

## Misconceptions About Indigenous African Music and Culture: the Case of Indigenous Bapedi Music, Oral Tradition and Culture

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### Abstract

Indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition have been dismissed as myth, superstition and primitive stories. Such dismissal has been based on the misconception and assumption that indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition are proletarian, steeped in evil religious experiences and unacceptable for worship. In Bapedi society, indigenous music and traditional oral stories are utilized to buttress and demonstrate the collective wisdom of Bapedi people, as well as to transmit Bapedi culture, values, beliefs and history from generation to generation. This article examines misconceptions about indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories. It argues that indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition should not be dismissed at face value as practices overtaken by circumstances and hence irrelevant to the present Bapedi community developmental needs. The findings of the present study faithfully reflect that indigenous Bapedi songs and traditional oral stories resonate in people's personal lives, in religious rituals and in society at large. These findings suggest that Bapedi people should keep and perpetuate their valuable heritage, which is still needed for survival and for the welfare of our next generation. The main question the study addressed is: What role do indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition play in Bapedi culture?

**Keywords:** Indigenous Bapedi music; oral tradition; culture; misconceptions; heritage.

### Introduction

Bapedi people are a Southern African people living mostly in South Africa in Limpopo province, but a large percentage is found in Sekhukhune district (**see figure 1**). They speak the language called Sepedi. It is one of the 11 official South African languages. Bapedi people have always managed to retain their cultural heritage. A little percentage of Bapedi people converted to Christianity under colonialism and missionary influence. However, although there are a few Christian converts, indigenous Bapedi music, oral tradition and culture have not disappeared, instead, there has been a mixture of traditional beliefs and Christianity. Cultural and religious beliefs are important in the Bapedi way of life.



**Figure 1:** Geographical Location Map of South Africa

Source: <https://www.google.co.za/search?q=Latest=map+of+south+Africa=showing=Limpopo+Province&tbn=isch&source>

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★ = shows where Sekhukhune district is situated in Limpopo Province.

Cultures across the globe seem to perform indigenous music and create stories as an effective, suitable and appropriate way of mediating and transmitting knowledge and information from generation to generation (Achebe 1958; Vambe 2001). Indigenous Bapedi music and the narration of stories are vocal form and not instrumental, though accompanied by handclapping, dancing, percussion instruments, ululating, drumming and singing. The main object of this study was to examine misconceptions about indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition; to investigate the poems, proverbs, parables and narratives that form the basis of the Bapedi songs which contain a good deal of interesting material that can contribute to a greater understanding of what indigenous Bapedi songs mean to the Bapedi people; and the discussion will move to highlight the role played by indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition in Bapedi culture.

This research study precipitates questions such as a) What role do indigenous Bapedi music, and oral tradition play in Bapedi culture?; and b) What is the emphasis on indigenous knowledge meant to achieve? Further questions are: c) Is the study of indigenous knowledge relevant in terms of enriching African philosophy and bridging the gap between Western mindset and African mindset?; d) What impact does Western culture have on indigenous notions of conceptions and oral tradition of Bapedi people; and e) How much of indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge still exists, and will this knowledge cease to exist when elders pass-on.

Following next is the theoretical framework of the study, discussing a link between Ontology theory and African theory of knowledge. This is followed by a review of previous related studies, research design and methodology. An analysis of misconceptions about indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories is conducted, followed by discussion of the role

played by indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition in Bapedi culture. The article concludes with a reflection on the implications arising from the results.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by African theory of knowledge and Ontology theory. Onyewuenyi (1976:525) argues that African theory of knowledge resonates well with theory of Ontology. Like in this study, the investigation of the misconceptions about indigenous Bapedi music, oral tradition and culture follows closely upon ontology. Another contribution to the literature on African philosophy<sup>1</sup> is Udefi (2014:109), who asserts that African mode of knowledge should pay due attention to the background of African spiritualistic and dynamic metaphysics. Udefi further argues that there are different mindsets, namely; Western mindset and African mindset, and it would be presumptuous to assess African thought on the criteria developed within the context of Western cultures (Udefi 2014:109). Furthermore, Udefi emphasizes how each culture interprets experiences can be explained by uncovering those assumptions and concepts which underlie its experience and world-view (Udefi 2014:112). Udefi's approach has strengths of being contextual and interrogating relevant questions challenging Western mindset. He seeks to destabilize the hegemony of Western approaches, while at the same time he re-appraises African theological thought and spirituality. Udefi's approach enriches African philosophy as it bridges the gap between previously marginalized communities and Western scholarship, as well as Western mindset and African mindset. The present study complies with this endeavor because it is making an attempt to examine misconceptions about indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories by Christianity, Westernization and colonization; b) challenge Western mindset; c) enrich African philosophy; and d) bridge the gap between Western mindset and African mindset.

Attesting to the observations above, Narh (2013:2) writes that Ontology is basic to all meaning in reality and knowledge construction. Narh asserts that Ontology refers to what is out there to know. According to him, it has to do with whether something exists as real (realism) or as perceived (subjectivism), (Narh 2013:2). Narh's views are in consonance with Lee's advocacy that Ontology is thus a theory of existence concerned with the nature of reality and that of human beings (Lee 2012). Narh (2013:7) gives a concise elaboration on the theory of Ontology and African theory of knowledge. Writing on *'The quality of ancestry in knowing'*, he states that, "in Africa, and for Africans, existence is made of past, present, and future generations as epistemic communities linked together as a community". He argues that, "the individual knowing person is a community that includes ancestors and future unborn generations (Narh 2013:7). The investigation of misconceptions about indigenous Bapedi music, oral tradition and culture in Bapedi cultural context is ideal for both theories because a large percentage of Bapedi people survived acculturation and continue to observe their culture, keep and perpetuate their valuable heritage, which is still needed for survival and for the welfare of our next generation. What will follow in the next section is a look at previous related studies.

### Previous Related Studies

In line with the perspectives of several other scholars (Mbaegbu 2015, Yoloye 1986, Nompula 2011, Dryness 1990, Bediako 1995, Nzewi 1999, Kwenda 2002), in this article the author upholds the thesis that many of the cultural traditions of African countries had been suppressed in colonial days and sufficient attention has not been given to the philosophy and latent human objectives that prescribed mass, informal music education in African cultures, and which determine the pedagogical strategies for music education, formal and otherwise because indigenous African music, oral tradition and culture were said to be manifestations of paganism.

Celestine Chukwuemeka Mbaegbu, for his part, argues that "undoubtedly, Africa has its own indigenous systems that deal with the metaphysical and the epistemological aspects of their existence" (Mbaegbu 2015:2012). Mbaegbu (2015:2012) correctly observes that despite the threat of epistemicide, these systems have persisted while coded in orality. Nzewi (1999:73-74) corroborates the above finding when he opines that "any human group that has a distinctive body of music knowledge and practice which is passed on from one generation to another as a process, has an operative system of music education, irrespective of its pedagogical manifestations". Furthermore, Nzewi argues that "in African traditions, opportunities for active participation in music making are abundant and certain philosophies guide the method of induction into the discipline and knowledge of formal ensemble performance".

The misconceptions that indigenous Bapedi music is regarded as proletarian, pagan, primitive, uncivilised, evil, and not sufficiently artistic and spiritual, has been challenged by scholars such as Nompula (2011:4), Bediako (1995:25), Hiebert

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<sup>1</sup> Ekanem (2012:54) describes philosophy as a discipline whose quest is to understand life which is common to all humans though with different approach and method.

(1994:55-57), La Roche (1968:289) and Tracey (1961:16). In particular, Nompula (2011:2) writes that in music and arts education in South Africa, there are still strong voices that stereotype indigenous knowledge as backward and proletarian. In similar vein, Mkabela (2005:178) observes that "since colonial invasions, African indigenous culture has weathered rapid change". Mkabela further elaborates that "many researchers made real attempts to get inside the African culture, but even so, there was a tendency to see culture in terms of the coloniser's precepts and to assess educational needs in terms of the coloniser's agenda". According to her "when establishing formal education, there was no adequate reference to the indigenous education that Africans already had or to the depth of the ancestral opinions that influenced African thinking" (Mkabela 2005:178). In the light of the above observations, Mkabela (2005:178) is concerned that as an African in South Africa, she has received education in a country that has openly marginalized African indigenous knowledge. Similar to what obtains in South Africa, Bapedi society in particular, Amlor (2016:63) highlights the impact of Western culture in Ghana, by stating that "unfortunately Western culture in contemporary Ghana, is speedily competing with, and almost stunting the growth and survival of African indigenous knowledge systems". According to Amlor, "this unpleasant situation has led to re-awakening among the Ewe ethnic society to go back to her roots to revive indigenous entertainment forms like play games to promote the teaching, learning and preservation of indigenous education" (Amlor 2016:63).

Within the African context, there have been several studies that have considered the impact of Christianity, westernization and colonization (Mkabela 2005:178, Nompula 2011:4, Amlor 2016:63). These studies have focused mainly on acculturation and the demise of indigenous African music, culture and oral tradition. It is worthwhile to mention here Hellberg's (2010:24) view on the impact of acculturation. According to him, in pre-colonial times, music making was embedded in the local way of life and related to the total cosmology of the people. Furthermore, Hellberg (2010:17) writes that many of the churches that were founded in Africa, Asia and Latin America through the global spreading of Christian mission during the colonial era have experienced considerable music-cultural change during the post-colonial period. According to him, in their early years the music cultures of churches founded by Western missionaries were often more or less dominated by spiritual music imported from, or modelled on, the Western art music tradition (Hellberg 2010:17).

Some studies reveal that the colonial powers used brutal policies and devious methods to subjugate the African people in order to acquire full control over their lands and resources (Adamo 2001, Aleaz 2003, Moila 1988, Mugambi 1994, Ukpong 1995). A number of studies have examined this, highlighting that these policies and methods included consistent inferiorization of indigenous cultures, and concerted efforts to erase existing systems of knowledge and their replacement with Western-driven belief and knowledge systems (Adamo 2001, Proglor 1999:1; Eyong 2007:131). In what follows, I will discuss the research design and methodology utilized in this study.

### **Research design and methodology**

The study utilized conversational<sup>1</sup> and storytelling methodology within an indigenous research framework on the experiences of selected Bapedi people on indigenous-settler and the powerful social relationships that marginalize indigenous Bapedi people, but also adopted the contextual approach as it considers the local context (Bapedi culture). Data from this contextual approach were analyzed guided by the research questions and objectives of the study. My contextual approach has led to the achievement of research objectives. All the subjects selected for this study live in Sekhukhune district, Limpopo Province in South Africa. During the course of the research for and the preparation of this article, I received assistance of many people. I am indebted to these people who permitted me to photograph them, their divination bones and their traditional medicines without reservation. The following procedures were followed in collecting data. Secondary evidence includes written sources like Masters and Doctoral theses, journal articles and books. The fieldwork involved participant observation on the part of the researcher. This means first hand observation of the role played by indigenous Bapedi songs and traditional oral stories in Bapedi culture. Ten (10) of the most knowledgeable and experienced traditional musicians and poets were purposively identified to participate in the research study because of their knowledgeable and informative qualities. Both personal and group interviews were conducted with the participants. The aim was to ascertain the conceptions about indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories and the role played by indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition in Bapedi culture. During my association with the participants, they corroborated my data on the required information. Most of the interviews took approximately one hour each, and an initial as well as a follow-up interview was held with each participant. All personal and group interviews with the participants, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Kovack (2010:44) describes conversational method as dialogic approach to gathering knowledge that is built upon an indigenous relational tradition. According to Kovach, it utilizes open-ended, semi-structured interview questions to prompt conversation where participant and researcher co-create knowledge.

observations, were captured with video and photo cameras. The poem and information on videotapes were translated into English. In the discussion that follows, I will concentrate primarily on the research findings of the study.

## Results

The results were obtained from all phases that is, interviews, direct observations and literature review. The commonly held misconceptions can be widely categorized into religious, spiritual, social and cultural misconceptions. The results of analyzing the misconceptions about indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories, as well as the vital role played by indigenous Bapedi songs and oral tradition in Bapedi culture, are described below.

### Misconceptions

The **first** misconception and the basis for this article is that indigenous Bapedi music is regarded as proletarian, evil and unacceptable for worship. In pre-democratic South Africa, indigenous African music and culture were thought of as proletarian, evil and unacceptable for worship (Nompula 2011:4). Consequently, they were excluded from school curricula. Instead, European music and instruments were introduced and promoted through churches and missionary schools. Thus, from the time of nineteenth-century colonialism, European music dominated the educational system in the "black" schools. Through the exclusive focus on western European music, learners came to believe that there is only one music system in the world, i.e. European music. African students were denied the opportunity to learn more about their own indigenous music and to recognize the values of their own culture.

The **second** misconception is that indigenous Bapedi oral tradition and culture are dismissed as myth, superstition and steeped in evil religious experiences. In the quest to convert the Africans, certain cultural practices were discouraged or ultimately prohibited by the early missionaries (Dryness 1990:11; Kwenda 2002:160). Traditional local customs and institutions such as indigenous music, circumcision, veneration of ancestors, tribal ceremonies, authority systems and polygamy, among others, were opposed and denigrated (Bediako 1995:25). It was reckoned that such practices are steeped in evil religious experiences, thus, they must be repudiated (Hiebert 1994:55-57). The result of these restrictions included Westernisation of converts. In some of these cases, converts were ostracised by their own people. Obviously, this negative impact resulted in disorientation of the converts. In other cases, due to the foreignness of the new religion, some Africans resisted, as they were not ready to break away from their aged practices (Kwenda 2002:169). However, conversion to Christianity needs not imply rejection of traditional culture (La Roche 1968:289). Another common phenomenon concerns the failure of Christian missionaries to address some of the cultural problems faced by their converts adequately.

The **third** misconception relates to indigenous Bapedi music, oral tradition and culture condemned as pagan, primitive, uncivilised, evil, and not sufficiently artistic and spiritual, that had to be dealt with, and an inferior system that had to be done away with. The attitude of early missionaries showed an unwitting ignorance of the positive values of the Bapedi way of life. Their actions were an unwarranted attempt to control the social situation and an unfounded attack upon the fundamental institutions of the traditional Bapedi society. Without first trying to understand the significance of traditional rituals, missionaries condemned most rites of passage and social ceremonies as pagan, whether they were contrary to the teachings of the scriptures or not. Bapedi people like dancing (movement), and dancing had no place in European church worship. As Bapedi people began to respond to the Gospel, they were forced to abandon their ancient customs, rites, cultural identities and even their names because all of these were regarded as 'pagan'. In these crucial initial encounters with powerful Western missionaries, the Bapedi people were made to feel inferior. Their previous way of life was condemned as totally unacceptable, wicked and pagan. This observation concurs with what Fabella (2003:105) and Lebaka (2017:117) similarly observe about the impact of Western culture on indigenous way of life of the African people. They concur with Yoloye (1986:164) who observes that indigenous African music, oral tradition and culture were systematically suppressed and repressed during centuries of Christianization, westernization and colonization.

The government's neglect of indigenous music was added to the historical influence of Christian missionaries on religious music in Bapedi society. Missionaries regarded drumming (**see photo 1**) as woven into the fabric of pagan life, so they were determined to exorcise it. Despite the scarcity of instruments, the Bapedi people refused to forsake their musical traditions and an outstanding vocal musical culture evolved over time.



**Photo 1.** Traditional healers-to-be; trainees (*mathasana*) playing drums. From left to right; Mavis Motha, Tshegofatšo Shai, Tshepo Magaela, Nogane Sete & Lekoba Masha (Kotsiri village; Sekhukhune district, Limpopo Province, 22.03.2019), Photographer: Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka.

Historical evidence strongly indicates that ample indigenous African knowledge in music has been systematically suppressed and repressed during centuries of Christianization, westernization and colonization of indigenous Bapedi music (Yoloye 1986:164). This was predicated on the myth that the masses of African people and their progenitors had accomplished little or nothing musically worthwhile, that they could never become exemplars in the advancement of society, and that in the best interest of all, teaching about Western musical cultures to the exclusion of African musical legacy should be a unique role of the imported western school systems in South Africa. Fifty years ago, African schools started from the wrong end and instead of insisting upon a solid foundation of local traditional songs, educators recommended that promising African musicians should be taught European music only (Tracey 1961:16). The above views and observations are in consonant with Yoloye (1986:164) who observes that, "many of the cultural traditions of African countries had been suppressed in colonial days because they were said to be manifestations of paganism". According to him, since early formal education was largely in the hands of the missionaries, songs, dances, drama and poetry associated with traditional African festivals or religions were forbidden in the schools. Yoloye (1986:151) further suggests that for the content of education in Africa to be relevant, the curricula, textbooks and methods must take into account the African environment, the African child's development, the African cultural heritage and the demands of technological progress and economic development.

The **fourth** misconception is that the mainline churches used to hold a very negative view of traditional medical practices and practitioners (many still do so today), and tried to discourage the use of traditional medicines (**see photo 2**) as much as possible. They did so for a number of reasons. Firstly, because it was felt that traditional healers encouraged the belief in witchcraft, which was considered one of the greatest hindrances to Christian missionary work (Yoloye 1986:164). Secondly, because early missionaries tended to regard the traditional healer as a rogue and a deceiver (Pawloková-Vilhanová 2007:25). Moreover, the traditional beliefs of the people were discarded as pagan and superstitious, in accordance with the Western prejudices of the time. Christian education and mission hospitals had the effect of weakening these traditional beliefs (Strayer 1976:10). They proved effective instruments for conversion to Christianity.



**Photo 2.** Traditional medicines (Kotsiri village; Sekhukhune district, Limpopo Province, 22.03.2019), Photographer: Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka

### **The role played by indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition in Bapedi culture**

#### **Indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories as a communal participatory experience.**

Literary evidence has shown that in the Bapedi society, indigenous songs and traditional oral stories are a social practice and cannot be enjoyed in isolation (Lebaka 2001:131). According to Lebaka (2001:133), they bring people together for different purposes, and with their ancestors, but also spur members of a group towards achieving a corporate objective in a community. With regard to 'music as a communal experience' Lebaka further mentions that "music as a direct agency for social intervention helps expressing and exposing corporate truth, communal or personal views, agitations, as well as aspirations (Lebaka 2001:133). These observations are vividly corroborated by Lidskog (2017:25) who states that music provides an opportunity for the expression of identity, and it can facilitate the reproduction and transformation of established social identities. He observes that music can be used as a symbolic identifier of a social group, both by the group's members but also by the surroundings (its non-members (Lidskog 2017:25). In the same vein, Rice (2007:35) observes that Music has the ability to index different aspects of multiple identities through the multiplicity of its formal properties (melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre and so forth). He argues that musical performance provides the opportunity for communities sharing an identity to see themselves in action and to imagine others who might share the same style of performance. In consonance with the above views, Joseph (2007:102) confirms that "learning from each other impacts on and influences one's identity". Furthermore, Joseph affirms that "music making is, therefore, an index of a living community, and a measure of the degree of social cohesion among its respective units" (2007:103). This is in line with the finding of Amlor (2016:63) who writes that "indigenous knowledge, perceived as cultural norms and values that collectively inform, educate and give identity to people in a society, still remains an African cultural legacy".

Indigenous Bapedi music is characterized by song, text, speech and poetry<sup>1</sup>, and it is difficult to have one of these characteristics and not the rest. In Bapedi music performances for instance, the performers sometimes open a performance with an introductory speech. The information in this speech is usually not sung to any melody, but spoken directly. It informs the audience about the background of the song to be performed and prepares them toward the experience. This is evident in the Bapedi reed pipes' music ensemble (*kiba*) performances.

<sup>1</sup> Lebaka (2008:189) describes poetry as an organized form of communication whereby, words are skillfully knitted together in manners where only few words cleverly express a body of ideas.

### **Moral lessons behind indigenous Bapedi songs and traditional oral stories.**

In my fieldwork in Sekhukhune district, it was interesting and encouraging to observe how Bapedi people employ 'fable'<sup>1</sup> to teach some moral lessons. Informal discussions have revealed that the characters of the story are often animals or birds, which converse like human beings. With regard to the role played by indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories in the Bapedi society, it was found that indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories serve several functions in the Bapedi society, ranging from social to moral, and religious to political. Furthermore, it was found that they function so much in entertainment as most members of the society are normally intrigued to watch the performances, but also serve the purpose of correction, education, counselling and enlightenment. These observations are in consonant with Idang (2015:103) who observes that African culture is embedded in strong moral considerations and has a system of various beliefs and customs which every individual ought to keep in order to live long and to avoid bringing curses on them and others. We observe in the present study that indigenous Bapedi music does not give momentary joy that makes people forget about realities of life, and does not aim at providing just temporary happiness in entertainment; but rather presents issues of the moment and provides stimulus to re-thinking about behaviours that are contrary to the norms of the society and such vice that could even be dangerous to those who indulge in them and the society. Oral accounts and observations have also shown that Indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories prompt members of the society to examine and address facts about reality. These findings imply that indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories deal with frank issues of life, and there is no hiding in their practice. For example, when the composer-performer means to criticize, he/she does so directly and when it becomes necessary to praise he/she does so frankly. These findings also support Lidskog's (2017:33) assertion of music and identity. In his view, "music has an important role in identity formation in diasporic situations". He maintains that "music can serve both to stabilize and maintain identities and belongings – but also to destabilize them, providing new material and resources for identity formation (Lidskog 2017:33).

### **The utilization of cultural proverbs and parables in indigenous Bapedi songs and narratives**

It has become evident through interviews and observations that indigenous Bapedi music is vocal and word-based. Closer investigation has shown that it presents its symbols in skilled language that employs figures of speech, imagery and other poetic elements. Using videos, it was recorded that it is the use of these language techniques put together in tones and tunes that assist in conveying the messages that make the songs symbolic. During interviews it was also established that Bapedi people employ a personification in a proverbial manner and metaphorical descriptions using animals, birds and this physical world as well as the spiritual world to discredit the being of the assailed subjects. When analyzing the data material, it becomes evident that indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories play significant roles in educating and enlightening Bapedi people through their musical performances. Furthermore, it was found that indigenous Bapedi songs are characterized by proverbial and metaphorical expressions. Along similar lines, it is worthwhile to mention here Hlupi's view. In a personal interview with Makgoga Hlupi Nkwana (28<sup>th</sup> of September 2018) at Kotsiri village, Sekhukhune district in Limpopo Province, it was pointed out that "the Bapedi culture is richly vast in the use of proverbs both in speech and songs". According to her, "in proverbs issues are raised and a multitude of counsel is given in brevity". Ekanem (2012:57) emphasizes the above observations when he writes that proverbs are seen as the oil with which words are eaten. He further elaborates that proverbs are the most important aspect of language and it is in proverbs that we find the remains of the oldest forms of African religions and philosophical wisdom, thus proverbs are the defining features of African languages. All the interviewed persons feel that in Bapedi society, many traditional stories, poems and indigenous songs are associated with animals and birds. Effective teaching in these stories, poems and songs is realized by employing imagery<sup>2</sup> of birds and animals (Lebaka 2008:155). The following poem (**table 1**) based on divination bones is an illustration of this feature. The poem as translated into English is shown below.

<sup>1</sup> Idamoyibo (2006:6-168) describes 'fable' as a very brief story to teach some moral lessons.

<sup>2</sup> Imagery is a technique in poetry adopted to create pictures in the minds of the audience in order to stimulate their imagination of the objects and subjects described and represented, and to arouse their responses (Idamoyibo 2006:169).



**Name of the poem of divination bones: Lewa la Hlapadima (a holotorous personality)**

**Poem text and translation**

Sepedi	English
<p>Ngwana tladi hlalefa, ge o ka se hlalefe o tla wela sefung. Ke hlapadima e leme la maka, Ga go kubu, ga go kwena, ga go selomi se metseng, Hlapa o tšwe, madiba ga se eno, ke a bo kwena.</p>	<p>My child, please take care, and be on the alert. In case you are negligent and ignorant, you will suffer the consequences of what you are attempting to do, You will be confronted by hlapadima (a holotorous personality), a liar, and unreliable. It is not advisable to associate yourself with this type of a personality/character. The most dangerous, prominent and popular animals such as the crocodile and the hippopotamus, have failed to establish friendship with this character/personality. Take a bath, and get out of the water, you don't belong there, that's where the crocodile belongs.</p>

**Table 1: Interview, Lesufi (17 March 2019).**

**Explanation of the symbolism**

There is much wisdom in the above poem and divination bones (**photo 3**). The poem is a warning to the person diagnosed, either the female or male partner who is intending to cohabit with his/her partner. The message put across is that 'please ensure your safety before any action could be taken'. This simply implies that one of the partners is sick or has a sexual transmitted disease. In the case of a female partner, this may also apply to menstruation cycle/period. In the case of a male partner, this serves as a warning that he should be cautious and guard against being socially excited of the newly established relationship, as the female partner might be sick or experiencing a menstruation cycle or period. According to Tshgofatšo Shai; a traditional healer-to-be (personal communication, 22 May 2019), the divination bones serve as a warning that fornication before consulting with the traditional healer for the utilization of the divination bones is health risk if not life risk. Tshgofatšo further mentioned that in Bapedi culture there is a general belief that *mosadi o hwetswa dikgagareng*, meaning, the rightful woman or prospective wife is found in the divination bones. This simply implies that after a man has proposed love to a woman of his choice, and the consensus has been reached, he should not be socially excited and inform his parents about the new relationship before consulting with the traditional healer for the utilization of the divination bones to find out whether the woman is the rightful partner for the bright future and happy marriage. This enlightenment is significant to the diagnosed person and other people in the Bapedi society because it is true that *mosadi o hwetšwa dikgagareng* (the rightful woman is confirmed by the divination bones). Since generally oral poetry in Bapedi society does not exist as mere recitation, it is performed by various traditional poets and musicians in different parts of Sekhukhune district without distortion of coherence and meaning in the messages communicated through the songs and poems. However, divination poems<sup>1</sup> do not exist for listening pleasure, but are intended to warn the diagnosed with frank issues of life. Sometimes the messages are presented proverbially or in parables and wide gaps are left for the diagnosed person to fill.

**Message**

In the above poem, the traditional healer's (poet) tone is very essential to the understanding of divination bones. The tone and diction suggest the meaning of what the traditional healer (poet) intends to communicate to the diagnosed person. The findings from this research correlates with the assertion by Lebaka (2001:64) who states that various methods of divination are used by Bapedi traditional healers (*dingaka*), and the most common method is the utilization of a set of divination bones (*dikgagara*). Lebaka (2001:65) further writes that the answer from the patient or whoever diagnosed is either 'Yes' or 'No' as a response to the question, 'Do you agree?' The question is asked by the traditional healer. Following next is the utilization of a set of divination bones (*dikgagara*) by Tshgofatšo Shai (**see photo 3**), interpreted by

<sup>1</sup> Whether short or long, the poems are memorable.

the poem in **table 1**. According to Tshegofatso Shai (a traditional healer-to-be; trainee), the four divination bones he is pointing are associated with *hlapadima* (a holotorous personality).



**Photo 3/** Utilization of a set of divination bones; Tshegofatšo Shai – Traditional healer-to-be; trainee (Kotsiri village; Sekhukhune district, Limpopo Province, 22.03.2019), Photographer: Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka

### **The pedagogical significance of indigenous Bapedi music.**

The body of evidence based inquiry and research have revealed that indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories, more than being the processes of social communication, are the products of the art themselves. As products, they exist to provide certain functions and as well serve as reference source in the Bapedi society. So far in this study, we have found that there is a clear indication that informal music education and traditional oral stories in Bapedi culture show remarkable interrelatedness of fields of learning such as literature, religion, sociology, history, philosophy and music, where they meet and unite to fulfil certain functions in the society. The exposition of this study has also shown that these fields of social, moral and spiritual experiences influence the philosophical thought processes of indigenous Bapedi music practitioners as they take cognizance of the cohesive art of communication. Attesting to the observations above, Nzewi (1999:73) observes that “sufficient attention has not been given to the philosophy and latent human objectives that prescribed mass, informal music education in African cultures, and which determine the pedagogical strategies for music education, formal and otherwise. Observations from Nzewi (1999:73) indicate that most researchers and analysts have often assumed that a systematic approach is non-existent simply because there is no unnecessarily verbal theorization or written tradition. Nzewi further argues that “to introduce Africans to modern music learning and appreciation of European music thoughts, contents, practices and pedagogy is a radical, de-culturating process which continues to produce the crises of cultural inferiority, mental inadequacy, and pervasive, perverse cultural-human identity characterizing the modern African person in modern social, political, educational and cultural pursuits”.

### **Discussion**

Several significant findings have emerged from this study. It was established that indigenous Bapedi songs and traditional oral stories resonate in people’s personal lives, in cultural and religious rituals and in society at large. Based on the findings of this study, common misconceptions about indigenous Bapedi music, oral tradition and culture include the ideas that indigenous Bapedi religious and cultural practices are condemned as proletarian, myth, superstition, pagan, steeped in evil religious experiences and unacceptable for worship, primitive, uncivilized, not sufficiently artistic and spiritual, that had to be dealt with, and an inferior system that had to be done away with.

Data analysis shows that Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) of Bapedi people is quite rich in cultural heritage. The truth is that these misconceptions are rooted in misinformation, lack of knowledge and stereotypes. Another truth is that some

traditional Bapedi musicians are unemployed, live a hand to mouth existence and lack access to education and resources, but they make the most of what they have. While education and resources are often lacking, innovation and creativity are in abundance and plentiful supply. Closer investigation has shown that they are undoubtedly resourceful and innovative. Based on my experience and the findings of this study, while acknowledging the contribution of Western knowledge systems to the development of modern Africa, it is deeply regretted to realize that indigenous Bapedi oral tradition and culture are dismissed as myth, superstition and steeped in evil religious experiences. The findings of this study have revealed that in Bapedi society, indigenous music and traditional oral stories are utilized to buttress and demonstrate the collective wisdom of Bapedi people, as well as to transmit Bapedi culture, values, beliefs and history from generation to generation.

What has emerged thus far in this study, is that with so many fallacies about indigenous Bapedi music, oral tradition and culture, it is not true that indigenous Bapedi music is proletarian and not sufficiently artistic and spiritual. The truth, however is that indigenous songs and traditional oral stories have traditionally played (and still play) an important role in Bapedi culture. The findings also imply that most people who have never visited Sekhukhune district in Limpopo Province, are susceptible to fall prey to the widespread misconceptions about indigenous Bapedi music, oral tradition and culture. The results yielded thus far contribute to the notion that it is also a great religious misconception to assume that indigenous Bapedi music is pagan and steeped in evil religious experiences. This is another fact that is misconceived. It is a misleading misconception because indigenous Bapedi music and traditional oral stories are utilized to buttress and demonstrate the collective wisdom of Bapedi people, as well as to transmit Bapedi culture, values, beliefs and history from generation to generation.

From an identity perspective, the results of this study have shown that Bapedi people seem to maintain and perpetuate their social cohesion, cultural identity, personal and social identity. This finding implies that Bapedi people must have control over their own knowledge and its belief system. It also emerged during the study that in Bapedi society, indigenous songs and traditional oral stories are a social practice and bring people together for different purposes. Based on the literary sources consulted, observations, interviews and using videos, I am firmly of the opinion that indigenous Bapedi music, oral tradition and culture are in consonant with African theory of knowledge and Ontology theory and should not be dismissed at face value as practices overtaken by circumstances and hence irrelevant to the present Bapedi community developmental needs. Findings from the interviews also indicate that communal music making in Bapedi culture is more common than individual performance. Generally, what remains factual ground for this study is that indigenous Bapedi songs and traditional oral stories resonate in people's personal lives, in religious rituals and in society at large, and the performance of indigenous Bapedi songs incorporates several aspects of artistic-aesthetic communication such as song, dance, various visual and verbal arts that are integrated.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the investigation was threefold: a) to examine misconceptions about indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition; b) to investigate the proverbs, parables and narratives that form the basis of the Bapedi songs which contain a good deal of interesting material that can contribute to a greater understanding of what indigenous Bapedi songs mean to the Bapedi people; and c) to highlight the role played by indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition in Bapedi culture. This study described the missionary influence on the cultural impact of indigenous music and oral tradition, but also reflected on the demise of indigenous Bapedi music, culture and oral tradition. The findings of the study suggest that Bapedi people should keep and perpetuate their valuable heritage, which is still needed for survival and for the welfare of our next generation.

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