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Music of Lesotho Recorded, Annotated & Edited by Bill Wood



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MUSIC LP

CIRCUMCISION SONGS

SIDE 1

1. LEKOA E KHELE Banna - Hey, in the Vaal, you men - Joseph Manare, lead singer
2. TSOANA LI MALENTE - They are carrying malente
3. MARASHEA - Bernard Nteka, lead singer
4. BONA MASE BOKO - Look at the goats
5. OA CHO SEKUBETHE - You say sekubethe Albert Makutoane, lead singer
6. HAE NKONG TSA MALIMO - Hey, under the cannibal's noses - Albert Makutoane, lead singer
7. HE SHEBANG KOANA - Hey, look the other way - Francis Lesako, lead singer
8. LINOKANA - Streams - Bernard Nteka, lead singer
9. SEMONKOULA - Francis Lesako, lead singer

SIDE 2

1. Train Journey to the Republic of South Africa Francis Lesako acc. by John Maele on harmonica
2. E THATA - A fierce One - Seth Sello, lead singer
3. KHOBA - dance song - Augustina Mokhsoa, lead singer
4. IEO KA CHA - Hey, I'm burning - girl singing game
5. ABUTI JESEFA O REKILE KOLOI - Brother Joseph has bought a car - Agnes Lekeno and Ignatia Ngoae
6. Holy Mama - Augustina Mokhsoa, lead singer
7. ETANG NONYANA E TSOANG KHEKULO - The bird has come from afar - Francis Foso, lead singer
8. NTOA HAE E LOANA KE MOSEBETSI - Fighting a war is hard work - Lerotholi Psholi, lead singer
9. MACHINE O TENG - There is a machine poem sung by Kenneth Rannyama
10. NTATE WOOD RE TLA SALA LE MANG - Mr. Wood, with whom will we be left? Francis Lesako, lead singer
11. LEHA KA BUA, LEHA LE KA SOMA - Even if you talk or mock us
12. HEE EA TLA SALA - Hee, the one who will remain here - Kenneth Rannyama

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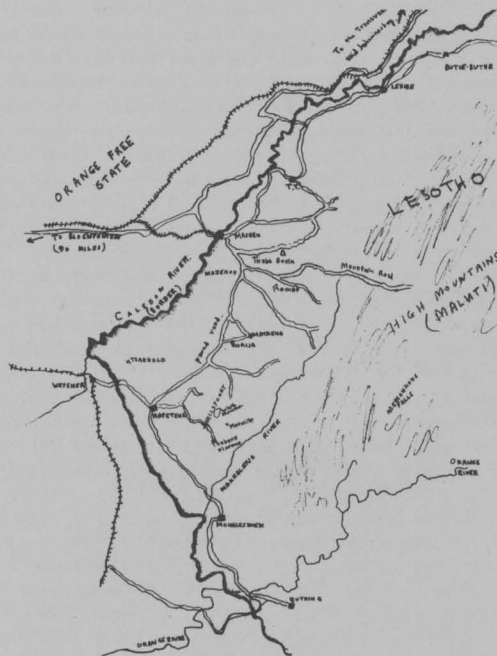
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Lesotho is an independent African country. About the size of Belgium, it has a population of approximately one million, almost all Basotho, and is completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. The country consists of agricultural lowlands in the west, averaging 5-6,000 feet, and higher mountains in the central and eastern regions. The climate is temperate: cool and dry in winter, hot and dry in summer. Summer is the rainy season; in winter, snow falls in many parts of the country. Corn and wheat are the main crops; sheep and goats are raised and their wool exported. Many families own cattle and horses.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the country was occupied by bushmen and by several Sotho-speaking tribes. The Basotho nation came into existence largely through the genius of one man, Moshoeshe, who united a group of these Sotho-speaking clans into a defensive alliance based on Thaba Bosiu, a flat-topped mountain which proved impregnable to attacks, first by wandering African tribes, then by the Boers and British. In 1868 Moshoeshe asked to have his kingdom made a British protectorate. The country remained under British control from 1868 until 1966, during which time it was called Basutoland. It became independent in 1966 under the name of Lesotho. It is a constitutional monarchy, with a parliamentary-type government.

Southern African Bantu languages are divided into two main classes, Nguni and Sotho. Sesotho is one of Lesotho's two official languages, English being the other. Sesotho, like other African languages, forms plurals and singulars of nouns by prefixing: monna=man; banna=men; ngoana=girl; banana=girls. Nouns are divided into seven classes, according to their prefixes. Class I, which has the plural prefix ba or bo, contains those words referring to Basotho people. In class III are found words for foreign tribes, such as the Matebele and Makhooa (white men). Two phonetic transcriptions are used for Sesotho. The older system, devised by missionaries, is still used in Lesotho, and a newer system, developed by linguists, is used mainly in books about African languages, and by some Basotho residents in South Africa. The Sesotho words in these notes are written in the old system. In general it sounds like it looks. A few exceptions: li is pronounced di and lu is pronounced du; the th and ph are aspirated t and p, and sound like English t and p at the beginning of a word; oa is pronounced wa; oe is pronounced like the English word "way." Thus Lesotho is pronounced "Lesoto"; Moshoeshe is pronounced "Moshway-shway."

Names

Almost all the students at Roulin were members of various Christian churches. Thus they had at least three names, a family name, a name given to them by their relatives soon after they were born, and a Christian name given to them when they were baptized into a church. The Christian names sometimes have an odd and grandiose ring to them: Anacletus, Augustinus, Justinus. Many students prefer to be called by their Sesotho names. The given names often tell something about the circumstances of the family at the time the child was born, or may tell something about the child when it was a baby. Thus Letholetseng is a name given to baby girls who don't cry very much; Puseletso (consolation) is a name given to a baby born after the death of a brother or sister. Thabang (joy) is a name given to the first-born boy; while Lifelile ("it is finished") is a name given by parents who do not expect to have any more children. Pulane is a name commonly given to girls born during the rain (from pula, "to rain").

The given names of singers which appear in these notes are those by which the students were commonly called.

The material on this record was recorded between 1972 and 1975, while I was teaching at Roulin Secondary School, Mafeteng District, Lesotho. The songs included here are not a comprehensive survey of the music of Lesotho, nor are they a complete record of the music of one region or village. The singers were all students of Roulin, and the songs here presented consist of that part of their musical repertoire which I thought the most interesting. Side 1 is made up of songs and poetry of the type sung by boys who have just returned to their villages from the traditional Basotho circumcision schools. They were not often heard around the school, partly because they are considered old-fashioned. But many boys knew the songs, and were happy to sing them for me. Side 2 includes dance songs, modern songs, and improvised poetry. Traditional culture and music are still very strong in Lesotho, and new songs in traditional style are being composed all the time. One such circumcision-type song has a chorus which celebrates the first landing on the moon: "Apollo levene, Apollo levene!"

Not included on this recording are a number of song types and styles which were common at our school and are heard throughout those parts of Lesotho which have come into contact with Western civilization. Omitted are church hymns and other religious music, which is composed by sophisticated African composers who are familiar with western musical styles and may have received formal musical training. These songs are learned by church and school choirs from printed texts, the music being given in the sol-fa notation. They are very popular and are sung almost constantly for weeks after they have been learned, but, at least to this listener, they sound syrupy and insipid, as though they had been composed specifically to neutralize the rough powerful music of Basotho tradition.

Basotho Initiation Schools

Supposedly in pre-Christian times all boys were initiated. No boy or man, no matter what his age, was considered a real man until he had attended the school and been circumcised. Christian missionaries, who were well established in Lesotho by the latter part of the 19th century, strongly opposed these rites of passage, and the initiation schools began less and less common, although they do seem to have increased within the last ten years. Schools run by Christian missions no longer refuse to accept boys who have been initiated, while many boys and their families no longer consider initiation a necessary step to manhood.

Boys who are going to go to the circumcision school are told that they have long tails, visible only to men who have already been initiated, and that these tails will disappear only after they have been circumcised. The boys are taken by a leader (mosuo) to a remote spot, preferably on top of a mountain. An initiation lodge (mophato) is built, and rough huts for the boys to sleep in. Here they live for about five months, during which time they are circumcised and learn secret songs (likoma), which are said (by traditionalists) to be of a highly serious nature and morally instruc-

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tive in text; and are said (by Christians and progressives) to be highly immoral and obscene. Never having heard any of them I can't say which account is true. The boys also learn lithoko; this word is translated into English as "praises." In this spoken poetry, the boys may praise themselves, their chief, or an animal. The lithoko do not always consist of praise, however, as the boys are equally likely to describe their bad qualities or lament the hardships of their life.

At the end of the five months, the boys, dressed in blankets and wearing bracelets and ear-rings, march together back to their home villages. On this march and after arriving home, they sing mangae, songs which are not secret and may be sung in the presence of non-initiates. These songs are usually followed by lithoko. (e.g., song number 1)

Many Christians and progressive Basotho say that the circumcision schools are bad, barbarous institutions. They point out that the boys at the school spend much of their time in gathering firewood, which further damages the already eroded countryside. They consider the circumcision operation itself dirty and dangerous, and attribute many deaths to it. (Those boys who do die are buried near the place of the school; a boy's parents are informed of his death only at the end of the school, when his blanket is left in front of their door.)

Whatever one may think of the circumcision schools, they still hold a fascination for Lesotho's young men, and have given the Basotho people many fine songs and poems of literary merit.

The Singers

The boys at Roulin knew many circumcision style songs and liked to sing them. They didn't sing them often, however, at least not around the school. The only times I heard them sung outside of recording sessions were at football games and one time when some of our boys were provoking boys of the primary school (the singing of this particular text: "May your girl-friend give birth to a donkey/ that I may ride him over sharp stones..." being an invitation to a fight).

Several of the lead singers and other singers heard on this record had attended circumcision schools, but some of our best singers had not. Francis Lesako, for example, had learned the songs from friends. He knew a great many Lithoko and composed several of his own songs in the circumcision style.

Lesotho's largest town is Maseru, the capital. Maseru has a number of supermarkets and hotels, including a Holiday Inn, complete with casino, much patronized by tourists from South Africa. The other towns, all located on the main road in the western part of Lesotho, are Buthe-Buthe, Leribe, Teyateyangeng ("TY"), Mafeteng, Mochale Hoek and Quthing. These are all much smaller places than Maseru. (Mafeteng, the nearest town to Roulin School, is usually referred to as "the camp" rather than "the town"—probably this usage dates back to the early days of British administration.) The towns do have a considerable number of facilities, including electric power, large general stores, post office, hospital, telephone service, gasoline stations, and senior secondary schools. Compared with Maseru they seem countrified, but compared with Lesotho's countryside villages, they seem very sophisticated places indeed.

Roulin Secondary School is located approximately 13 miles by road from Mafeteng. This road is unimproved and rocky. It crosses five unbridged rivers between Mafeteng and Roulin, and is impassable during heavy rains. The school is located across the road from Mt. Olivet Roman Catholic Mission, a mission founded in the last decade of the 19th century. Two large villages lie nearby: Khobotle and Majakaneng (which means "the place of the Christians"). There are many much smaller villages, some containing only three or four families, scattered about in the valley and on the flat tops of nearby mountains.

All the people wear western-type clothes of one sort or another. Many people have radios, with which they can listen to boxing or soccer live from Johannesburg. Sheet metal and bricks are preferred as building materials to thatch and stones, although only the well-to-do can afford them. There is a bus service, two buses running daily from Thabana Morena to Mafeteng. One of the buses continues on to Wepener, across the border in the Orange Free State, to connect with the train for Bloemfontein. These buses are always full of people going to Mafeteng or other parts of Lesotho, and of men going away to work in South Africa.

At the end of Majakaneng village is the Hellspoot Store, which takes its name from the name given to the area by the Boers, following the defeat of a Boer commando by Basotho war-

riors in the mid-19th century. At Hellspoot Store, one can buy clothes, candles, batteries for radios, beer and some food. There is also a mill, powered by gasoline generator. There is a telephone line as far as the Khobotle post office, and from here one can call out to Mafeteng, to other parts of Lesotho and the rest of the world. There is running water available from taps installed at various parts of the village; it is piped in from a spring in the mountains.

Many of these innovations are quite recent. People make use of the things which progress has brought them but otherwise their way of life has not changed greatly. Although there are two tractors in the region, most people still plow with oxen, and harvesting is done by hand. Some people consider hospitals to be foreign and dangerous places, and prefer to consult local traditional doctors. Belief in witches is not uncommon: witches are said to take control of people at night, and ride them through the air, sometimes as far as Johannesburg. In 1973 it was still possible, so I was told, to purchase, from a mail-order merchant in Swaziland, the secret ingredients needed to make a thokolosi. Thokolosi, a dwarf-size man-like creature, occupies approximately the same position in Basotho folk-lore that trolls and goblins held in Western tradition several hundred years ago. Made from a porridge base with the secret ingredients added, lithokolosi were in former times supposed to have aided humans, helping them in harvesting crops, but now they are used mostly for disposing of one's enemies. Properly controlled by its owner, thokolosi is invisible to all but its intended victim, whom it can then attack and strangle without interference. It is difficult to know to what extent lithokolosi are believed in: our older students generally did not believe in them, but most uneducated people and almost all younger children do think they exist.

Like most junior secondary schools in Lesotho, Roulin is a private school. It is governed by a committee of parents from the local villages, and is associated with Mt. Olivet Mission, which controls the school's budget. Education in Lesotho is not compulsory, and, after the primary level, is not free. Secondary school students pay 40 rand per year for tuition fees (about \$60 at 1972-4 exchange rates) and another 10 to 25 rand for books and school uniforms. Most students at Roulin come from local villages and live at home while they are attending school, although some come from far away, and must find accommodation with families in the village or at boarding facilities run by the mission.

The students are from 12 to 25 years old. Most girls enter junior secondary school at about age 14, while boys generally are older when they enter. Many boys are still required to spend several years herding the family cattle, usually from age 7 to 11. Boys deprived in this way of schooling sometimes do not enter secondary school until age 18, and usually have difficulty in speaking English and understanding spoken English.

Lesotho has 7 years of primary education, the last three being taught in English. Those who can pass a government-administered examination at the end of the seventh year are eligible to enter junior secondary school. This course lasts for three years, the same subjects being studied in each year. These are English Language, English Literature, Sesotho Language, Sesotho Literature, Geography, General Science, Physiology and Hygiene, Modern Math, and Agriculture or Domestic Science. This is a formidable program, especially as Math contains such unusual topics as probability theory and topology. English Literature, before 1975, included works by Shakespeare, Browning and Alfred Lord Tennyson. As the majority of students entering secondary school had little experience in reading—even in reading simplified English—this syllabus was not satisfactory, and as of 1975 was replaced by a more realistic and useful program.

The school year runs from the end of January until the beginning of December, with a winter holiday of six weeks in June and July. First-year students are called Form A's, second-year Form B's, third year Form C's. Form C's write the Junior Certificate (J.C.) exam in November of their final year. The exams stretch over a period of two weeks or more, and are the sole factor determining whether a student passes or fails his course. About 60% of those writing the exam pass it. Those who pass, if they have enough money, can continue on to senior secondary school, where they will do a two-year course in preparation for writing the Cambridge Overseas Schools Certificate exam (C.O.S.C.). Passing this exam can lead to a government or other administrative job or to a course at the national university, located at Roma.

While a few Basotho do not believe in Western-type education, most Basotho parents want their children to get as much education

as possible. However, some are prevented from educating their children because of poverty. Lesotho's many private schools operate on the tuition money they collect from students. Students are aided by government bursaries and by private organizations like Save the Children Fund, but this aid reaches only a few of those who need it, and every year too many intelligent students are forced to stay out of school. Boys, especially the older ones, have a fairly good chance of finding gainful employment. Girls have less chance, and often have to sit home or are encouraged by their families to get married rather than continue their education. Poor families that have only enough money to send one or two children to school will usually elect to send their boys, even though the girls may be the better students.

Considering that most Basotho do not have much money, it is quite remarkable that they are able to put so many of their children through school. This successful record is partly due to the extended family system. Relatives and older brothers and sisters may assist in financing education. Family ties among Basotho are extremely strong, even though heads-of-households are frequently absent for long periods in South Africa.

Basotho children from an early age are talked to as if they were adults, and from the age of 7 or 8 are expected to take part in the work of the household. Children seem to be maturer at a younger age than one usually sees in the United States. They give the same respect to their teachers that they do to their parents, and teaching in a Lesotho secondary school is a relaxing and pleasant, as well as stimulating, experience.



Joseph Manare

SIDE 1

Band 1: Lekoa e khele banna: Hey, in the Vaal, you men
Lekoa is the Basotho name for the Vaal River, which forms the present-day boundary between the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. In this area, both north and south of the Vaal, lived a number of Sotho-speaking tribes before the lifaqane, the forced migration of the early 19th century, when many tribes fled before Shaka's Zulu impis.

Joseph Mojalefa Manare, the lead singer, and one of the best traditional singers at the school, was about 19 when this recording was made in 1973. He obtained his junior certificate in 1974, and since 1975 has been working at President Steyn Gold Mine in the Orange Free State.

He lekoa e khele banna (chorus)
Khome li ntle tse na tseso moholo
Lipuhetsoana tse melala lithole
Ke bone ba li otlala ba li phaphatha

Hey, in the Vaal, you men!
My grandfather's cattle are very beautiful.
They are the greys with strong necks and healthy bodies.
I saw people driving them and beating them.

Poetry spoken by Francis Lesako:
Phakoe e theatse maeba thabeng
Ea sia maholi ntho tse bohla
A sala a fera-fera lithabeng
'Na ke hopetse nkhono khanoana
Ke hapa se maraibe sethole

Lethula o nyantsang ke le oa hao
Ke le thipa ke bile ke le lemeko
Ke tla khobella ke tsena tafoleng

The hawk has chased the doves away from the mountains.
It has left the clever birds called maholi.
Left them hopping in the bushes.
I have captured¹ the red cow for my grandmother,
And a red-and-white one.

Lethula,² why do you refuse me
When I am your man?
I have a knife and spoon
With which you can eat the food at the table.

¹ i.e., in a cattle raid
² name of a local chief

Band 2: Tsoana li malente: They are carrying malente

Malente are pieces of cloth put on the ends of sticks to resemble flags, carried by the boys returning at the end of the initiation period. A group of these boys I saw near Khobotle were carrying them. They wore expensive-looking blankets, many had bracelets on their arms and all wore ear-rings. Their faces were smeared with a red substance, presumably the traditional mixture of red ochre and fat. A mosuoe is the leader or teacher at an initiation school; tichere denotes a teacher at a Western-type school.

Tsoana li malente (chorus)
Mosuoe oa rona Molise ke ema
Nroese masale ngoanes'o Mahlape
Etlere ha ke bua a ntsoanele
Nroese maslae kapa masekana

They are carrying malente
Our teacher Molise is here
Put ear-rings on me, my sister Mahlape
So that when I talk they should fit me
Put ear-rings and bracelets on me

Band 3: Marashea

The marashea were a Basotho murder gang, active on the Witwatersrand. It is not uncommon for Basotho to wear their blankets year-round and so the marashea perhaps had an advantage over rival gangs from other tribes when it came to concealing their weapons. Gauda is Sesotho for gold, and Gaudeng is the "place of gold," i.e., Johannesburg. The lead singer is Bernard Nteka, a member of the class of 1975. He is in his early 20's.

Ke setumo sa marashea (chorus)
He sa marashea he koana Gaudeng
Liphala le ea ua tsa marashea koana Gaudeng
Lisabole le ea benya tsa marashea koana Gaudeng

The fame of the marashea.
Yes, the murderers at Gaudeng.
The whistles of the marashea are blowing at Gaudeng.
Their swords are shining at Gaudeng.



(l to r) T. Klass, F. Lesako, B. Molelekoa, K. Rannyama

Band 4: Bona Maseiboko: Look at the goats
(verses improvised by Francis Lesako)

Maseiboko are Angora goats. Francis Lesako explained the opening verses as follows: "This was sung by a man who was proud of himself. The man was from the mines and he had a lot of money. Instead of using it in the location with these prostitutes, he bought the goats. He was showing the people—see! Maseiboko! According to our belief, these people who use their money with the prostitutes at the location after they have earned their salaries will go to hell, for they are doing a satanic deed. But the ones who are buying the things they will use at home are blessed." So barekisi (traders) here refers to those who buy and sell with no regard for their traditions or the life of their country. The verse "Mountains are barriers, you can't see through them" may have reference to the traditional promise of the mosuoe to prospective initiates that they will be taught how to "bore their way through mountains."

Bona Maseiboko! (chorus)
'Na nke ke ke shoa ke rekile
Ho tla shoa lona barekisi teng
'Na nke ke be ka cha lekhale

Oa li bona thaba tse tsoeu tsela
Lithaba tsa tla tsa fetela Moshoeshoe batho
Lithaba bo Mangenegene bo Kololapare
Lithaba ke masirela he ke bone

Nka be ke bona Foristata
Ntate Wood he ee tloha mona
Ke ea tsamaea
Nke ke be ke lula ke se na khotso
Kolo senya se sale le bo itsepeng
Roulin e sale le bo itsepeng

Mosali ea tsoetseng bashanyana
O tsoaletse 'muso likoanketla
Motho oa shoa me oa tele
Ngoan'e motona ke kabeloa manong

Ha ho hatsa likhomo
Ha ho tsehisane
Ho betsoana ka majoe lifahleho

Look at the goats!
I'll never die because I bought something.
You traders will die.
I'll never burn in hell.

Do you see those white mountains?
Moshoeshoe's people died there.
Mountains like Mangenegene and Kololapare.
Mountains are barriers, you can't see through them.

I want to see the Free State.
If Mr. Wood leaves for home
I'll leave too.
I shall never live without peace.
Proud people should be at this school.
Roulin should be left with proud people.

A woman who has boys
has made soldiers for the government.
A person dies and his mother forgets him.
A male child is made for the vultures.

When we capture cattle
we do not laugh with each other.
We throw stones at each others' faces.

Band 5: Oa cho sekubethe: You say sekubethe

This brief text is not very clear in meaning. The lead singer, Albert Makutoane was in the class of 1974, and was 19 years old when this recording was made in 1973. In 1975 he enrolled in a two-year carpentry course offered at St. Monica Technical School, Leribe district. The discussion after the song is by Francis Lesako and Jobo Mokotjo.

Oa cho sekubethe (chorus)
Ntho tsa banana
Banana ba eso batsoa moroheng
Ba roetse mokopa, ba roetse solotsi

You say sekubethe
Girls' things.
My homegirls¹ are coming from the fields.
They are carrying different kinds of pumpkins.

¹ homeboy and homegirl are used in Lesotho to refer to boys and girls of one's native village.

Band 6: Hae nkong tsa malimo: Hey, under the cannibals' noses

A typical text for an initiation-style song: the young man complains that he has lived a hard life and been ill-treated by his family. Francis Lesako sings similar verses in his poem of the train journey. A flock of goats was passing while this recording was being made.

(song leader: Albert Makutoane)

Hae nkong tsa malimo
Tsa malimo nkong tsa (chorus)
Le re ke ee hae ke e ha mang
Ke tsaba ntate ee ke mpolaea
A ke nchape ka phafa ea lipere

At the cannibals' noses
At their noses.
When you say I should go home, to whose house should I go?
I am afraid that my father will kill me.
He will beat me with the whip he uses for horses.

Band 7: He Shebang koana: Hey, look the other way

Chobelo is commonly translated by the Basotho into English as "stealing." However, chobelo usually involves an elopement, not a forcible abduction. It occurs whenever a girl, willingly or not, goes away with a boy before the traditional marriage agreement is fixed between the girl's and boy's families. In a traditional marriage settlement the family of the bride gives a number of cattle to the family of the groom. The number of cattle is stated to be between ten and 25, depending on the status and wealth of the families concerned. Chobelo requires a payment of six extra cattle, according to my informants. Nowadays money is replacing cattle in marriage settlements, and many young people, like the composer of this song, have rejected the tradition altogether.

(song leader: Francis Lesako)

He shebang koana (chorus)
Banana le se ke le tsoha chobelo
Chobelo ke lona lenyala le joale
Monongoaha e tsamaisa machato
Ke bone ba theosa ba ea le thota

Hey, look the other way
Girls, don't be afraid of being stolen
Stealing is how we marry nowadays
This year some of us are very eager
Some are going out into the fields before they marry

Poetry spoken by Francis Lesako:
Nkhono me loee oa ikhantsa
O feta kanihle lebaleng heso
O feta feela ha a lumelisa
Nkhono me loee se ka 'molaea

Grandmother, bewitch him
He always passes next to my home
He passes without greetings
Grandmother, bewitch him, but do not kill him

Band 8: Linokana: Streams

Lesotho has many small rivers, easily fordable for most of the year, but during the November-March rainy season they can quickly turn into impassable torrents. Every year a number of



(l to r) Albert Makutoane, Bernard Nteka, John Maele, William Mahlae, Alexis Nkunyane, singing "linokana."

people misjudge the force of the water, as they are hurrying to reach their destinations. One such case occurred near us in 1972, when a young woman teacher was drowned on the way home from a teachers' meeting.

This song refers specifically to the drowning of students (*bana ba sekolo*, lit. "children of the school"). Students of Western-type schools are unpopular with herdboys and boys of the circumcision schools and a student out for a walk near a group of these boys, especially if he is wearing his school blazer, becomes a target for stones or worse.

As the singing begins, one singer calls out *butle!* (slowly!). The singers had difficulty on the transition from chorus to second verse, as the song was not a well-known one.

(song leader: Bernard Nteka)

Linokana, linokana bo (chorus)
 Noka e nkile bana ba sekolo
 Nokana li bletse masupo a batho
 Tsa tlala tsa tjeka linokana
 Mali a batho a fetoha lerole

Streams, yes, streams
 The river has drowned many students
 The streams are full of the bones of people
 They are flooded and have changed their courses
 People's blood turned into sand

Band 9: Semonkoula

Semonkoula is an old Sesotho given name, no longer used for naming people, but present as the chorus for several fine circumcision-style songs of similar melody; another text runs: "Semonkoula! When I arrived at my home, I asked where my grandmothers were. They pointed at the graves." Francis Lesako said he learned this version of Semonkoula from some of his neighbors near Matelile, who, one gathers, are no great respecters of the Christian churches. The lyrics imply that Christians are craven, sheep-like people, in fact not really people at all. Basotho, when invoking traditional gods and spirits, do not kneel.

(song leader: Francis Lesako)

Semonkoula
 Maretloane ngoana thari ea konyana (chorus)
 Lipikoko banana ba ka Taung
 Majokana he le batho le baloi
 Ekose he le rapela la khumama
 Le siele mor'a Molimo thoteng
 Le sa tla be le khutle le eo molata

Semonkoula
 Maretloane, child of the lamb's afterbirth¹
 The peacocks, the girls of Taung
 Christians are not worthy people, but witches
 When praying they have to kneel down
 You have left the son of God far away in the veld
 One day when you're in trouble, you'll have to go
 looking for him

¹ because he wears it like a blanket

Poetry spoken following song by Francis Lesako:
 Khomo tsa e-shoa morui o koata
 Bahimioa ka li thothometsa lirope
 Kereke ea Fora nke ke ka e kena
 Na, nthoe mpe ke nyatsa kabelo
 Ha e le ea Roma ke nyatsa ho khumama
 Ho betere ke ikele folisi
 Empa le teng ke nyatsa moqoqopelo

The cattle died, so the rich man was sad and angry
 And we, his workers, were shivering to the thighs
 I will never attend the L.E.C. church
 Because I hate to pay the contribution
 I also hate to go to the Roman Catholic Church
 because they kneel too much.
 It is better to go to the Church of Zion,
 but I also hate dancing.

SIDE 2

Band 1: Train journey to the Republic of South Africa
 (Francis Lesako, accompanied by John Maele on harmonica)

The only rail line into Lesotho crosses the Caledon River (the border between Lesotho and the Orange Free State) at Maseru Bridge; it ends a mile further on at Maseru Station. From here many Basotho board the train to find work in the gold fields of the Free State and the Transvaal. This type of poem, describing a journey into the Republic by train, and usually accompanied by fast harmonica music, is known as a "Langlaagte," after the railway station of that name near Johannesburg.

This selection is one of several similar journey poems which Francis Lesako did for me one day in November 1973. He would walk up and down a minute or two before each poem, arranging in his mind the sequence of events he was about to relate. This poem has no set text and is not memorized. The individual lines came to him during the course of his performance. Of his method of composition he says, "I collected them (the verses) from other people, and some are from my knowledge (i.e., my own imagination)."

Francis Hlalele Lesako is from Matelile. He was 19 years old when this recording was made. He was an above-average student and did particularly well in Math. Since getting his junior certificate in 1973, he has done a two-year C.O.S.C. course at Moshoe-shoe II High School and has worked in the South African mines. At the time he composed this poem, he had never in his life traveled on a train or been outside of Lesotho.

John Maele, of Khototle, also graduated in 1973, and has since been working as a miner.



Francis Lesako and John Maele

Hei, ke re ntsoe la ka e ka be e le tleloloko
 Nka be ke le chaea ke le ngenetsa
 Nka be ke le chae ke ea le mona.
 Lentsoe la ka le entse joang ka jeno
 Athe ka mehla be lla li-tolo-tolo
 Le lla lithamo ntho tsa makhooa.

Ngoanana mpoke
Ke tseba katara,
e tle e re ha u sila ke u letsetse.
Ke palaba, ke palaba ke sebetsa chafo
Lipento mosameng u tla una.

Hae, Lefue!
Abuti ke lefe u tla mpoleaea.
Le tle le bone abuti ke lefu u mpoleaea.

Aku le boneng mohlang ke qaleng ho bona terene!
Ake le boneng ha ke fihla Maseru seteicheneng!
Ake le boneng ha ke fihla botsa lekhooda la kate!
Ake le boneng ke fihla ke botsa terene e kae!
Ka bona le ichebaka sephakeng.
La re ke eme five minits e ntse e etla.
La re e sa le ka Mohokare entse e enoa meki khano e metsi
Are five minits!

Train journey
Hey, if my voice was a bell, I'd ring it.
What's gone wrong with my voice?
It sounds like a musical instrument,
like the harmonica of the white men.

Love me girl, I know how to play the guitar.
I'll play for you while you're grinding meal.
I'm a strong man who works at the mines,
you'll always find money under my pillow.

Hey, Death! (Hae, Lefue!)
My brother's name is Death, so he'll kill me.
Wait and see, he'll kill me.

Look, my first time to see a train!
Look, I got to Maseru station!
Look, I asked the guard, a white man!
Look, I asked him where the train was!
I saw him looking at his arm.
He said to wait for five minutes, it was still coming.
He told me it was in the Caledon River to drink water.
He said, "Five minutes, five minutes."

After five minutes it came, the brown cow of the government.
It came into Maseru station,
at the big town next to the Caledon River.
It came like a big dog with its back up,
putting its nose to the rails,
blowing out smoke through its nostrils,
the fast runner, the brown cow of the mines.
Brown cow of the lowlands,
don't slow down, for you have much to do!
You were born for running.

Where is our train, we people who never go back home?
We people who spend our lives at the mines?
Train that starts at eleven at night,
take me away from Lesotho.

We got in it while the sun was still shining,
with Lenkoane the warrior.
It went up the hills and down.
It went through the places of the white men.
It went through the Free State, burning the pastures of the
Boers.
Ten karaku sheep were burned, and all the Merinos died.
A Boer was running away so fast that his mouth turned yellow.
His panama hat turned inside out.

Wait and see! (Ke tle le bone!)
Look, I am going!
I am a wind that blows over the hills.
I am a sheep skin which is not worn.
I am a house for fleas and bugs.
My darling's mother, I'm from far places.

Aa...ooo
Goodbye, Ramotena, my friend.
I looked for you but didn't find you.
I heard people say you were at the graveyard.
Death is evil to people's children.
There is death and hunger at Makhaleng.

Let's go, Sele! (Palama Sele kea tsamaea!)
Aa...ooo
Look, my mother and father are without mercy.
I grew up like a young animal not suckled by its mother.
I grew up leading a hard life.
I grew up being suckled by a donkey.

Aa...ooo
Play the harmonica, boy, play it to make us happy!
The owner can fix it if it gets broken.
You know when I say that it means I'm going.
When I sound like this, I'm going.
I'm going to Kotoisi, into the Free State.
I'm remembering my mother, at the big village of Jerusalem.

I once lived in the location, where I ate nice food.
I married a white girl and was a true son-in-law to her parents.
I ate free oranges, sometimes I'd buy apples and pears.
I drank the white man's beer, sugar and beer...
A train would run all day long,
bringing the food I'd ordered from Orlando.

Aa...ooo
Why don't you respect me, boys?
I'm a big mature goat now, that can wear a bell.
I'm old, my arms are rusty.
I'm old, my molars are green.
I've got lots of troubles, I, Matseliso's son,
because my parents have no mercy.

Joy to those who still have their fathers.
My father died when I was little,
as tall as this little child here.
I came from the field where I'd been a shepherd
and found my sister crying for my father's death.
I caught a locust for his coffin
and took a piece of dry grass for a telephone line.

If ever the post were sent to heaven,
I'd send all the old people there,
so that I could bring them back when they were fat
and sell them to the butcher shop at Mpharane.
They say Manraile is burning, for she does strange things.
If women married, I would make Manraile to marry.

Aa...ooo
My voice is dead from shouting.
I talk as if I'm being paid,
but no one will give me even a ticky,
not even a penny to buy snuff.
So take your song, my friends, for I'm making a comma and
full stop.
Exclamation and question mark aren't needed.
You know when I say this I stop.
Full stop. I have closed.

Band 2: E thata: A fierce one (sung by members of 1973 Form C class)
(song leader: Seth Sello)

This song can sound quite fierce when sung by a crowd of boys
at a football match. This recording was made in November 1973,
as the Form C class of that year was celebrating the end of the
junior certificate examination.

A fierce one!
I often fight fiercely
when I'm drunk.

Band 3: Khoba (danced by Form A girls, June 1974)
(song leader: Augustina Mokhosoa)

This song accompanies the mokhibo, a type of dance done by
women only. The dancers are on their knees, their hips, arms and
upper bodies moving in time to the music. A chorus of girls (and
in this case some boys) stand behind the line of dancers, clapping
to keep the rhythm. Liphamola may be a name which was used in
girls' initiation. Its literal meaning is "big strong men," but here it
refers to a group of girls.

Khoba helele! (chorus)
Where can the liphamola cross
when the river is in flood?



Form A girls dancing mokhibo - June 1974

(photo by David Huestis)



Form A girls doing monosono. (l to r) Pulane Ramakoloi, Pulane Molapo, Augustina Mokhosoa, Austeria Letholetseng Soai. Dec. 1974

Band 4: leo ka cha: Hey, I'm burning
(performed by Pulane Ramakoloi, Anna Ntebele,
Augustina Mokhosoa, Pulane Molapo, Austeria Soai)

This type of girls' singing game is called monosono. The girls get close together in a circle and start bumping into each other. The verb ho tonosa means to make motions as if one has big buttocks.

A Xhosa man in the hospital ...
When I call him with a whistle
he comes.

This dog is not my aunt.
She's left the chamber pot at the back door
to attract men's attention.

If I were giving orders around here,
I'd say mine compounds should be closed to prostitutes,
both the married and unmarried ones.
I'm not a married prostitute, but an unmarried one.

Mother, uncover me and look.
~~He's beaten me on the buttocks.~~
He's beaten me to death.

Unison: Hello, my husband! Hello, my wife!

(Explanation of the verses in English by Anna Ntebele and
Austeria Soai.)

The five girls performing this selection were in the 1974 Form A class. When the recording was made in December 1974 they were all 13 or 14 years old. Four of them are preparing to write the J.C. examination in November 1976. Anna Ntebele dropped out of school in the first term of the 1976 school year, being unable to get money to pay her school fees.

Band 5: Abuti Josefa o rekile koloi: Brother Joseph has bought a car
(sung by Agnes Lekeno and Ignatia Ngoae)

A modern song. The two singers heard in this recording were a great attraction at student concerts, where they sang under the name of "The Sweet Sisters."

Abuti is a direct borrowing from the Afrikaans word for "older brother." Koloi refers to any kind of four-wheeled vehicle. "These things" are the folds of an accordion or concertina; such instruments are becoming increasingly common in Lesotho. Young men wander along country roads, playing as they walk, and, presumably, charming the ladies. One song says: "Stop these things / for they will do you harm / they have already spoiled many people's wives."

Brother Joseph has bought a car.
A car is the way he gets lovers.
Stretch these things
so that the old people should see them.

Band 6: Holy Mama (song leader: Augustina Mokhosoa)

Another modern song, this one in English, and also popular at student concerts, where it was used to accompany a little shuffling dance. I heard the song a lot in 1974, never in 1972 or '73. Jealous Down is the name of a private bus company operating out of Maseru, where this song probably originated in the early 1970's.

Band 7: Etang nonyana e tsoang khekulo: The bird has come from far
(song leader: Francis Foso; dance leader: Francis Ramoholi)

I'm told this dance is an Ndlamo, a type of dance taken up by the Basotho from the Nguni group. It is performed in columns, the men raising their feet high, then stamping the ground. The leader runs out in front of the group, waving his stick, shouting encouragement and doing exaggerated clownish dance movements.

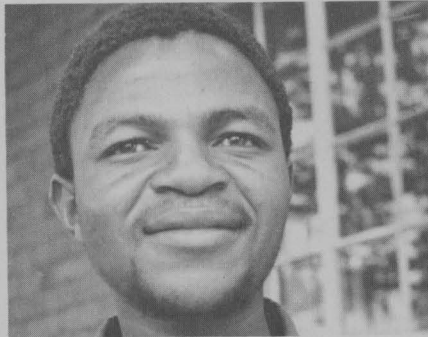
Band 8: Ntoa hae e loana ke mosebetsi: Fighting a war is hard work
(song leader: Lerotholi Posholi)

This song, used while threshing peas, employs the chorus of one of the circumcision songs. The song leader works along with the others, which perhaps explains why he doesn't make up a set of verses to go with the chorus. Five different songs were used during this particular threshing operation, all chorus only, no verses. Each lasted about five minutes, when the leader was out of breath. The shouts and shrieks of encouragement in the background were made by women employed by the mission.

Lerotholi Posholi, the song leader, worked as a miner before enrolling at Roulin. After completing the J.C. course in 1973, he did a two year C.O.S.C. course and in 1976 was working for the post office in Maseru.



Boys dancing ndlamo, Dec. 1972. (l to r) Sam Qhoai, F. Lesako, Francis Santela, Clementi Ramoholi.



Kenneth Rannyama

Band 9: Machine o teng: There is a machine
(poem sung by Kenneth Rannyama)

Heard in this selection is the beginning of a 17-minute poem improvised and sung by Kenneth Rannyama. In its entirety it includes traditional Basotho wisdom, topical allusions and autobiographical matter. The singer praises himself in the traditional fashion, saying that there were signs on the day he was born: boys at the circumcision school would not sing their likoma (secret songs); and girl initiates refused to cross a ravine to go to the place where they were to be taught.

Kenneth Kenene Rannyama is very interested in maintaining pure Basotho music and traditions. In class discussions he could always be counted on to ably advocate Basotho traditions like lobola and large families. His abilities as a poet made him much in demand as a praiser of horses at the Saturday racing meets. He is from Tsa Kholo and about 25 years old. After finishing school in 1974 he went to South Africa to work in the mines.

The Mr. Molise mentioned in the verses has been teaching math at Roulin since it opened in 1971, and has been principal of the school since 1975.

Machine o teng
makhoeng koana.
Ha o ua ba ea koloka.
O qala ka ho ohlela pele.
Khoele ea khaoha
re sale kaofela
ea khaoha re slae sekiping.
Bo'm'a rona ba llelele hong.
Nko, nko.....

There is a machine
there in the place of the whites, at the mines.
When it gives an alarm, they line up.
It starts by coughing.
A wire split apart
while we were all together
in the cage.
Our mothers all cried at the same time.
Nko, nko.....
lee, lee
Accidents dog a hard life.

Bad luck doesn't smear itself with fat.
Why do you suppose this beautiful girl doesn't marry?
lee, iee...
I think she's pregnant.
You'd better bring her to me.
I'm learning to be a witch doctor.
I'm an old experienced doctor who's helped many people.
Nko, nko... iee...
My mother's name when a girl was 'Maseabata.
Here at Koeneng village she's called 'Maneo.
And what is your mother's name?
Nko... Heela...
Form C students aren't little boys.
God help us to pass.
Mr. Molise, teach us maths....

Band 10: Ntate Wood re tla sala le mang: Mr. Wood, with whom
will we be left? (song leader: Francis Lesako)

A song composed by Francis Lesako at the end of 1972, shortly before I left for a trip to the U.S.

Mr. Wood, with whom will we be left
when you are leaving us
now that you are going to your fatherland
in America?

Band 11: Leha ka bua, leha le ka soma: Even if you talk or mock us

This optimistic song and dance had for accompaniment a bouncing tennis ball. As it turned out, all the singers, 1974 Form A girls, did pass on to Form B in 1975.

Even though you talk and mock us
we are next year's Form B's.

Band 12: Hee ea tla sala: Hee, the one who will remain here

This song was composed and sung by Kenneth Rannyama at the time his class was writing the J.C. exam in November 1974. "The one(s) who will remain here" refers to those who will fail the examination. In fact, those who fail rarely return to repeat Form C.

Hee, the one who will remain here. (chorus)
Whose child will remain here?
Boys and girls are quarreling.
Our course is over and we are leaving.

* * * * *

Translations are by Jobo Tlali Mokotjo, who graduated from Roulin in 1973, passed his Cambridge exams in 1975 and has since worked at Kloof Gold Mine in the Transvaal. Translation of his train journey is by the composer of it, Francis Lesako. Additional help in translation is by William Mahlae and Stephen Marabe.