotho history and culture. For example, Marion How, daughter of one such official, James C. Macgregor, and married to another, Lt. Col. Douglas Walsham How, researched the musical instruments of Maloti Bushmen and the Basotho. In her publication, *The Mountain Bushmen of Basutoland*, she talked about two instruments which the Bushmen and Basotho shared, that is, *thomo* ('kopo) and *setolo-tolo* ('kan'gan). She went on to mention the 'gora of the Bushmen, which is actually a third shared instrument, the *lesiba* of Basotho.²⁷

Basotho, as they became literate, were also able to document some aspects of their material culture. Everitt Lechesa Segoete mentioned *lesiba*, *thomo* and *moropa* in his book, *Raphepheng*.²⁸ In SS Tlali's book published in 1951, entitled *Mehla ea Boholo-holo*, mention is made of *lesiba*, *thomo*, *moropa* and other musical instruments such as *lekhotje* and a whistle called *lehofu*.²⁹ Among these writers, Tladi is the only one who talks about *lekhotje* and one is inclined to believe that he is actually speaking of *lekope*. The materials used in the making of the instrument as well as the process involved to produce its sound are similar to that of *lekope*. His is the first work to speak of *lekope*.

In his anthropological study of music and dancing from the 1960s, Mokhali mentioned *lekolulo*, *lesiba*, *setjoli* and *setolo-tolo* as instruments played by males while *lekope*, *moropa* and *thomo* are female instruments according to his understanding.³⁰ Ratau also emphasized that Basotho musical instruments are divided according to gender. He stated that *lesiba*, *lekolilo*, *lekhitlane* and *sekhankula* as instruments played by boys especially shepherds.³¹

The last category of people involved in writing about Basotho musical instruments or music are the professionals in ethno-musicology. Their focus was the documentation and interpretation of the music / musical instruments of the region. For example, Percival Kirby published in 1934 *The musical instruments of the native races of South Africa*, where he was concerned not only with the distinctive traditions of each people, but also with the similarities of their musical instruments across different ethnic groups in the region. In 1935 he even commissioned the noted sculptor from Lesotho, Samuel Makoanyane, to produce clay statuettes or figurines depicting Basotho playing traditional instruments such as *lekope*, *lesiba*, *lekolilo*, *moropa*, *setolo-tolo*, *sekatari*, *thomo* and *lekhitlane*.³² *Lekhitlane* was never produced because it is the whistle or small horn used during the initiation ceremonies, and the making of its representation may thus have been taboo.

Kirby's list of instruments is the most comprehensive of any of the other sources mentioned above, a credit to his acumen as a researcher. In addition, he was able to correlate instruments played by Basotho with those of other ethnic groups across Southern Africa, in a large and detailed reference work that greatly surpassed that of others before him. Nonetheless, given the multiplicity of different ethnic groups which were studied, as well as the varying quality of his informants, Kirby was not able to fully discern all of the spiritual and cultural aspects of these instruments, including certain rituals associated with particular instruments. The present study

²⁷ How, Marion Walsham, *The Mountain Bushmen of Basutoland* (Pretoria: van Schaik, 1962), p. 48-9.

²⁸ Segoete, Everitt Lechesa, *Raphepheng: bophelo ba Basotho ba khale* (Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1915), p. 27-8.

²⁹ Tladi S S, *Mehla ea boholo-holo*, p. 18.

³⁰ Mokhali, AG, *Basuto Music and Dancing* (St Michael's Mission: The Social Centre, n.d.), p. 10-11.

³¹ Ratau J K, *Molisana oa Mosotho*, p. 41.

³² Damant, C.G., *Samuel Makoanyane*, p. 8.

hopes to add a few more dimensions in this regard though much has been lost through cultural attrition.

Robin Wells' publication, *An introduction the music of the Basotho*, published in 1994, draws upon many of these earlier sources. He and Kirby, as musicologists, were able to transcribe songs performed with different instruments in staff notation in order to provide a better foundation for future generations interested to perform this kind of music.

Many of the writers above have emphasized the usage of these instruments along gender lines and as solo performances, though additional references supplied below may moderate our views in this regard.

In summary, *lesiba*, *thomo* and *setolo-tolo* seem to have been well established by the time the first external witnesses arrived, while *lekope* may also have been present though evidence is lacking. '*Mamokhorong* was a later innovation, *Mokhope* was brought by Xhosa-speaking peoples during the latter half of the 19th century before gradually penetrating Sotho-speaking communities in Lesotho, and *sekebeku* was probably a 20th century addition.

In the Section which follows, instruments are ordered more in terms of their 'visibility' in the local archival record, whereas musicologists might prefer to order these chordophones according to their 'complexity' or other criteria.

E. The indigenous musical instruments (mainly chordophones) of the Basotho / Lesotho

The first six instruments as shown in Table 1 above, these instruments being the focus of this paper, seem to have descended from the hunting bow, though not the *sekebeku* whose origins are unclear.³³ These single stringed instruments were believed by some to have been inherited from the San or Bushmen. Ethnological researchers such as Stow stated that Bantu never had any knowledge of musical accompaniment other than the clapping of hands, the beating of knobkerries as well as assegais on shields, or the use of drums until they came into contact with the Bushmen from whom they learned various bow instruments. This understanding reflects Stow's rather jaundiced view of the martial culture of 19th century Bantu-speakers in Southern Africa, without appreciating other important elements.³⁴

Kirby also suggests that all these instruments originated from the hunting bow when he says, "As Balfour has rightly pointed out, all these instruments are obviously derivatives from the bow of a hunter or warrior..."³⁵ Nonetheless, although these instruments almost certainly derive from a hunting bow, the question of origin is complex as well as opaque given the fact that single-stringed bow instruments are common throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa. In that regard, they may have been brought to the region by the Bantu-speakers themselves.

1. Lesiba

The string instrument is also classified by others as a wind instrument because of the unique way in which sound is produced, both by blowing as well as inhaling. It has been very popular in Lesotho, mainly with shepherds while pasturing their cattle. Among all the instruments used in

³³ It is not clear if the modern *sekebeku* made of metal was adopted first in the mining towns of South Africa, after which a local version made of bamboo was improvised, or not.

³⁴ Stow G W, *The Native Races of South Africa*, p. 106. His perspective was limited to Southern Africa; moreover, as a proponent of the Bushmen, he had a rather negative view of later peoples who settled the region, especially the Bantu.

³⁵ Kirby P R, 'The recognition and practical use of the harmonics of the stretched strings by the Bantu of South Africa', p. 32.

Lesotho, *lesiba* is considered as *the* national instrument. Its unique sound has been used for decades by Radio Lesotho as a precursor to its regular news broadcasts.

Despite its widespread recognition as the 'premier' national instrument of Lesotho, *lesiba* has never been systematically promoted through schools or other institutions to ensure its long-term usage among Basotho. Perhaps it was assumed that its place in society was secure.

This assumption has proven to be false, however. Given the policy of Free and Compulsory Education of the Ministry of Education which was



Figure 2: *Lesiba* (from Wells, p. 155)

introduced in 2000, and the prohibition of child labour even in terms of herding animals during the school year, the primary context in which younger shepherds learned to play *lesiba* has disappeared. With the ever-increasing use of recorded music, many shepherds see little point in entertaining themselves or their animals with music from the *lesiba* as was previously a commonplace. Moreover, *lesiba* is by far one of the most challenging of instruments to master, requiring considerable devotion.

In an attempt to understand the instrument, one will have to deal with its historical background, description, how it is made, and musical interpretation, all of which follow below.

a) **Origins of *lesiba***

Many travellers and explorers in Southern Africa as well as missionaries have written about the *lesiba*. The Hottentots or Khoi referred to it as Gora while the Bushmen called it *t'ha* or *//hã*. The Sotho group that consists of Batswana, Bapedi (northern Sotho) and Basotho (Southern Sotho) call it *kwadi*, *losiba* or *lesiba*. Another group that falls under the classification of the Sotho is Bavenda and they called the instrument *ugwala* which shows that they copied or adopted the instrument from the Zulu or Ndebele of Zimbabwe. The Zulu as well as the Xhosa named the instrument *ugwala* or *unkwindi* and *ugwali* respectively. The Swazis call it *makwindi*. From Swaziland or Eswatini, the instrument was also found among the natives in Delagoa Bay and according to Kirby this was the most northerly point the instrument reached.³⁶

Other writers of the 19th century believe that the *lesiba* was the invention of the Bushmen particularly when it seemed to have stemmed from the hunting bow. Stow who dedicated his time to researching the natives of South Africa argues that both the coastal Nguni and Basotho have appropriated the *gora* or *sesiba* (*lesiba*) from the Bushmen.³⁷ The ethno-

³⁶ Kirby P R., *The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa*, p. 185.

³⁷ Stow G W, *The Native Races of South Africa*, p. 109.

musicologist Kirby, however, advanced the theory that the *lesiba* was first invented by the Khoi and was only later appropriated by the Bushmen by saying, "The fact that the Gorah was a Hottentot instrument, though played by a Bushman, has been regularly neglected by those who have referred to Burchell's description."³⁸

Burchell, one of the earlier travellers to the Tswana, categorically stated that the instrument belongs to the Hottentots. In addition to Burchell's statement, Kirby also advances the fact that the music of this instrument is very soothing to domesticated animals and thus infers that it is an instrument of pastoral peoples, starting first with the Khoi. Secondly, Kirby makes reference to the earliest documentation of the instrument by Dapper in 1668 which pertains to the Hottentots. He further suggests that the instrument originated from the Cape and was spread among the Batswana by the Korana Hottentots who migrated to the Vaal and exchanged ideas with the Tswana including musical instruments. Basotho are said to have copied it from the Tswana and both ethnic groups called it *lesiba*.³⁹ Other writers such as How have adopted a neutral stand when they say, "the Bushmen and Basotho had many musical instruments in common, particularly those based on the bow."⁴⁰

The question of who invented the *gora* or *lesiba*, however, cannot be answered definitively as the travellers, explorers and missionaries did not interrogate the origins of the instrument adequately when there could have been answers, if indeed its diffusion was not already so widespread that the time for such answers had already passed. Moreover, the fact that the Khoi were the first people with whom the European settlers interacted provides no proof that they invented the instrument, nor is its soothing effect on cattle necessarily a proof of its having originated among a pastoral people. Perhaps its first use was to sooth human beings. Finally, it appears that no reference has been located as yet that shows whether other indigenous peoples, especially the Bushmen, being interviewed about the origin of the instrument, neither would it necessarily have been easy to compare such statements if they existed given the fact that peoples of the interior were only documented 200 years after the Khoi.

b) How to make Lesiba

The making of *lesiba* as an instrument is not a tedious process even though *lesiba* is a very intricate instrument to play. A stick (*monkhoane*) of almost a metre in length is cut. A hole is drilled at one end of the stick. A small peg is inserted in the hole to make tabs that would hold the quill in place so as not to come loose as one is inhaling and exhaling forcefully when playing.

A quill (*lesiba*) of about 5cm is cut and wettened in one's mouth to soften it. Once it is soft, the quill is slit lengthwise but bulging in the middle. Then this quill is filed to reduce its thickness. The other end of the quill is inserted between two tabs that are going to be inserted into the stick together with the quill. The second end is pierced with a very sharp tool to make a hole where the string will be attached. Once the string has been attached and bending (wrapped) over the second tab, it is stretched to the other end of the stick where it will be fastened in an elevated manner from the stick.

³⁸ Kirby P R, *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁴⁰ How M W, *The mountain Bushmen of Basutoland*, p. 48.

Boseka (copper wire) could also be used to make the *lesiba* 'string'. I witnessed Mahlomola Lekhula in 2009 using *boseka* and a quill attached to a pole made of bamboo to make *lesiba*. Both interviewees Molahlehi Matima and Molefi Khoele have also indicated that a 'quill' or its equivalent could also be made of a piece of horn, especially of a cow. A horn is filed to the size of a bird's quill and is shaped like one. This 'quill' made of a horn is rather more durable than that of bird quills.⁴¹ This



Figure 3: Elevated position of the quill (MMA, photo by Thabo Mohloboli)

means that even hooves and nails of certain animals can be used to make a *lesiba*. However, it depends how broad the nails are. Nonetheless, this demonstrates the variety of materials from which to make *lesiba*. Even porcupine quill can make *lesiba* if properly filed to reduce the thickness. While other nations used a feather as a writing tool, in sub-Saharan Africa, a quill was used to make an instrument. If we can understand all the elements that make a quill including keratin, a *lesiba* could be produced with the latest technology.⁴²

c) How to play Lesiba

Once the instrument has been made, the player holds the stick where the quill is in a half-closed palm, allowing the quill to be exposed to the player. Then the player should place his lips on the fingers barely touching the quill and should inhale and exhale with such a force that will cause the quill to vibrate and produce sound. The sound is varied by various vocal movements.

The player cannot play this instrument without a set of teeth. The teeth are used to control air that is used to inhale and exhale. The teeth help to direct the force into one particular area. However, Molefi Khoele has suggested that for those who have lost their teeth, one can replace the teeth with a mouth-guard, used in boxing, as an alternative, such that toothless people can continue playing the instrument. Molefi has used a mouth guard and it works well.⁴³

d) Types of Lesiba songs

The songs performed playing *lesiba* are not called *lipina* (the normal word for a song in Sesotho) but are rather *linong* (poetic name for a vulture), or *linonyana* (birds), no doubt a result of the feather (quill) which makes this instrument unique, or alternatively *litsoanya*.⁴⁴ Moreover, when a performer is playing *lesiba* songs, he is also in some respects imitating the birds even though not all songs talk about birds. In her book, *The Mountain Bushmen of Basutoland*, Mrs

⁴¹ Molahlehi Matima (5/8/2022) and Molefi Khoele (4/8/2022) from interviews at Mophato oa Morija.

⁴² This suggestion was made by one of the participants at the Artists' Training Workshop held at Morija Arts Centre, 'Matlali Matabane, who raised the possibility in January 2022 of making the *lesiba* without using a bird quill. It could be manufactured in Johannesburg if the correct specifications were provided.

⁴³ Khoele Molefi interview at Mophato oa Morija on 5/5/2022.

⁴⁴ It is almost impossible to find English equivalents to names such as *litsoanya* and those that follow below.

How says that Miss Lemue, the daughter of a 19th century missionary who had close relations with the Bushmen, claimed that by using the *lesiba* the Bushmen could imitate a bellicose ostrich to perfection.⁴⁵ However, some of the *linong* such as *phakoe thusetsa* (hawk, help) are always accompanied by a dance called, *nkilo*, '*maletampa*, *mokhikha*, *mokhele* or '*monto*. The name of this dance differs according to regions. *Linong* songs are rather low pitched while *litsoanya* are high pitched.

e) The effect of *lesiba* music

According to Mokhali,⁴⁶ a skilful *lesiba* player commands great respect from his animals. Animals are able to recognize his way of playing and can distinguish him from other players. They (animals) usually display their appreciation of his music by huddling around him. The playing of *lesiba* music soothes and calms the animals. The soothing effect of the *lesiba* would be understandable as standard songs or compositions are about imitating various birds. Even to humans, different bird sounds can be very soothing. Molahlehi Matima also suggests that *lesiba* could be used in prayer.

It might be suggested, therefore, that the soothing sound of *lesiba* is somehow connected with spirituality, that it is in fact therapeutic. This theme requires further exploration, not only with regard to *lesiba* but also in terms of some of the other instruments as well.

Perhaps this explains the comments of others, to the effect that the elderly often performed *lesiba* if they were lonely (*pelo e ile mafisa*).

In addition to performing *lesiba* for either its soothing influence upon man or his cattle, or merely for recreation, *lesiba* was sometimes also accompanied by a drum where men and women would dance by the moonlight. This accompaniment and the occasion are mentioned by Casalis and Widdicombe respectively.⁴⁷ The two missionaries have thus revealed to the present generation that both men and women danced to the instruments in unison for a particular occasion even though they stopped short of giving the name of this event.

Casalis describes the dance as follows:

The movements are slow and effeminate, but seldom graceful. The women generally have a long stick in the hand; which, in addition to the cries they utter, the grimaces they make, and the ridiculous movements they give to their petticoats, always reminded me of the witches in Macbeth. The similarity is so much the more striking, as these grotesque ballets are generally performed by moonlight.⁴⁸

He goes on to state that:

the lugubrious and monotonous sound of a kind of tambourine [used in these dances] is in accordance with the clapping of hands and the clamour of all present . . . It is accompanied [as well] by the *lesiba*, the sharp sounds of which would soon put any nervous person to flight.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ How, M W, *The Mountain Bushmen of Basutoland*, p. 49.

⁴⁶ Mokhali in his anthropological studies (*Basuto Music and Dancing*) has talked about many instruments as well as dances but without going into the matter in any great depth.

⁴⁷ Casalis E, *The Basutos*, p. 148 and Widdicombe J, *Fourteen years in Basutoland*, p. 58.

⁴⁸ Casalis E, *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Casalis, *Ibid.*

Perhaps Casalis' views of the *lesiba* would have been moderated had he taken more time to understand the instrument as well as its soothing effects upon both humans and animals!

To many writers during the 20th century who documented traditional instruments, they concluded that indigenous musical instruments are used for solo performances, the individual seen as being alone, solitary, but the statements of Casalis and Widdicombe bring to the fore a different dynamic by including the elements of time (night performances), accompaniment, dance, attire and other props. Cultural differences blinded the missionaries who viewed these performances as heathen practices. Nonetheless, we are indebted to them for observing and recording the social or communal nature of these instruments as well.

2. Thomo

This instrument seems to have existed among different ethnic groups across the region. The Basotho called it *thomo*, the Basotho of Transvaal *sekgapa*, the Batswana *segwana*, the Swazi *ligubu*, the Thonga *dende* or *tshitendje*, the Xhosa *uhadi* and the Zulu *ugubu*, *ugumbu*, *guolukhulu* or *inkohlisa* while both the Khoi and Venda did not have it.

Stow asserted that the instrument has been inherited from the Bushmen by the intruding tribes. He further suggests that the Bushmen improved from utilising a simple bow to one on which was attached a hollow object, in this case a tortoise shell that acted as a resonator to improve the sound of the instrument.⁵⁰ Kirby also shows Chapman has documented the instrument which was improved with the attachment of a calabash resonator by the Bushmen who called it 'kopo while Basotho called it 'tomo of which among the Tati Bushmen means voice.⁵¹ Arbousset's only mention of the instrument among the Basotho, the example being a Lighoya woman who was playing it in 1839 at Mekuatleng.⁵²



Figure 4: Young woman playing the *thomo* (from a drawing by Christol p. 83)

All the groups have named the instrument based on the materials that were used to make it, especially its most distinctive feature. This includes the Bapedi, Batswana, Swazis, Xhosas and Zulus while the Basotho of Lesotho concentrated on the sound made by the calabash even though they seem to have sothofied the name.

The construction of this instrument is common among the ethnic groups that play the instruments. What differs is the material that is available to make the instrument. In most cases a thin stick is procured and has its bark removed. To this well-seasoned stick, a string of horse hair is attached to both ends. Then a calabash resonator is cushioned and attached to the stick or mountain bamboo among the Basotho. Cow or horse hair as well as sinew strings have been replaced by a copper wire or by fish line. The calabash could also be replaced by a cylindrical can.

⁵⁰ Stow G W, *The native races of South Africa*, p. 107-8.

⁵¹ Dornan SS, as quoted by Kirby, *The musical instruments of the native races of South Africa*, p. 197.

⁵² Arbousset T., and Dumas, F., *Relation d'un voyage*, p.400.

In an interview with Mrs 'Mapelaelo Tloutle of Majakeng, Mokhotlong, *thomo* was also called *lekopu* by Batlokoa. The two names were used interchangeably by the elderly women. To construct the instrument, they would use any available stick and allow it to curve a bit, to which are attached other accessories. In the absence of a calabash, they used a similar shaped pumpkin with a thick outer layer. The pumpkin would be cooked whole and the upper part would be cut in a manner similar to that of the calabash, skilfully removing whatever is inside. The shell would be drilled and attached to the stick to make *thomo* or *lekopu* as they call it.⁵³

Kirby describes how the instrument is played by saying, "The instrument is held upright, the opening of the resonator being held close to the left breast, the second, third, and fourth fingers of the left hand grasping the lower end of the bow in such a manner as to leave the first finger and thumb free to manipulate the string, and so as to raise its pitch. The string is struck near the lower end of the bow with a thin grass or reed held in the right hand, the grip being similar to that used by side-drummer in holding his left-hand drumstick."⁵⁴

Many writers have stated that *thomo* was completely monopolised by women except in the case of Batswana, Swazis and Pondo where occasionally it would be played by males. Among these Basotho writers, Segoete for example says it was performed by women who are lonely. In some instances, a woman would play the instrument *ho kobisa* (to criticize someone indirectly), or when in a sorrowful mood.⁵⁵ Instances have been recorded of the sorrow being so great that women would commit suicide after playing *thomo*. The feeling of loneliness of women and girls therefore urging them to play the instrument is also corroborated by Kirby among the Xhosa community.⁵⁶

However, other writers such as travellers, missionaries and ethnographers show that it was also performed for amusement and it is usually played to accompany the voice. Although some writers have emphasized the usage of *thomo* strictly by women, Ellenberger differs when he says, "He (Moshoeshoe I) composed several panegyrics, which his men used to sing to the accompaniment of the *thomo* (a musical instrument), or which they would recite to anyone who wanted to listen".⁵⁷

Although the instrument was commonly played by women, it does not rule out males using it occasionally. In some of Paul Ellenberger's recordings of the music of the Basotho, certain interviewees and performers indicated that *thomo* was also used or preformed during *thojane* ceremony that is a *ceremony where female initiates spent the whole night without sleeping and stand holding sticks as they support themselves*. Among the initiates as well as their relatives, nobody is allowed to sleep during the *thojane* ceremony.⁵⁸ *Thomo* was further used by *mathuela* during *hlophe*.

Another dimension that Pinda talks about during interviews is that *thomo* was performed by the elderly women in the evening to amuse themselves or the children and also try to instil the love of music among children. This instrument could be performed to replace folktales (*litšomo*). Another reason for performing *thomo* in the evening was basically to calm and sooth the

⁵³ 'Mapelaelo Tloutle's interview Majakeng, Mokhotlong, 11 May 2022.

⁵⁴ Kirby P R, *The musical instruments of the native races of South Africa*, p. 198.

⁵⁵ Segoete E, *Raphepheng, bophelo ba Basotho ba khale*, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Kirby P R, *The musical instruments of the native races of South Africa*, p. 202.

⁵⁷ Ellenberger, D F., *History of the Basuto*, p. 297.

⁵⁸ Sekese A, *Mekhoa le maele a Basotho*, p. 15.

performer after a long day. Pinda also mentions that *thomo* was played very early in the morning while the performer is still in bed and the rest of the women folk will sing along. This was done in preparation of starting different chores of the day.⁵⁹ It thus used to uplift one spirits or energy to face different duties of the day.

In his publication, *Mehla ea Boholo-holo*, Tladi talks about *thomo* which is slightly different from other writers when he says, “One of the instruments of Basotho was *thomo*. It was made with a curved stick where a string of sinews is attached at both ends. Another string connects the longer string to the calabash. Where the connecting string is attached to the stick, a calabash is also attached. The player will use a piece of grass or a small thin stick to strike the string”.⁶⁰

Kirby shows that this type of instrument, which differs slightly from the typical *thomo*, was first documented by a Jesuit priest, Filippo Bonanni in 1723 among the people of Mozambique, and later by Miss Bleek among the Bushmen of Angola.⁶¹ Kirby further advances that in South Africa it was only found among the Venda calling it *tshikala* or *dende*, the Tshopi *tshitendole*, the Thonga *nkaku*, *nkoka* or *dende*, the Transvaal Sotho *sekgapa*, the Swazi *umakwenyana* and the Zulu *unkoka*, *umakweyana*, *isiqwemqwemana*, *uqwabe*, *imvingo* and *inkohlisa*. According to Kirby this instrument never existed among the Basotho of Lesotho, or the Batswana, Tembu, Pondo, Xhosa, Hottentots and Bushmen.⁶² The different instrument seems to carry the very same name of *thomo*. The only difference with this newer version is the string attached to the stick and the placement of the calabash. One is inclined to argue that the version Kirby talks about is a variation in the evolution of the instrument. *Thomo* seems to be virtually extinct in Lesotho and of late its name has been given to the piano.

3. Setolo-tolo

In terms of its origin, Stow says the *setolo-tolo* was also copied from the Bushmen and it was called ‘kan’gan.⁶³ Both How and Wells show the commonalities of the instrument that existed among the Basotho and the Maloti Bushmen while Kirby stated that the instrument existed among the Bantu from long ago.

The instrument was first documented in 1638 among the natives of Mozambique by Linschot. According to Kirby, the Venda call the instrument *tshigwana* or *tsivhana*, Basotho of Lesotho *setolo-tolo*, the Bapedi *lekope*, the Tshopi *penda*, the Thonga *sekgapa*, the Swazi *isitontolo*, the Zulus *isitontolo* or *isiqomqomana*, while the Bakwebo and Balubedu call it *kedondolo* and *kashane* re-

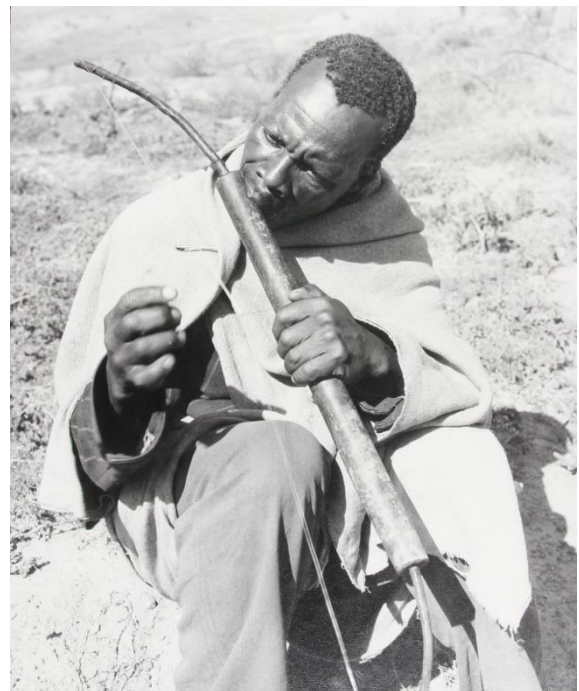


Figure 5: Setolo-tolo (MMA, Chris van Nispen Collection)

⁵⁹ Stephen Pinda in an interview with Paul Ellenberger, Cassette B Side A Track 27.

⁶⁰ Tladi S S, *Mehla ea boholo-hlolo*, p. 18.

⁶¹ Kirby, P R, *The musical instruments of the native races of Soth Africa*, p. 204-205.

⁶² Kirby, P R, *Ibid.*, p. 205 -208.

⁶³ Stow G W, *The native races of South Africa*, p. 108.

spectively. Karanga call it *tshipendani*.⁶⁴ The Pondo and the Xhosa, however, do not have the instrument.

The materials used in the construction of the instrument have been captured by How when she says, "This consisted of a piece of thick bamboo, about a foot long, with stout tapered rods inserted at each end. The rods were bent over and joined by a thick string of animal sinew to make the bow. The string was pulled down to the bamboo to produce two equal lengths and notes were emitted by plucking the string with the forefinger of the right hand."⁶⁵ Instead of using bamboo, a section of stick (wood sapling) could also be used where thinner and flexible sticks would be inserted in both ends.

Another construction method is such that the stick of about 10cm thickness and 60cm in length is retained in the centre and other parts curved to reduce the thickness into flexible and thinner sticks that are made to curve by strongly binding these together with a string made of sinews or wire. A loop would be made in the centre to halve the string. This loop is also used to create a desirable tension needed by the player. Recently, the players usually use wire strings, no longer animal sinews as was the case previously.

To play the instrument, a portion of the thick centre part is held with the mouth and one hand, either left or right. The other hand is used to pluck the halved string from both sides.

Mokhali asserts that this instrument was only played by men among the Basotho. With reference to Pinda, however, the use of some these instruments was not divided along gender. Pinda claims that *setolo-tolo* was one of those instruments played by girls and boys while he was growing up. He further reveals that during his youth the best performers of *setolo-tolo* were Bushmen.⁶⁶

4. Lekope

During the National School Cultural Competitions which took place at Morija Museum from 2001-2013, *lekope* was not performed by the students. It was already virtually extinct. However, the traditional musical instruments resuscitation project of 2007 to 2008 revealed that there were still a few remnants of the older generation in their sixties who could play the instrument. Several villages in Leribe had old ladies who could play *lekope* very well and they kept the instrument hanging on the walls in their houses. They were thrilled to realise that various institutions and individuals were still interested in the instrument.



Figure 6: *Lekope* played by 'Mapelaelo Tloutle (Photo by Selebalo Molefe, MMA)

It is not certain if *lekope* has been among the Basotho for centuries, or is a more recent arrival as it was not documented until the early 20th century. *Lekope* is not so well loved like *lesiba*. The early travellers, explorers and missionaries in the 19th century do not mention *lekope*. Ethnographers only began to document it in the 20th century. In his book, *Raphepheng*, published in 1915,

⁶⁴ Kirby P R, *Ibid.* p. 228.

⁶⁵ Marion Walsham How, *The Mountain Bushmen of Basutoland*, p. 48.

⁶⁶ Pinda S, in Paul Ellenberger's recordings, Cassette B Side b

Seogoete does not mention *lekope* among the instruments he described. Mokhali in his anthropological publication of the 1950s talks about *lekope* as an instrument played by girls and the music produced was associated with love-making.⁶⁷ Tladi talks about the same instrument but called it *lekotje*, stating that it was played by married women for their amusement.⁶⁸ Thoahlane talks about the same instrument but he suggests that it was played by both genders and the women's instrument was called *moqakana*.⁶⁹ Wells also shows that *lekope* was occasionally played by men among the Basotho.

As with *lesiba*, there were *lipina tsa lekope* taken from *mohobelo* and *mokhibo* songs. Some of the songs were also taken from *lesiba* songs called *linong*. Wells further suggests that there was a solo dance performed by the *lekope* player called *saku*.⁷⁰

Kirby demonstrates *lekope's* existence among a wide variety of groups across the region, lending substance to the possibility that it too was common among Basotho even though it was only documented during the 20th century: the Korana Hottentots called it *!gabus*, the Venda *lugube*, the Tswana *lengope*, the Sotho *lekope*, the Thonga *umqangala*, the Swazi *umqangala*, the Zulu *umqangala* or *umqengele* while the Pondo and Xhosa call it *inkinge*.⁷¹ This stringed musical instrument was most commonly played by girls or women. No attempt has been made to trace the origins of *lekope*.

This instrument among all the ethnic groups mentioned seemed to be fashioned in a similar manner, that is, it is made from a slightly curved and hollowed reed where a string of horse hair or sinew is stretched from one end to the other. In some instances where the reed is straight, the string is elevated from the reed by looping the string around the reed until it is elevated so that it cannot touch the reed when plucked with the plectrum of dry grass or a fourth finger.

When one plays the instrument, one end of the instrument is held with the lips while the string is facing away from the player. The string will be plucked by a small plectrum or the fourth finger. This instrument will be held in such a manner that it stretches from the mouth to the left hand (or right hand as the case may be), the fifth finger being used to alter the vibrations depending upon the song being played. The mouth serves as the resonator. The desired sound or tone is attained by slightly moving the mouth in a closing and opening manner.

Of all the writers, it is only Thoahlane who shows that it was played by both sexes. Lately, nylon fishing line has been used to make a string of *lekope*, thus creating a stronger audible sound. Rev Paul Ellenberger's valuable audio work of documenting Basotho music in the late 1950s/early 1960s reveals that *lekope* was also used during *hlophe*, that is, a ritual healing dance by *mathuela* (sangomas or spiritual healers). It is also used to invoke the spiritual energy from one's ancestors to intervene in the healing process or help to brighten the initiate's path during training. *Hlophe* dancing, as explained by Buhrmann, is a "slow, rhythmic movement, with emphasis on body posture and the vigorous pounding of the ground by feet, while dancers move slowly and individually in a circular, anti-clockwise direction."⁷²

Obviously *hlophe* is performed to the clapping of hands and singing by the participants and some of them are necessarily not healers. Both singing and clapping are also accompanied by beating

⁶⁷ Mokhali, A G., *Basuto music and dancing*, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Tladi S S, *Mehla ea bohlo-holo*, p. 18.

⁶⁹ Thoahlane A B., *Mce nkomo-thupa*, p. 35.

⁷⁰ Wells, R., *An introduction to the music of the Basotho*, p. 152.

⁷¹ Kirby P R, *The musical instruments of the native races of South Africa*, p. 220.

⁷² Buhrmann M V., *Living in two worlds*, p. 57.

of the drum. The sound of the drum could be heard from a distance but the sound emitted by *lekope* in comparison is less audible. Consequently, *lekope* was probably used in the absence of a drum and not accompanied by it.

It has also been noted that songs performed with *lekope* come from different genres of music. For instance, Stephen Pinda, Ellenberger's assistant, indicates that the songs performed at Ha Raisa by women with *lekope* and *thomo* are ancient war dance (*mokorotlo*) songs of the Amahlubi of Pakalitha, in particular "*ingwale ko chane izwe le file kwa Mshoeshoe*", that is, "*Mshoeshoe's country has been decimated*". Pinda says this song was sung when Matiwane and Pakalitha were attacking Mshoeshoe.⁷³ However, it must be realized that Pakalitha was killed by Matiwane and many of his Hlubi were incorporated into the Ngwane regiments. It was Matiwane who attacked Mshoeshoe not Pakalitha.

Nonetheless, amazingly, some of the songs of the 1820s are still preserved through instruments such as *lekope*, *setolo-tolo* and *thomo*. These *mokorotlo* songs were performed by men but in the recordings are performed with musical instruments by women and thus, the usage of instruments tends to blur the lines of gender. The stronger gender-based categorization of the instruments seems to have developed rather later. Pinda also shows that young girls were fond of *lekope* and after mastering it, they would graduate to *thomo*. As such, therefore, *lekope* was viewed as an instrument for beginners.

Pinda further shared that the song *abthwali ba senyongo*, that is, *those who wear the gall bladder on their heads*, is a song sung by new Matebele initiates in the realm of healing. It is a foundational or starting song (*pina ea ho fehlella mochonoko*) that encourages communication between the initiate and his/her ancestors in the journey of becoming a healer/doctor.⁷⁴ Besides the drum (*sekupu*), other musical instruments are no longer used by traditional healers. They seem to have lost the utilization of *lekope* in their ceremonies.

5. 'Mamokhorong / Sekhankula

'*Mamokhorong* is a rather recent musical instrument found among the Basotho. Paul Ellenberger and Stephen Phinda documented the instrument among the Baphuthi and Xhosa in Quthing. The Xhosa call it Katari while one of the Baphuthi boys refers to it as Kopotsi. The Xhosa performer believed that Katari originated from the Griqua. He first saw the instrument among the Griqua in the 1930s but he was unable to explain when it was adopted by the Xhosa in Quthing.

However, Mokhali talks about *setjoli* which one believes is as precursor to '*mamokhorong*. He describes *setjoli* as a bowed instrument that was bowed using *qakoa* (*hyparrhenia dregeana*) or *lebeko* (spatula) used for cleaning the nose or for removing perspiration). The string was made of *leloli* (*cyprus marginatus*), cow tail, horse hairs or sinews. People used to perform *lipina tsa lipapali* (songs used during different 'games' or cultural activities), and also the songs of 'vain people' (*makako*). He goes on to explain that lately the string is made out of wire just like *lekope* and a 5-litre tin is attached to amplify the sound.⁷⁵

Kirby discusses what could be perceived as a variation of the same instrument when he says, "The second type of instrument in this group consists of a hollow bar or half-tube of bamboo,

⁷³ Pinda S, Cassette B side a Track 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Mokhali A.G., *Basuto music and dancing, anthropological studies* p. 11.

fitted with a wire and tuning peg. The string is set in vibration by means of a miniature bow of wood and hair from a cow's tail, resin being applied to the hair. The mouth was originally used as a resonator, but recently a gallon paraffin tin has been applied to the instrument."

Kirby further shows that the Venda call the instrument *tsilojo*, the Basotho of Lesotho *sekatari*, the Batswana *sefinjolo*, *setinkane* or *segankuru*, thus explaining the origin of the name *sekhankula* among the Basotho. The Basotho of Transvaal call it *sekgobogobo* or *setsegetsege* while the Ndebele *pone*, the Swazis *izikehlekehle*, the Xhosa *uhadi* and the Zulu *ubhel'indlela*.⁷⁶ Damant also indicated that Kirby commissioned Samuel Makoanyane in 1935 to model eight Basotho instruments being played by Basotho for the British Empire Exhibition of 1936 including *sekatari* (as shown in the illustration below).⁷⁷

'Mokhali mentions *setjoli* which is now extinct, but the way *setjoli* has been described, it could be a precursor to *sekatari*, while *sekatari* may have been a precursor to '*mamokhorong*. Wells, on the other hand, says that '*mamokhorong* has been developed from many different sources including *isicelekeshe* of the Zulus and *segankuru* of the Batswana as well as the *gorito* of the Damara.⁷⁸



Figure 7: 'Mamokhorong (MMA, photo by Thabo Mohloboli)



Figure 8: *Sekatari* statuette (P. Kirby Collection, University of Cape Town)

However, the question still remains, who named this instrument '*mamokhorong* and why? '*Mamokhorong* is made of slightly curved stick of half a metre in length or slightly curved metal rod of the same length. The stick is inserted into a tin from which the top covering has been removed in its entirety. A wire string is fastened to the top end of the stick and then the stick is bowed towards the corner of the can where the wire is to be fastened.

The wire is stretched to make an appropriate tension. The tin is fired to make it light and loud. In some instances, several holes are made on both sides of the tin to increase its sound.⁷⁹ Once the wire is stretched from the stick and is fastened to the corner of the can, the player gets horse hair to make a bow that will be used to bow it just like on violin.

⁷⁶ Kirby P R, *The musical instruments of the native races of South Africa*, p. 214-15.

⁷⁷ Damant C G., *Samuel Makoanyane*, p. 8.

⁷⁸ Wells Robin, *An introduction to the music of the Basotho*, p. 161.

⁷⁹ Before a 5-litre tin came into fashion, the instrument apparently used a tortoise shell, calabash or other smaller tins as a resonator.

The instrument is played facing away from the player. The one hand holds the instrument against the player and the thumb stops the wire string to produce the desired melody while the other hand holds the bow. This instrument is mostly used or played by shepherds. Although it was believed that *'mamokhorong* is the combination of *sekatari* and *setjoli*, one is inclined to believe that *sekatari* is extinct while *setjoli* is the precursor to *'mamokhorong* even though Mokhali's description is rather inexact.

6. Mokhope

The origins of this instrument are not known as yet. However, Wells talks about its similarity with */khou* of the Bushmen or San even though instead of being plucked, it is bowed with a thin dry stick.⁸⁰

Kirby shows that this instrument is found among the Pondo who call it *umqange* while the Xhosa as well as the Zulus call it *um-rhubhe*. The Swazis call it *utiyane* or *piano*.⁸¹

It was made of a hollowed river reed or *umsenge* wood (*cussoica spicata*) where at one end a short piece of a thin pliable rod would be inserted. Then a string of both vegetable fibre or twisted rush would be tightly fastened to force the stick into an arc



Figure 9: Mokhope played by Nonembhile Mateisi (MMA, photo by Selebalo Molefe)

shape or bow. Of late a wire string has replaced the vegetable fibre. Wells suggests that in Lesotho it was copied from the Xhosa and adopted by Basotho calling it *mokhope*. Among the Xhosa it was/is played by women whereas among the Basotho it was played by both sexes. I documented an old man playing the instrument some years ago, and he had copied it from the Xhosas while he lived at the cattle posts. Its similarity with *lekope* is that it is mouth resonated.

In an interview with Mrs Nonembhile Mateisi, she indicated that she uses poplar sticks and wire to make the instrument. The wire should be burned to remove any exterior coating in order to expose the rough surface. She uses a poplar stick because it is light weight.⁸² However, Mrs 'Malesaoana Tontši prefers to use copper wire and a *kolitšane* stick (*Searsia divaricata*). *Kolitšane* is a hard wood and according to her, an instrument made of this hard wood is relatively louder, that is, it resonates more effectively than soft woods like the poplar.⁸³ Lately, players of the *mokhope* have introduced a tuning peg that is inserted at the back of *mokhope* stick. This is a recent invention. Nonetheless, in the context of Lesotho, this is one of those endangered music instruments as we have only been able to identify two people who play it in the Lowlands.

⁸⁰ Wells, R.E., *An introduction to the music of the Basotho*, p. 144.

⁸¹ Kirby P R, *The musical instruments of the native races of South Africa*, p. 239.

⁸² Mateisi Nonembhile's interview at Nthzimnande, Quthing, 5 May 2022.

⁸³ Tontši 'Malesaoana in an interview at Morija, 4 May 2022.

7. Sekebeku (Jaw Harp)

This instrument – the jaw harp – is of oriental origin even though it has assumed a Sesotho name *sekebeku*. Often called the ‘Jew’s harp’, Wikipedia states that it has nothing to do with the Jewish people *per se*. Rather it was first seen in Chinese drawings of the 3rd century BC. Secondly it was found made of bones in Shimao fortifications in Shaanxi China dating to 1800 BCE. It is not clear when it was first introduced in Southern Africa.



Figure 10: Sekebeku or Jaw harp (MMA, photo by Thabo Mohloboli)

During the past century (or more?), the Jaw harp has been embraced by various communities in the region and was usually sold from European shops. Basotho made their own version using bamboo or maize stalks though the sound is totally different to the original one which is made of metal.



Figure11: Basotho bamboo version of the Sekebeku (MMA, photo by Thabo Mohloboli)

When tuning the instrument, Basotho would throw them into boiling water for an hour or more (*ba se phe-ha*). Given that they were procured from different sources, the thickness of the frame is not always the same, neither are their shapes. The lack of references prohibits us from speculating as to when Basotho adopted this instrument or decided to make their own version using bamboo and maize stalks. However, one interest-

ing element is the name of the instrument in Sesotho. This is a Zulu word *skebengu* and has been sothofied as *sekebeku*. *Skebengu* can be translated as a freebooter and the equivalent of the word in Sesotho would be *senokoane*, possibly denoting that it was used by people in the mining towns of South Africa where unemployed men became involved in various illicit activities. This instrument has been recently adopted by Basotho.

F. Conclusion

The rich history of 'traditional' or indigenous musical instruments in Southern Africa is largely unknown and under-appreciated in this day and age of urban music, television, radio and the digital world. Yet, such instruments may make a comeback as the school curriculum in Lesotho mandates that students learn to make and play them. Through the current Sound Connects Fund Project, the Lesotho College of Education is prepared to give training to its Music Department staff members as well as teacher trainees in order to begin mastering these instruments, and pass on this knowledge and skills to a new generation.

This paper has sought to provide an overview of the history of such instruments, the contexts in which they were played, how the instruments were made, and the type of music performed.

The documenting of indigenous and musical instruments by travellers, explorers, missionaries and others over the past five centuries has provided a valuable if very incomplete historical background to this study. One of the shortcomings of their writings is that when they first documented an instrument within a particular ethnic group, especially the Khoi or Hottentots, observers tended to conclude that the instrument was invented by that group. Given that different ethnic groups were not documented within the same timeframe, it is rather difficult to conclude that an instrument was invented by the group where it was first documented by literate outsiders.

Further research has revealed a larger framework for interpreting the evolution of these chordophones over longer periods of time and across the wider region of sub-Saharan Africa. Though certain commonalities exist both north and south of the Zambezi, distinctive regional patterns have also emerged. Many questions remain to be clarified through the research of archaeologists, musicologists, and others.

Many writers have indicated that most of the instruments discussed were solo instruments and yet, upon careful analysis of certain observers, we discover that a larger social context also existed. For instance, Casalis and Widdicombe show that *lesiba* was performed to the accompaniment of a drum in a larger performance context. Some of these instruments would also be accompanied by singing and dancing, and featured in various communal ritual and spiritual ceremonies.

We have noted, for example, that *lelope* and *thomo* were played during the *hlophe* ritual. Lately *mathuela* (indigenous spiritual healers) have lost the use of these instruments in their ceremonies. From the audio recordings of previous researchers, we are able to realise, however incompletely, how the instruments were used in a range of rituals, and thus the songs carry a lot of history and borrowings from different types of music.

Though music may well be of solace and spiritual value to a solitary player, it is also connected with social, cultural and religious events / activities. Perhaps the rapidly changing circumstances of Basotho during the 19th century led to the increasing loss of these larger performance contexts, lending undue credence to the observations of later writers who were not aware of the previous dispensation.

One instrument that seems to have evolved significantly, more than the others, is '*mamokhorong*'. It has evolved from a simple mouth-resonated bow made of sinew string and a stick bowed with horse or cow hair with a simple resonator (calabash or shell) into a combination of wire string and tin resonator that has helped it to retain its value in terms of a larger performance context.

However, it is still bowed with horse hair. *Sekatari*, on the other hand, also a product of innovation, is extinct.

Efforts by modern players to provide a tuning peg or other adaptations to increase their value in performance may lead to an enhancement of the attractiveness of some of these other instruments within new performance contexts, thereby giving greater social recognition as well as authenticity in this era where youth in particular are seeking to 'decolonize' education or knowledge. Re-appropriation and adaptation are thus in vogue, at least to a certain extent.

The observations of many writers as to the gender of instrumentalists may also be questioned in a number of cases. In 2008, I interviewed an elderly lady named 'Mankoko Putlamela from ha Letseka (Leribe District), who could play *setolo-tolo*, *lelope*, *sekebeku* and *mokhope*, whereas some commentators asserted that *setolo-tolo* is a man's instrument. Here too the younger generation, with its greater consciousness and freedom in terms of gender roles and identity, is likely to disregard such stereotypes.

Though the instruments that were utilized 200 years ago are fast facing extinction in Lesotho, the future may be very different as the various initiatives associated with the Sound Connects Fund Project gain traction.

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The views expressed in this paper, however, remain those of the author alone.

APPENDIX A

Nations that use lesiba									
Baroa/ San	Basotho	Khoi	Griqua	Pedi	Swazi	Tswana	Venda	Xhosa	Zulu
t'ha	lesiba	gora	Gora	kwadi/ lesiba	makwindi	losiba	ugwala	unkwindi	ugwala

Nations that use Lekope									
Basotho	Khoi	Griqua	Pedi	Pondo	Swazi	Tswana	Venda	Xhosa	Zulu/ Thonga
lekope/ lekotje	!gabus	!gabus	lekope	inkinge	umqangala	lengope	lugube	inkinge	umqangala

Nations that use Mokhope				
Baroa/San	Basotho	Pondo	Xhosa	Zulu/ Thonga
/khou	mokhope	umqange	umrhubhe	umqangala

Nations that use Setolo-tolo							
Bakwebo	Balubedu	Baroa/ San	Basotho	Basotho Transvaal	Karanga	Swazi	Pedi
kedondolo	kashane	'kan'gan	setolotolo	lekope	tshipendani	isitontolo	sekgapa
Tshopi	Thonga	Venda		Zulu			
penda	sekgapa	tshigwana/ tsivhana		Isitontolo/ isiqomqomana			