

Bangwaketse of Botswana Setapa Traditional Music Practices

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Abstract

This paper aims at discussing information found out about setapa traditional music practiced by the Bangwaketse located in the Southern District of Botswana. The paper was conceived from tribal collaborations between ethnomusicology music classes and the respondents in an effort to understand setapa traditional music and its uses in the tribal daily lives. The paper does not only pay attention to the music, but also to its traditional ways of transmission and its social and cultural explanations. The subject of learning styles among practiced and proficient musicians, aspirant musicians, participants is also pronounced. This paper seeks to promote and disseminate research that investigates experiences affecting musical acquisition, development, and participation across the lifespan. The research is also geared towards pointing out community factors that contribute to the nearing extinction of this music practice in other parts of the District. Data was mainly collected through oral interviews recorded on tape with informants as well as internet search and other documented information repositories. The oral interviews were also recorded using an audiotape for the purposes of future reference. Photographs of the practical music performances were also taken and will be found in the research. It became evident from the interviews that Bangwaketse of Botswana setapa is mainly performed by men on day to day tribal societal activities for entertainment with the inculcation of women ornamenting through ululating.

Keywords: Botswana, Bangwaketse, Setapa, Sesung and Traditional music.

Introduction

This paper aims at discussing Setapa traditional music practiced by the Bangwaketse of Botswana. Bangwaketse are found in the Southern District of Botswana. It should be noted that setapa is not the only traditional music performed by Bangwaketse. Other musical types performed by this tribe include; Mmino wa dinaka and Semerika. Mmino wa dinaka has been described by informants to have originated before setapa. Setapa is believed to have been started by Bangwaketse ancestors long ago. In most parts of the country, Botswana and Bangwaketse in particular have their life style arranged in such a way that there is at the fields, cattle post and at home which are distinctively regarded as remote or rural areas, as well as semi - urban, towns and cities. Today though setapa is still performed among Bangwaketse, in semi - urban villages; like Kanye, setapa is not performed by many people due to urbanization and other occupations such as self reliance or Ipelegeng as it is called in Setswana. In the past people used to perform setapa at the fields during the ploughing and harvesting seasons. Nowadays ploughing is in a very small scale and

erratic partly due to insufficient rainfall which results into long periods of continued drought. There are also no social incentives to encourage people to continue reviving setapa performances. Instead setapa performers would now prefer to find paying jobs such as the newly introduced paid for Self Reliance for community village projects. However, at Molapowabasadi, Selokolela and Sesung sa Ga Ngwaketse villages, Setapa music is still performed in abundance by people of all ages. These villages are regarded by Bangwaketse as ko masimong literally meaning - at the fields, the stronghold of setapa traditional music where cultural custodians of the tribe could be found.

Nowadays Bangwaketse perform setapa mostly with the purpose of entertainment as well as teaching visiting groups from other tribes hence Setapa music is taught to interested community and school groups from all over Botswana. During the teaching process, the setapa group demands a token of appreciation mostly in the form of money to buy uniform and other accessories.

Data Collection

Data collecting took place in the village of Kanye in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 consecutively. This process included practitioner interactive sessions in Kanye and Sesung (2009 and 2011) villages respectively. The method of collecting data was oral interviews with the informants. Photographs and videos were also taken with the permission of the informants and village elders. In some instances, the informants were prepared to demonstrate setapa performances i. e. dancing, hand clapping and singing patterns. The informants at the Kanye kgotla were dikgosana; headmen from different wards delegated by the kgosi kgolo; paramount chief. These are the people the chief trust to be the cultural custodians of the village. The Kgosi believes that dikgosana are knowledgeable in cultural activities and make a proper representation in its transmission without any distortion. It was very difficult to reach other rural villages the Kanye informants annually referred the researcher to, such as Selokolela, Molapowabasadi and Sesung. This was due to lack of information on the contacts and communication facilities. However, in 2009 the popular Sesung village which is said to be the strongest in Bangwaketse setapa cultural heritage was finally reached with the other two villages of Selokolela and Molapo wa Basadi still remaining unvisited.

The informant's interview set up at Sesung was different from that at Kanye. Kanye informants were village ward headmen who had to be interviewed with the permission of the kgosi at the kgotla, whilst those at Sesung were respectable families with a traceable hereditary setapa performance historical lineage. Their performance and interviews were not at the kgotla but organized at a selected individual family household. However, it appeared that these families are also trusted by the village kgosi hence permitted to perform and disseminate the cultural heritage with liberty.

What does the Word Setapa Mean?

Setapa traditional music is performed by Bangwaketse in mainly Sesung, Molapo wa Basadi and Selokolela villages. It is regarded as a Bangwaketse traditional music which was also started by tribe. The name setapa is derived from feet stamping which in Setswana is called "go tapa tapa". Setapa according to Bangwaketse unanimous understanding means to dance stamping feet. The name of the traditional dance and music is then derived from this activity and known as mmimo wa setapa, literally meaning setapa dance or music.

Different Types of Setapa Music

Due to the vastness of the Southern District, setapa music was traditionally found in three distinctive types namely:

- (a) Setapa sa dipitse; setapa with a galloping horse's rhythm. This type of setapa was performed in Mmathethe village and its surroundings
- (b) Setapa sa phathisi; setapa performed whilst the lower part of the trouser is tightened by a peg. This was an influence from the neighbouring Bakwena's music borankana known as phathisi (from the costume).
- (c) The third type of setapa was called setapa sa go goga maoto; this setapa was performed by dragging feet. This was an influence from the neighbouring Basarwa's music commonly known as tsutsube from Kgalagadi Desert.

It is evident from these three setapa musical types, that the influence might have been the result of border sharing. Bangwaketse share borders with; Bakwena to the North, Bakgalagadi to the West and to a lesser extent Barolong to the South. Other big villages in this district either perform setapa in an unclear distorted form or the music is almost obsolete. An example of such a big village experiencing this problem is Kanye which is the administrative centre of Bangwaketse. This is due to the intrusion of other foreign musical types through different means such as the school traditional dancing troupes brought by teachers from all over the country and permeation through tribal borders as pointed out by some knowledgeable village elders. Sells (2003:38) asserts that, to make learning interesting and relevant to students' lives, let them share information about their heritage and teach them about the cultures of their classmates and other people.

Costume

Traditionally, men put on diphamphathana almost similar to Bakwena diphathisi on their shins. These were made from phuduhudu (antelope) skins to produce percussive sound similar to leg rattles during dancing. Trousers were folded up to the top of the knee to accommodate diphamphathana. Men also put on shorts known as motseto/mongato made from animal skin preferably antelope, tshephe - springbok and phuti - duiker, borokgwe bo tshasitswe mosetsane (smeared with ochre) to appear reddish in colour.

Due to wild life restrictions on animal killings, the researcher was shown an example of a single phamphathana with the thicker outer pudi (goat) skin and inner lighter ntlole springhare skin which were made when the animals were still easily obtainable in the area. In some instances men also put on traditional sandals known as mpheetshane made from hard leather obtained from the forehead of an ox. During the dancing process, these differently textured skins surprisingly produce percussive sounds exactly like leg rattles. See plate 1 below for a labeled diphamphathana picture.

Plate 1



Showing diphamphathana

Nowadays most men tie on leg rattles since they do not have diphamphathana

anymore. Traditionally, ladies put on skin skirts known as diphaeyana. These were made from the same animal skin preferably phuduhudu, tshephe and phuti as those of their male counterparts. In some instances, ladies also had sandals from the hard leather of an oxen forehead. The ladies' sandals were called dikhuba. Nowadays, there is no special setapa costume. Some adult groups such as Mogocono Traditional Adult Group of Sesung put on Mateisi (German prints) skirts and white T- shirts for ladies and men put on their ordinary shirts and trousers with leg rattles on ankles to produce the rattling percussive sound.

This is actually an agreed uniform by the group instead of being of traditional resemblance. Both men and women dance with ease and comfort when bare footed. Most of the schools in the Southern District, especially in Kanye have contrarily devised modern designed leather costumes as uniform. This is meant for identification during their traditional dance competitions since they have no exposure to setapa. As one informant pointed out in Kanye village, there is no link between the school and the Bangwaketse community when coming to these musical activities.

Instruments and Accompaniments

Traditionally a double whistle (phala) was made from mhurukwana tree which is available in the Bangwaketse area, Sesung village to be precise. This is a thorny tree with thin green clustered leaves. In Kanye, it was noted that the whistle was also traditionally constructed from a motsotsojane tree. See mhurukwana tree in plate 3 below.

Plate 2



mhurukwana tree (for traditional whistle construction) with fruits

Plate 3



The Mogonono Traditional Dancing troupe band leader blowing a double barreled modern metal whistle

Setapa Performances

Who Performs Setapa Music?

Firstly, it should be noted that setapa traditional music is learnt through rote and imitation. Traditionally, setapa performers consumed a wild fruit called senwane during the night dancing session to quench thirst. It was consumed either raw or roasted. Its taste is similar to that of a water melon and lekatane. When performing setapa, a man would hold on the shoulders of a lady whilst the lady also covered her breasts to protect them from being touched. During the day when the boys were looking after cattle and had no girls to practice dancing with, they used thorn less trees for practice. This is supported by Kamien (2008:577) when he asserts that, non-western music is most often transmitted orally from parent to child or from teacher to student. Compositions and performance techniques are learned by rote and imitation. Music notation is far less important in non-western than in western culture. Even when notation exists, as in China and India, written music traditionally serves only as a record and is rarely used in teaching or performance. However, Setapa music has been kept alive orally through generations since its inception.

Setapa music used to be performed by makau le makgarebe (big boys and girls) overnight during gwetla (letlhahula) in the evenings when they had completed their daily chores at home. This is the period when food in the fields is ready for consumption. There are also no restrictions in attendance to the performance. Young boys and girls are also allowed to attend so that they could start learning at an early age during rehearsals.

Normally setapa was performed after the harvest season when there was plenty food from the fields to feed the performers overnight. During setapa performances, girls sing, clap hands and ululate while boys do the dancing and whistling. Singing is the most important way of making music in the vast majority of non-western cultures. Preferred vocal timbres vary

widely from one musical tradition to another, Kamien (2008:577). In Setapa music, boys would also hold girls by hands and turn them around (ba ba chikisa) to ornament the dance.

Plate 4



Two young boys (extreme right) learning to dance the ryforo - Afrikanse (let us move forward) setapa style

One elder pointed out that, during performances only those big boys and girls who are trusted to be confident and could perform for a very long time are allowed to participate. There is a female lead singer who calls and the group responds and a male lead dancer who moves in front of the performing males in any setapa performance. To support this, Kamien (2008:582) asserts that, much African vocal music is characterized by a performance style known as call and response, in which the phrases of a soloist are repeatedly answered by those of a chorus. An exciting overlap of sounds often results when the leader resumes singing before the chorus has completed its response. Typically, African vocal music has short phrases that are repeated over and over to different words. There are normally around 30 performers in a group of setapa performers (10 male and 20 female). The standing order in performing setapa was in three lines; i. e. lead singer followed by next high voices, then males (tenor and bass).

When completing the setapa performance, the rest of the group except sopranos moved round performing as shown in plate 7 below.

Sopranos remained in one place singing and ululating. When the other voices/parts came back to join soprano, this was an indication of ending the song.

Kamien (2008:577) clarifies this concept by stating that, improvisation is important in many nonwestern musical cultures. Performers usually base their improvisations on traditional melodic phrases and rhythmic patterns.

Plate 5



Four men ornamenting setapa by dancing when seated

Setapa was performed at the fields overnight with a huge fire to scare animals such as; foxes, duikers and hyenas. These animals had a tendency of feeding on and destroying crops in the fields. During the performance of Setapa, boys would preferably dance with girls they love and vice versa. In the morning (after the rising of *naledi ya masa* -the morning star), setapa performers would return to their respective fields for resumption of the daily chores. The morning star was used as a watch by the performers. When *naledi ya masa/mphatlalatsane* (morning star) appeared, love songs were heard dominating the show. The saying (slogan) “a setapa seye monyong seye go bina se kaname” was shouted several times by male participants. This expression literally meant “let the setapa dance go to the dew and be danced upside-down”. This was the time performers would sneak with their beloved ones secretly hence the expression “a setapa se ye monyong se ye go bina se kaname”. This saying actually alerted lovers to sneak away and make love with their partners (“private vote of thanks to each other” - as alluded to by one informant in Kanye). During this sneaking off, there was no pregnancy allowed. Whoever disappeared as lovers would be expected to practice courtship. If a boy made a mistake and impregnated a girl, the solution was to disappear and go to work at the South African mines in fear of being punished. He would come back after some years when the elder’s anger has calmed down. Unfortunately the poor pregnant girl would have had nowhere to go hence facing the punishment. So, both boys and girls were careful not to fall in this trap because the main purpose of the night long setapa sessions was entertainment, recreation and relaxation without any mischief. These big boys and girls were only allowed to indulge in sexual activities after marriage. In most cases, some performers ended up getting married. After harvest, setapa used to be performed at the Eastern side of the Kanye main kgotla. It is however no more used for setapa purposes. As stated earlier, this is partly due to factors such as the continued drought which has resulted in little or no harvest at all. During this

performance, in addition to food, traditional beer was also served to the performers for motivational purposes. Other setapa performances would be hosted by different families in turns (molaletsa) through invitations. At this homestead, the performers preferably dance at a thotobolo (heath row) outside the yard.

Setapa was also used for competitions by performing groups from different wards. The hosting ward would arrange for the whole show. This arrangement included food for performing groups and presents to be won during the competitions. Traditional food availed from the fields included morokolo, logodu, dikgobe, kabu, morubulo, bogobe and there would be lekuka la madila; a large traditional container of sour milk for the best prize. Traditionally brewed beer was also served during the ceremony.

The winner would be given a present of lekukana la madila; a traditional container of sour milk and a larger share of food served during the occasion as a token of appreciation. Elders observed that setapa debarred big boys and girls from wrong doings by keeping them busy and entertained.

During this research, it was not easy to get the lyrics of all setapa songs and interpretations since the performances were specially arranged and timed for a requested observation. To avoid making this research paper song oriented, the researcher included a few titles as examples for the reader as shown below.

Excerpts from Setapa Songs

1. Setswana

Mmakgosi ga ana molao, o setse a roma diphikoko ngwetse tsa gagwe di ile.

English

The chief's wife has no discipline, she remained sending peacocks since her daughters in law have all left.

2. Setswana

Ke motitinti ke mokaba ka ke paletse banna.

English

I am very strong and resistant since men do not approach me so cheaply. This is about a girl who is proud of her virginity since she does not permit any men to go out with her. This song was encouraging virginity among girls.

3. Setswana

Monna o tshabile kwa Ga Sita a tshaba letsholo la tau.

English

A man ran away from Ga Sita village being afraid of the lion hunt.

4. Setswana

Mamosadi seopana, o roma bana бага mang o sena bana.

English

This song questions a barren woman on whose children she will send since she does not have any children.

5. Setswana

Mmamalome - ryforo.

English

My uncle's wife ryforo

6. Setswana

Konkobi kafa morago kafa pele kgomo diatswa.

English

This song is about a young lady of a marriageable age. She expresses her strictness with her body parts by saying to a man, you can attempt to touch me at the back, but if you touch me in front, you should pay a bride price first.

7. Setswana

Gase nna poo ya pina.

English

This is about the lead singer. Lead singers normally want to be recognised by saying, I am not the lead singer, whereas they are the ones.

8. Setswana

Nna matsale oa nthata keya nokeng ka galase.

English

This song is about the daughter inlaw who is expressing happiness about being loved by her mother inlaw by saying; my mother inlaw loves me i go to fetch water with a glass.

9. Setswana

Nkatamele o ntshune, naledi ya ntshune e dule

English

Come closer and kiss me the morning star has risen. This song is normally sung to indicate that setapa performers are about to dismiss and see their beloved ones (boy friends and girl friends).

10. Setswana

Dieshane o tlodile tsela, dinao tsa gagwe di makwapa.

English

This song is making fun of a person called Dieshane that if her has crossed the road, you will see through his rough untidy foot prints.

11. Setswana

Mopae a ntima bojalwa, a bonwa sum le ba gagabo a bonwa sum le Ramatsepu.

English

Mopae did not give me beer; he drank it with his relatives such as Ramatsepu.

12. Setswana

Monna wa Molapowabojang, ke bale ba ile mma ba kelebetse, ba lebile Moses morwa Letshabo.

English

A man from Molapowabojang village. There they are they have left for Moses Letshabo's place (Moses Letshabo is the chief of Molapowabojang village).

13. Setswana

Tshelenyane o tlabelwe ke mutlwa, Ralepatlo o tlabelwe ke mutlwa, Dibinare o tlabelwe ke mutlwa.

English

Tshelenyane has been pierced or pricked by a thorn, Ralepatlo has been pricked by a thorn, and Dibinare has been pricked by a thorn.

Challenges and Threats to Setapa Preservation

Because of lack of exposure and assistance from knowledgeable elders, Bangwaketse schools have changed Setapa dance to Borankana. For example in the song "Malome wee, kea belaela, o itse loso la ga rre" literally meaning "uncle, I am suspicious, you know what killed my father", there is no compatibility between the singing and dancing. Today though Setapa is still performed among some Bangwaketse elders, it is not feasible mainly due to developments and people are also no longer ploughing in large numbers. This is because of the continued drought. There are also no social incentives to encourage people to venture into Setapa performances. Instead Setapa performers would now prefer to find paying jobs. Nowadays, very few people have knowledge of setapa performance in Kanye village.

Educational Implications

The current music syllabi for Botswana schools call for the inclusion of traditional music. However, if the teachers and the musically knowledgeable elders do not work together to achieve this goal as it is now, it poses a threat to traditional music teaching in schools. As a result, teachers either skip or ignore this music component when its turn comes. Traditional music in schools is practiced as an extracurricular activity outside the classroom by a hand full of interested teachers for the Botswana Teachers Union Annual competitions. There has to be cooperation between the school and the community for this music to prosper and kept alive in school where the future citizens are found.

Conclusion

Historically, Bangwaketse practiced setapa traditional music in all the three places i. e. at the fields, at the cattle post and at home in the village. This research has found out that nowadays, setapa music is non existent in big villages and only practiced at the fields. People in big semi - urban villages hardly find time to practice and perform setapa music. They are occupied with other means of making life such as the government self reliance scheme of Ipelegeng. This has been partly caused by long periods of continued drought which resulted in people spending most of their time in big villages instead of going to the fields to plough and practice the nonprofit making setapa music. However, places like

Sesung where people have made their homes at the fields still regard setapa music with high esteem since it is their form of entertainment. Schools in the Bangwaketse area practice different types of traditional music brought by teachers from different parts of the country. Diaz (2001:11) states that it should be noted however that since we live in an interdependent world, it is imperative for students to be introduced to global or multidimensional citizenship. That is, students should be taught about other people's cultures, places and events so that they can appreciate the similarities and differences between people everywhere and learn to value diversity. However, parents do not see their participation in school music being a cultural preserving tool. Instead they see this as the teachers' responsibility.

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