
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Culture through songs: Excavating indigenous Basotho knowledge in songs in Sannere's Pha-Badimo

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ABSTRACT

For the Basotho people songs are not just art. They are also vital mechanisms through which culture is transmitted. Additionally, writing is a fairly new phenomenon and means of information communication for them. Prior to writing being introduced, oral forms of literature were the main ways through which cultural transference, teaching, learning, and overall information communication took place. The introduction of writing among the Basotho did not replace orature. It only supplemented it as culture is still transmitted orally through methods that include songs, and lessons are still taught through oral forms of literature. In order to demonstrate the role played by songs in cultural transmission, this research excavates indigenous Basotho knowledge that is embedded in Sannere's (2024) extended play titled Pha-Balimo. In it, the artist explored themes including monogenesis, circular time, a cyclical life journey, balimo, as well as cornerstones of the Basotho people's societies including proverbs, clan names, myths, and dreams. This research builds on the transdisciplinary work of Phafoli and Khotso (2020) on Sesotho songs. Due to the research being centred on songs, the cultural transmission through music approach was employed.

KEYWORDS

Cultural transmission; Monogenesis; Basotho; Songs; proverbs; Circular time

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1. Introduction

Songs form an integral part of the Basotho people's culture. They have many functions; chief among them is the transmission of culture and teaching. By culture, this research refers to a people's collective knowledge and intellectual achievements, which are passed down intergenerationally. This research investigates songs in Sannere's extended play, *Pha-Balimo*, which was released in 2024. In the extended play, the artist grappled with many aspects of the Basotho people's culture which this research highlights, thereby showing the role and importance of songs in cultural transmission among the Basotho.

2. Functions of songs among the Basotho

Songs are part of a large cache of oral forms of literature among the Basotho which are still being used to teach, convey messages, communicate traditions, and serve a host of other purposes including entertainment. They are sung at different times, including during prayers for rain, and they are also sung for numerous purposes, such as strengthening and encouraging people during difficult tasks and celebrating (See Khotso 2017). Phafoli (2020, 23) argued that for artists who sing Sesotho music, songs are their conscious or unconscious preservation of history. Sesotho is both a culture and a language and also "... refers to anything, ideational, behavioural, or material, that Basotho regard as purely of their own devising, unadulterated by "external" influences" (Coplan 1991, 164). Zulu and Phafoli (2014, 181) analysed Basotho people's accordion songs as "... small narratives of self-identity" and argued that the songs were constructions of the artists' experiences. "The focus of the constructed self includes parentage and ancestry, clan totems and chiefs, social conditions, places where the artists were born and grew up, marriage problems, and experiences as migrant labourers in South Africa" (Zulu & Phafoli 2014, 181). The songs, through their inclusion of the aforementioned themes, transcend the autobiographical sphere and tap into the realm of history, historiography, tradition, and

culture. *Likoma* (secrets), as some songs are known, "... have become a defensible symbolic landscape, ringed by authoritative knowledge and identity" (Coplan 1991, 164).

3. Methodological approach

This research was undertaken using a cultural analysis methodology known as cultural transmission, particularly cultural transmission through music, as the work centred on songs. This method was used to examine how music served as a vehicle for cultural transmission among the Basotho people. "Cultural transmission is the process by which information is passed from individual to individual via social learning mechanisms such as imitation, teaching or language" (Mesoudi & Whiten 2008, 3489). It is "the transmission of preferences, beliefs and norms of behaviour which is the result of social interactions across and within generations ..." (Bisin & Verdier 2005, 1). The practical application of this method included analysing the song lyrics for cultural references and examining how the songs reflected the cultural identities of the Basotho people. It also included an investigation into how the songs communicated cultural cornerstones, preserved cultural narratives, and transmitted cultural knowledge. This approach is rooted in the understanding that songs play a vital role in preserving and transmitting culture.

4. Conceptual framework

This work builds on the transdisciplinary framework of Phafoli and Khotso (2020) on Sesotho music. The framework highlights four things: Firstly, Sesotho music "... like most oral Sesotho artifacts of the Basotho is a channel of thought of the society and mouthpiece of the folk that practice it" (Phafoli & Khotso 2020, 48). Secondly, in their music, the Basotho ensure that "... their language, customs, beliefs and thematic aspects [a]re retained and propagated" (Phafoli & Khotso 2020, 48). Thirdly, that Sesotho music "... broadly cover[s] Basotho's experiences and ways of their livelihood" (Phafoli & Khotso 2020, 49), and lastly it is "... the symbol of culture with which Basotho identify themselves ..." (Phafoli & Khotso 2020, 49). This thus portrays that music is deeply tethered in the fabric of the culture of the Basotho as they not only distinguish themselves from other nations with it, but they also use it as a tool through which they express their experiences and share keystones of their societies, including language and customs. Phafoli and Khotso (2020, 49) also argued that "generally, the artists [a]re not only viewed as the eyes and ears of the Basotho nation but also their conduit of thought and ethnicity on the whole".

5. Creation, beliefs, time, birth, and death

The first few themes in Sannere's (2024) songs in *Pha-Balimo* concern the Basotho people's belief in circular time, a cyclical life journey, regeneration, and monogenesis. In the song titled *Ke romiloe* (I am sent), Sannere (2024) stated that his talent multiplies at Ntsoana-tsatsi which is where the Basotho people believe they originated from and will once again return to after life as it is known to the living in the earthly plane ends through death. Sannere (2024) stated: "*Talente eaka e kolla Ntsoana-tsatsi*" "my talent gathers/ multiplies at Ntsoana-tsatsi". Ntsoana-tsatsi means place of the rising sun. Its exact location is generally no longer known however it is believed to be somewhere in the East, the direction from which the sun rises (Guma 1967, *qtd in Mokoena 2011, 14*). For that reason, the Basotho buried those who had passed-on facing the east (Rakotsoane 1996, 50, 63). Futhwa (2013, 66) argued that this place is in present-day Botswana, while Guma (1967 *qtd in Mokoena 2011, 13*) stated that Ellenberger and Macgregor placed it across the border of Lesotho, midway between Vrede and Frankfort. Rakotsoane (1996, 62, 66) stated that it is the world *Molimo*, creator of everything, and the *balimo* who are individuals who have passed-on. They are sometimes translated into English as ancestors; however, because "language represents a specific worldview and ontology" (Ntuli 2002, 54 *qtd in Magoqwana 2018, 76*), the English word does not fully encapsulate all that the *balimo* stand for, therefore, this paper will refer to them as *balimo* and to the supreme being whom the Basotho believe to be the creator of everything as *Molimo*. Rakotsoane's (1996, 62, 66) assertion that Ntsoana-tsatsi is the place of *Molimo* and *balimo* means that it is not located in the land of the living. Nonetheless, the Basotho people believe that it is a world of peace, rain, and prosperity (Guma 1980 *qtd in Rakotsoane 1996, 65*), of Khotso, Pula, Nala as the motto of the Basotho states. The Basotho also believe that life is a journey to and from the creator.

The Basotho believe that their beginning is where their end is as people are created (pre-birth) by and return (post-death) to the supreme being known by multiple names including but not limited to *Molimo*, *Ramaseli*, *Tlhahlamacholo*, *Tlatlamacholo*, *Rammoloki*, *Tsitoe*, and *Jere* (See Rakotsoane 1996 and Futhwa 2013). This can be deduced from their ancient prayer lines that state: "*Lichaba li tsoang ho oena 'mopong, Lichaba li tlang ho khutlela ho oena meahong*" (Rakotsoane 1996, 46) "nations that come from you from creation, nations that will return to you to creation". These lines deduce that people are created by *Tlatlamacholo* and will return to him when their lives are over. The Basotho also believe that after death, they become *balimo*, who are the living-dead, live in the after-life with *Molimo*, and are still significantly involved with the lives of the living as they are believed to be granters of good fortunes and bestowers of bad luck depending on how they are treated (Manyeli 1992, 51 *qtd in Rakotsoane 1996, 69*; Rakotsoane 1996, 70). Therefore, for the Basotho, death is merely an entrance back into the land of *Molimo* and *balimo*. That is why they never pronounced a person dead. They would rather say that the person had "... slept, passed away, gone home, departed, rested or left" (Rakotsoane 1996, 59).

As can be determined through the line *"liatla li ts'oeu tsa Rammoloki, liatla li ts'oeu ke ho bopa masea"* "Hands are white of the saviour, hands are white due to creating babies" (Rakotsoane 1996, 46) in the ancient Basotho people's prayer, *Molimo* creates new beings, babies that will be born into the earth. The *balimo* help to welcome souls from earth. *Molimo* and *balimo* are also believed to be overseers of all of life on earth (Rakotsoane 1996, 70). As formerly stated, the Basotho believe in life after life; hence, in the olden days a person was buried with supplies like seeds and weapons if he was a man and cooking and cleaning supplies if she was a woman. This was so they would be able to continue to make a life for themselves in the next life (see Rakotsoane 1996, 55, 58). That is also why, as stated before, they were buried facing the east, where they were believed to be heading (Rakotsoane 1996, 50, 63). As indicated above, life is thus a circular journey from and to Ntsoana-tsatsi for the Basotho. To add to the idea of a cyclical life journey, which also encompasses birth, seeming death, and regeneration, Sannere (2024) asserted that his flesh was born to an already existing spirit and that he was given the actions of someone who was alive a long time ago.

In the song titled *Ke romiloe*, Sannere (2024) asserted *"nama e hlahile moea o se o ntse o phela, ke fuoe ketso tsa motho ea phetseng khale"* "flesh was born to an already alive spirit, I was given the actions of someone who lived a long time ago". This may seem improbable however, the Basotho people do not tame time the same way Europeans do. As Tisani (2019, 23) argued, "Europeans have tamed time through their application of mathematical knowledge, as well as the use of chronometers". "... The European worldview is rigidly linear, going forward" (Tisani 2019, 23) while for Africans, time is both cyclical and linear (Tisani 2019, 25). Linearly in the human experience, days and seasons succeed one another in a seeming forward movement (Tisani 2019, 25). Cyclically:

"a day after going in a circle, is succeeded by another day, summer succeeded by another summer when the time has gone round. This important notion of time permeates all thinking and understanding of life. The significant factor is that what is, is not complete in isolation. In due course what is will come again and this attain its fullness. There is a pregnancy, a potential to regenerate" (Tisani 2019, 25).

This means that what is presently the past will once again be (the) present in the future. It also means that "dead" does not mean having ceased to exist, but rather dormant for now with a chance of being active in the future. Being active does however not mean in the same form. As is expressed in Sannere's (2024) work, an old spirit may inhabit a new body.

Still in the spirit of regeneration, in the song *Ke romiloe*, Sannere (2024) stated: *"Mesebetsi ea ka, le pele ke phela, boholo ba eona ene e se entse e tsejoa"* "my works, prior to me being alive, most of them were already known". Linearly, this seems counterintuitive as works cannot be known before they are performed, let alone before their creator (the worker) is alive; however, taking the idea of regeneration and a circular existence into account, this is possible as what was, will be again, as time and actions cycle through "the new-old". The new-old means new in this season yet not new (old) under the sun as what once was, is, and will again be in the future. To further affirm this fact, still in the song *Ke romiloe*, Sannere (2024) stated: *"Lehlakeng la ka bonkhono ba ne ba ts'ohile, ba re jo! Mokhachane o tsohile"* "At my reed¹ (meaning at the place of my birth)) elderly mothers were scared, they said jo! Mokhachane has reincarnated". Mokhachane was the father to the founder of the Basotho people, Moshoeshe I. Therefore, the elder mothers seeing him incarnate in a new-born child speaks to that regeneration that the Basotho believe in. It affirms what was (past) once again being (present) in the ever-unfolding life cycle.

Also, because in the cosmology of the Basotho people what is does not and cannot exist in isolation, the artist (Sannere 2024) stated that his talent was given to him by the *balimo*. Sannere (2024) stated *"Talenta ena ke e fuoe ke balimo"* "this talent was given to me by *balimo*". This speaks to what the Basotho call *lineo* which they classify as talents or gifts that one is naturally endowed with by *Molimo* and/ or *balimo*. It again speaks to the "monistic world-view" "... which was a closed system of cause and effect" which Rakotsoane (1996, 1) argued was held by "the ancient Basotho, like most other Africans ...". "Because of this, they excluded chance in reality, hence everything that happened was understood to have its own specific cause within the same system" (Rakotsoane 1996, 1). The cause, as is mimicked through Sannere's (2024) assertion that the *balimo* endowed his talent, is beyond individual reach and attributed to larger forces such as *balimo* and *Molimo*.

Still within the context of monogenesis and in the song *Ke romiloe*, Sannere (2024) asserted, *"Hotla mona ke romiloe nna, ha ke ea tla feela, ke tlike ho phetha thomo ea baholo"* "coming here I was sent, I did not just come, I have come to fulfil the elders' mission" thereby professing that his birth was planned for the purposes of *balimo/ baholo* (elders) and his life will also be a fulfilment of

¹ "Ancient Basotho used to say ... *ngoana o tsoa lehlakeng* – a child comes from the place of reeds" (Rakotsoane 1996, 50). Futhwa (2013, 118) stated that the origin story of the Basotho states that the first Mosotho emerged from the reeds in Ntsoana-tsatsi. Ntsoana-tsatsi was said to have been surrounded by tall reeds therefore a reed is erected outside a house to symbolise that there is a new-born baby (Guma 1967 *qtd in Mokoena* 2011, 14; Futhwa 2013, 11). A reed is also a sign of purity (Futhwa 2013, 66).

their mission. Therefore, all his achievements will be in honour of them. In the song *Ke holisitsoe ka malingoana* (I was raised through *malingoana* (*malingoana* are songs that are sung at some point during boys' initiation into manhood)), Sannere (2024) also added "*ha le mpona ke itetse pineng, ke ntse ke phetha thomo*" "when you see me dedicated to music, I am fulfilling what I was sent for" thus further expanding on the idea of monogenesis. Sannere (2024) also thoroughly explored the roles the *balimo* play among the Basotho people.

6. The role played by balimo

Among the Basotho, the *balimo* are believed to be concerned with a human's life from its inception until they transition back to the world of the *balimo*. In the song titled *Nthoe ke e lorileng* (*What I dreamt about*), Sannere (2024) stated that "... *balimo ba a thusa*" "... *balimo* do help". This means that when spirits transition back into the world of *Molimo* and *balimo*, they are once again concerned with the well-being of people. Consequentially, when things are going awry in one's life, the Basotho say that the person's *balimo* have turned against them (Rakotsoane 1996, 70). It is also through the *balimo* that people pray to *Molimo* (Guma 1967 *qtd in Mokoena* 2011, 16; Futhwa 2013, 61). Rakotsoane (1996, 35) argued that the *balimo* "... are the direct object of the words of prayer for they are asked to pass the prayers of the living to him who is their leader (*Molimo*)". Futhwa (2013, 61) argued that it is the *balimo* who pass people's gratitudes and grievances to *Molimo*. Segoete (1981, 42-43 *qtd in Rakotsoane* 1996, 69) argued that for the Basotho, prayer was appealing to *Molimo* through the intervention of *balimo* while Rakotsoane (1996, 70) argued that prayer was used as an expression of gratitude or a way to appease the *Balimo*. Nevertheless, prayer was necessary for the overall well-being of life (Rakotsoane 1996, 69).

It is important to note that 'in Sesotho culture, the king does not live separately from his subjects but he lives among them and from him, they receive orders and guidance' therefore *Molimo* does not remain in the sky whilst *balimo* remain underground (Rakotsoane 1996, 3). Thus, as previously indicated, *Molimo* lives with the *balimo* (Rakotsoane 1996, 4, 40). Echoing these sentiments, in the song *Ke holisitsoe ka malingoana*, Sannere (2024) stated that Moshoeshoe, founder of the Basotho people who has long since passed on "*o lutse letsohong le letona la Ramaseli balimong*" "is sitting at the right-hand side of *Ramaseli* (*Molimo*) at the place of *balimo*". In the same song the artist (Sannere 2024) also spoke to the interest the *balimo* have in the living. Still talking about Moshoeshoe, Sannere (2024) stated that: "*kea tseba moo a teng o motlotlo*" "I know that where he is he is proud". It was a general belief that if one had contributed positively to the well-being of the Basotho during their earthly life, they would continue to do so beyond death and become protectors of the nation (Rakotsoane 1996, 71). The Bakoena's influence especially extended beyond death because they held leadership positions in the Basotho's social organisation (Rakotsoane 1996, 71). Moshoeshoe was a Mokoena.

Returning to the subject of the help that the *balimo* offer to the living, Sannere (2024), in the song *Lumela 'me* (*Hello mother*), directed the following to his mother who has passed on: "*hopola ke oena sets'abelo sa ka ha 'kepe sa bophelo se teba, hopola hore ke ts'epile oena ha mathata a fihla*" "remember that you are the place I run to when the ship of life sinks, remember it is you I am trusting in when problems arise". Affirming the role believed to be played by the *balimo* among the Basotho, Rakotsoane (1996, 61) argued that:

"... ancestors were also the protectors of the living against all perils of life. As long as one was under the protection of his ancestors, he felt secured and protected against such calamities as droughts, hunger, poverty, lightning and all other sorts of problems in life. It was because of such existing relationship between the living and the dead that in Sesotho when one was plagued by all sorts of misfortunes in life, people used to say that his ancestors had turned against him or that his ancestors were with him in such cases as when one had mysteriously survived a serious danger".

As formerly stated, just as it is necessary to go through the chief's councillors to get to the chief, *Molimo* is also met through *balimo* (Rakotsoane 1996, 69). This is reflected in the words of the Basotho people's indigenous prayer which state "*Molimo o mocha rapela oa khale*" "new *Molimo* pray to the old one" through which the living beckon the "new *Molimo*" who is the *balimo* to pass their prayers on to *Molimo*, the supreme being who is referred to as "*oa khale*" in the prayer (Rakotsoane 1996, 70). In the indigenous belief systems of the Basotho, *Molimo* is higher in status than the *balimo* who are the closest beings to him and thus serve as intermediaries between him and the living (Rakotsoane 1996, 41, 61; Futhwa 2013, 69). On top of being intermediaries between humans and *Molimo*, *balimo* were also believed to be intercessors as they prayed for the living and also passed the living's prayers to *Molimo* (Rakotsoane 1996, 61). Sannere (2024) alluded to this sentiment in the song *Ke romiloe nna* through stating that at Ntsoana-tsatsi: "*Bonkhono le bontate moholo ba ntse ba re 'bina ka thata ngoana' moshanyana*" "*Bonkhono* and *bontate moholo* (passed-on elder mothers and fathers) are still saying 'sing a lot boy child'". They are not just mere onlookers but are also supporters as one goes about the business they have been called to do. Sannere (2024) also referred to the symbiotic relationship that the living have with the *balimo*.

In the song *Nthoe ke e lorileng*, Sannere (2024) stated:

"Hlabang tse ts'oeu le fepe balimo

Le tle le bone ha Molimo o thaba

Hlabang likhatala le etse mekete,

le tle le bone ha Lesotho le hlaka"

"Slaughter white ones and feed the balimo

So that you may perceive Molimo's happiness

Slaughter rams and make a feast

So that you may perceive Lesotho becoming clear"

In these lyrics, Sannere (2024) reckons that if the Basotho slaughtered animals and made a feast, they would perceive *Molimo's* happiness through things going well for the country. The shedding of blood connects people to the *balimo* (Futhwa 2013, 72). As argued before, the *balimo* are intercessors for the living, and they are also intermediaries between them and *Molimo*. Therefore, when the living give to the *balimo*, the *balimo* also give back to them hence the clearness of Lesotho when a sacrifice of animals has been made to them. This, for the Basotho, is prayer. In line with the symbiotic relationship the *balimo* have with the living, there is also a feast of thanksgiving known as a *Pha-balimo* after which Sannere (2024) titled the extended play being investigated in this research.

The Extended Play is titled *Pha-Balimo* (Gift to the *balimo*), which is a ceremony of thanksgiving from the living Basotho to their *balimo*. As formerly stated, the *balimo* are believed to be grantors of good fortunes (Manyeli 1992, 51 *qtd in Rakotsoane* 1996, 69) as well as bestowers of terrible luck therefore, when they help an individual with good fortunes, the individual, in turn, expresses their gratitude through the feast known as a *Pha-balimo*. *Pha-balimo* is therefore an expression of gratitude to the *balimo*. Rakotsoane (1996, 73) stated that it was normally done after harvest through an offering of grains left in a shallow hole in the middle of a threshing ground for the *balimo*. In recent times where providence comes through many other means alongside harvest, a *Pha-balimo* can take place anytime an individual or family wants to give gratitude to their *balimo*. It takes place in the family homestead where a feast, often including meat from an animal slaughtered by the family, accompanied by traditional alcohol (*joala ba Sesotho*) and snuff, is made and people are invited to dine with the family and share in their gratitude. Sannere's (2024) work also highlighted cornerstones of Basotho societies, as well as their indigenous knowledge systems.

7. Myths

The cornerstones highlighted by Sannere (2024) include clan names, myths, *Molimo*, and proverbs. He employed the myth of *Moshanyana oa Senkatana* (See Rakotsoane 1996) to elaborate his thoughts through a story that would be familiar to the Basotho people. In the song *Nthoe ke e lorileng*, Sannere (2024) stated "*Kholumolumo, sechaba se ka mpeng*" "*Kholumolumo* (Man-eating beast), the nation is in the stomach" to explain the greed that he observed among politicians whom he claimed did not heed to the cries of people because they were money-oriented. In the myth of *Moshanyana oa Senkatana*, *kholumolumo* eats an entire nation and its animals, leaving behind only one pregnant woman who had hidden well (Rakotsoane 1996, 41). The woman later bears a child, *Moshanyana oa Senkatana*, who defeats the *Kholumolumo* and frees the people (Rakotsoane 1996, 41). As in the myth the *Kholumolumo* ate so much it could not move yet still wanted more, his use of the myth immediately betrayed his sentiments about the people being referred to without him having to overtly state his case. It speaks to them never being satisfied and thus continuing to betray the people in their pursuit of more. Sannere (2024) also incorporated dreams, which are part of the keystones of Basotho societies, in his work.

8. Dreams/ Ditoro

Sannere (2024), through the guise of a prophetic dream, made his hopes for the future of the Basotho people known however, prior to detailing his vision of the future, Sannere (2024) stated: "My mother was a prayerful woman who had faith that *balimo* helped. She always told me that: 'my child, please be aware that dreams speak'". In his own words, in the song *Nthoe ke e lorileng*, Sannere (2024) stated: "*Mme ene ele mosali oa morapeli, ea nang le tumelo ea hore balimo ba a thusa. O ne a hlola a ntjoetsitse hore 'ngoan'aka ke kopa o hlocomele hore litoro li a bua*". Dreams are some of the primary ways through which the *balimo* communicate with the living (Rakotsoane 1996, 66). It is through them that they express their demands or dissatisfactions (Rakotsoane 1996, 66). Futhwa (2013, 72) argued that they are the way in which life reveals itself to an individual. Futhwa (2013,

72) further argued that there are three kinds of dreams namely revelation/ prophetic dreams, dreams of *balimo*, and general dreams. Revelation/ prophetic dreams are dreams in which an individual is shown what is to come, dreams of *balimo* give instructions on what to do while general dreams connect the person to all else (Futhwa 2013, 72). Russell (1993 *qtd in Mokoena 2011, 11*) argued that one of the important functions of orature is to encompass past, present, and future and offer a window into a society, touching on its beliefs and values.

Sannere (2024) detailed his prophetic dream in this way:

"Nna ke lorile ho se ho le monate

Mathata a felile, re phela ka hosanna

Moo re leng teng ho rena khotso,

moea oa boikhutso,

'Chaba sa heso se utloana"

"I dreamt that it was jovial

Problems having ended, we lived in Hosanna (joy, praise, adoration)

Wherever we were peace was king,

Air of restfulness/ calmness

My fellow kinsmen getting along"

This dream is an expression of a hoped-for utopic future as in the same song Sannere (2024) expressed that there were divisions among the Basotho, high crime rates in Lesotho, as well as corruption in the country. He stated "*Ke shebile lipeto le polao tsa masea, ke shebile litumelo tse fapaneng tse arotseng banna ha ba/ re tents'ana ts'ea*" "I am observing the rapes and killings of children, I am observing different belief systems that have divided us, men no longer help one another wear the ts'ea (meaning that people no longer aid one another)". Sannere (2024) therefore expressed his desires for the future of Lesotho and Basotho through this claim of having had a prophetic dream. Sannere (2024), through how he communicated about *Molimo*, made reference to the supreme being that the Basotho people believe in being an impersonal, non-human(ised) being.

9. Non-personalised supreme being

In the song *Nthoe ke e lorileng*, Sannere (2024) stated: "*Le tle le bone ha Molimo o thaba*" "so that you may perceive *Molimo* being happy" and later in the same song he stated "*Molimo o ka re thusa*" "*Molimo* can help us". In the Basotho's pre-Christian prayers, *Molimo* was addressed in this manner: "*Molimo o mocha rapela oa khale. Re rapelle ho o [m]oholo Jere*" (Rakotsoane 1996, 37). What makes the references impersonal is the use of the pronoun "o", underlined in the above statements (See Rakotsoane 1996, 37). For personal pronouns the Basotho use "e", "u" and "a" instead of "o". Sannere's (2024) reference to *Molimo* as impersonal also showed that unlike the Christian God and many other gods who are personalised and attributed to different genders, the Basotho people's ancient god is neither human nor gendered. As stated before, proverbs are part of the cornerstones of the Basotho people which Sannere (2024) incorporated into his lyrics.

10. Proverbs

Proverbs are succinct statements of truth (Mierder 1993, *qtd in Possa 2013, 12*). They are an integral part of the Basotho people's culture as they form a significant part of their language and therefore understanding and interpretation. In the song titled *Lumela 'me*, Sannere (2024) stated: "*Mona ke tlotla 'tau li mesana', tsela e ntlisitseng bophelong*" "here I am honouring 'lions in small dresses', the road that brought me to life". Proverbs have many functions including relaying messages, educating, and briefly making a point. In this instance, Sannere (2024) used a proverb to point to the gender of the individual he was talking about, as well as that individual's relationship to himself. In its unadulterated form, the proverb states: "*Basali ke tau di mesana*" (Sekese 1907, 255) "women are lions in small dresses" which Machobane (1996, 38) argued meant that women are sharp-tongued and Sekese (1907, 255-256) argued that it meant they used their mouths to fight. As shown above, in the song, the artist (Sannere

2024) leaned into who was portrayed in the proverb, not what was portrayed. Therefore, through that depiction, Sannere (2024) was simply portraying that he was honouring women, particularly his mother as she is “the road” through which he came to life.

Proverbs form part of the large cache of oral forms of literature among the Basotho people. Guma (1997 *qtd in Mokoena 2011*, 12) argued that they are a survival of a past that was handed down by word of mouth from its inception. They, along with other forms of oral literature, were most alive in the world of the ancients before print froze them in books (Guma 1997 *qtd in Mokoena 2011*, 12). Grzybek (1994, 236 *qtd in Possa 2013*, 8) argued that although used differently to earlier times, proverbs are still very much in use while Pachocinski (1996, 1 *qtd in Possa 2013*, 8) argued that proverbs are still an integral part of indigenous African people’s everyday lives. Duncan (1998 *qtd in Mokoena 2011*, 11) argued that social success in African societies is partly dependent on a good command of proverbs. They are embedded in the fabric of the Basotho people’s language and as argued by Pachocinski (1996, 1 *qtd in Possa 2013*, 8), at their core, proverbs contain the history, heritage, traditions, ethics, and wisdom of a people. Central to proverbs are feelings, emotions, and attitudes (Mokitimi 1991, 18 *qtd in Possa 2013*, 11). It is however also important to note that proverbs have been influenced by modernity and have thus evolved to fit the modern age (Possa 2013, 10).

Mokitimi (1991, 111 *qtd in Possa 2013*, 10) also argued that proverbs are affected by the change that comes with development hence the existence of variants with marginally different meanings. In line with that argument, Possa (2013, 12) argued that “Proverbs are still being newly coined, twisted, modernized and harmonized along with the changing culture to suit the prevailing socio-cultural situations in the society”. Similarly, Mieder (2009, 43 *qtd in Possa 2013*, 9) argued that proverbs are flexible and adaptable as their meanings are not contextual. The aforementioned variants, flexibility, and adaptability of proverbs can also be seen in how Sannere (2024) used some of the proverbs. In the song *Ke holisitsoe ka malingoana*, Sannere (2024) stated “*ha nka ka qapela pina seemeng mapepele atlo nthula*” “If I compose a song when the performance is already ongoing, people who cannot sing are going to bump into me”. The proverb states “*u qapela koma seemeng*” (Sekese 1907, 164) “he composes a song during an on-going performance” which is discouraged among the Basotho who believe that preparation is key.

The proverb, to those who do not know its meaning, may just sound like a statement that does not encourage or discourage however, to capture its true essence of discouragement, Sannere (2024), in the song *Lekholo la banna* (a hundred men), again used the proverb to demonstrate the importance of preparation and the disadvantages of a lack of preparation. He (Sannere 2024) stated: “*Ba itse ba qapela pina seemeng, le kajeno ha ba so phakame*” “they tried to compose a song during an ongoing performance, even today they still have not risen (succeeded)”. That therefore states that no success will be had from a lack of preparation. In relating the proverb and its meaning through stories, the artist (Sannere 2024) forced the proverb to conform to the situations he was describing, thereby showing the proverb in action. Another proverb that the artist reconfigured to capture the essence of the message he was portraying states: “*U se ke ua khahloa ke none e hlotsa*” “do not be enticed by a limping blesbok that is passing by”. This means to not be deceived by appearances as the limping blesbok may be used to its disability and will outrun the individual in a chase (Sekese 1907, 128). In the song *Nthoe ke e lorileng*, Sannere (2024) stated “*E re khahlile none*” “we have been enticed by the blesbok”. That means that “(we) have been deceived”. Again, as Possa (2013, 12) and Mieder (2009, 43 *qtd in Possa 2013*, 9) stated, proverbs evolve to fit the needs of the time and context in which they are used. Orature is therefore always in motion.

This lack of stagnancy and constant motion of orature can also be observed in the proverb Sannere (2024) used in the song *Ke holisitsoe ka malingoana*. The artist (Sannere 2024) stated: “*ho itsoe ke tsebe hore ts’epo ea motho oa monna e lutse moqhakeg oa tlholo, haeso bokeno bo ka thatafala, sentle ke ho boea le marumo*” “they (meaning the elders. For young people or one’s peers the Basotho use the pronoun ‘ba’ instead of ‘ho’) said I should know that a male person’s hope is in the crown of victory, (or else) entry back into the place I originate from would be a difficulty, what is right is to return with the assegais”. The unadulterated proverb states “*Sentle ke ho boea le marumo le thebe*” (Sekese 1907, 383) “what is right is to return with assegais and a shield”. Failure to do so means that one has lost the battle or has run away from it. Both are condemned (Sekese 1907, 383). The proverb is also used to give thanks for the life of an individual who has returned home safely from battle (Sekese 1907, 383). Sannere’s (2024) work thus affirms the argument that orature is not stagnant. It is forever transitioning and is never frozen in place. His (Sannere 2024) use of proverbs in work that was released in 2024 also shows that they are still relevant among the Basotho people today. Sannere’s (2024) work also includes clan names, *liboko* as they are known to the Basotho people, which, as argued, are part of the foundation stones of Basotho societies.

11. Clan names

In the song *Ke holisitsoe ka malingoana*, Sannere (2024) referred to himself as a Letebele, thereby tracing himself back to his Nguni roots as the first king of the Matebele people was Mzilikazi who was born of two Nguni parents from Kwa-Zulu Natal namely Machobane and Nompethu (Mutunhu 1976). Machobane was a king of the Northern Khumalo people and Nompethu was a daughter of Zwile, king of the Ndwandwe people (Mutunhu 1976). The song *Ha le felile o ntjoetse* also referred to a Mofokeng. The Bafokeng were a part of the first clans with which Moshoeshoe founded the Basotho. His mother, Kholu, was a part of the Bafokeng clan therefore some people from where she came from chose to be led by her son. Among the Basotho, when an

individual recites their clan names and praises, those who know the names and praises already know the history of the reciter's people, as well as which part of Lesotho they may have originated from. *Liboko* also form an integral part of the Basotho people's oral literature as the main way through which they are transmuted is word of mouth. They are also a large part of the remnants of pre-literate Basotho societies. They are important because they teach individuals the origins and history of their people and also introduce them to their *balimo* and elders (Futhwa 2013, 22). This is important because culturally, in prayer, one calls to their *balimo* therefore individuals need to know who to call to (Futhwa 2013, 22). They also help to determine the boundaries of relationships because by tracing back lineages, they help to determine whether individuals are related or not and whether culturally they can get married or not (Futhwa 2013, 22). Sannere (2024) also explored the historical and historiographical knowledge of the Basotho people.

12. Indigenous historical and geographical knowledge

In the song titled *Ke holisitsoe ka malingoana*, Sannere (2024) gave his ethnic and geographical information culturally. He (Sannere 2024) referred to himself as "*tlolo sa Kholu le Mokhachane*" "grandchild of Kholu and Mokhachane" thereby tracing himself back through the lineage of the Basotho people who were first conceived by Moshoeshoe, father of the Basotho, whose parents were Kholu and Mokhachane. The cluster of people that came to be known as the Basotho were first gathered and welcomed by Lepoqo, chief of the Bakoena ba Mokoteli clan who is commonly known by his praise name, Moshoeshoe. He received the praise name after successfully raiding Monaheng, the Chief of another Bakoena clan (Mangaela 1945, 6 *Rasenyalo* 2011, 43). After the raid, it was said that Lepoqo had sheared Monaheng's beard therefore, the name was coined after the sounds of shearing blades (Rasenyalo 2011, 44). Further asserting himself as a Mosotho, still in the song titled *Ke holisitsoe ka malingoana*, Sannere (2024) stated "*ke ngoana' peo ea Letlama*" "I am a child of Letlama's seed".

Letlama is also one of Moshoeshoe's names. He received it at initiation school, *lebollong* (Rasenyalo 2011, 43). It is customary for a man to return with a new name from *lebollong*. Through Sannere's (2024) proclamation that he is of Letlama's seed, he also gave his geographical information as he placed himself in Maseru, an area of Lesotho where Moshoeshoe primarily ruled while his brothers ruled other regions with Moshoeshoe as their primary king. The artist was born in Mokema which is a part of the jurisdiction that was ruled by Moshoeshoe. Traditionally, when also wanting to divulge their geographical details, the Basotho who have their roots in Lesotho referred to themselves, just as the artist did, according to who their chief was. Soccer teams also bear the names of the chiefs of the places they were formulated in. Therefore, Maseru's soccer team is named Matlama (The binders) after Letlama (The binder).

13. Conclusion

Oral forms of literature never lost their importance among the Basotho. Although they were supplemented by writing after it was introduced, information is still conveyed through them. Songs are a significant part of those oral forms of literature. They are not just art but are also living cultural documents that are vital in the process of cultural transmission. Furthermore, they are vital tools in preserving cultural knowledge from one generation to the next. As modalities that also preserve cultural narratives, they transcend entertainment and tap into conveying culture, recounting history, teaching lessons, and communicating traditions. Succinctly, they are modes through which information is transferred and knowledge is gathered. *Pha-Balimo* is a great example of this as it is a rich cultural reservoir because through it Sannere (2024) communicated and preserved culture, traditions, as well as other cornerstones of the Basotho people and their societies.

The main aim of this research was to excavate indigenous Basotho knowledge embedded in Sannere's (2024) songs and show that songs are important in the process of cultural transmission among the Basotho. This was an important undertaking because oral forms of literature are not as commonly used as written forms of literature in the investigation of culture in different disciplines yet they are common ways of conveying culture in societies that have strong oral traditions. This leads to some important aspects of those societies being missed/ left out. This research therefore centred on under-utilised modalities of gathering information and showed that they are invaluable sources of cultural material, and consequently vital tools for conveying culture.

Ethical statement

This research does not contain any studies involving human or animal participants. It is a cultural analysis. It will not be plagiarised. The works of other people that will be used in this research will be cited. The author also did not receive any funding for the undertaking of this research and there were no conflicts of interest.

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