# 'YET NONE WITH TRUER FERVOUR SING': *CORONATION SONG* AND THE (DE)COLONIZATION OF AFRICAN CHORAL COMPOSITION

*by*

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**Abstract:** In 1937, the Se(Sotho) composer, Mohapeloa published 'Coronation Song' a short *a cappella* choral work that celebrates the coronation of King George VI and which is ostensibly rooted in his colonial experience of the British Protectorate of Basutoland. It was reprinted in Morija in 1939 as 'Coronation March', by which time it was clear that this song's political message was at odds with his other songs. Reprinted in 1945, 55, 66, and 80 with minor changes, the song becomes increasingly anachronistic. Mohapeloa suddenly rewrote it in the mid 1970s, 10 years after Lesotho gained independence, by transforming it into a patriotic song, 'Lesotho Our Heritage' ('*Lesotho Lefa la Rōna*'). This article traces the song's journey through decades of political change by means of a close hermeneutic reading of its text, musical language and structure, arguing that the music had always identified with two political tendencies, the one European and colonizing, the other American and decolonizing. It was this ambiguity that kept Mohapeloa's interest and led to his last version of the song, finally published only in 2015.

**Keywords:** Mohapeloa, Coronation Song, colonial, decolonial, Basutoland, Lesotho, choral, analysis, history, harmony, tonality.

## Introductory remarks

Little detailed musical analysis has yet been applied to colonial and postcolonial African composition in order to lay bare the lasting damage inflicted on indigenous musical languages by what Kofi Agawu has called "musical violence of a very high order" that accompanied other forms of colonial violence (Agawu 2016a: 337). Among the scholars who have analyzed composers' responses to this musical violence, almost none has probed individual works for signs of those 'other forms'.[1] Most agree that it was caused by the systematic imposition by colonial agents (including but not only missionaries) of portable, harmonically and rhythmically simplistic, stylistically generic, often notated forms of 19th-century European and north American music (hymns and parlour songs mainly) onto African musical regimes known for their fluidity, diversity,

[1] These writers include, in alphabetical order: Agawu (2003, 2016a, 2016b), Erlmann (1991, 1996, 1999), Galane (2009), Haeker (2012), Lucia (2011, 2014), Mugovhani (2010), Muwati (2015), Muwati and Mutasa (2008), Olwage (2002, 2003, 2006), Pooley (2014), Potgieter & Mazomba (2005), Scherzinger (2001), van Rhyn (2013), and Wells (1994).

modality, rhythmic complexity, lack of formal teleology, and indigenous-language-based phraseology.[2]

As Agawu's "Tonality as a Colonizing Force in Africa" argues, the resulting hybridity of African art music, choral music, popular music, and jazz often shows either an uneasy co-existence between western and African tonal thinking (at worst an unremitting diatonicism based on chords I, IV, V) or an almost superhuman effort to transform exogenous violence into musical material driven by "the ethical and aesthetical imperatives of indigenous creativity" (*ibid*.: 346). I agree with Agawu that some African composers struggled harder than others (his 'best practice' is Joshua Uzoigwe; *ibid*.: 346-48) to manipulate tonal restrictions imposed upon them as a "colonizing force". Indeed, I would add to his argument that as far as the forced assimilation of western tonality is concerned, African composition across southern Africa can probably be placed on a continuum from flabby assimilation to vigorous transformation of western tonality.

In my previous work on Sotho composer, Joshua Pulumo Mohapeloa (Lucia 2011, 2014), who worked in the middle of the 20th century, I show that he is situated somewhere in the middle of this continuum, displaying more agency than the Ghana Peace Brass Band (Agawu 2016a: 341–42), but less than Uzoigwe, probably because of when Mohapeloa lived and because he only worked with the short *a cappella* choral form – his (se)Sotho interpretation of the hymn or parlour song - that so dominated southern Africa in the wake of colonialism.[3] I argue that he manipulated cadence-directed four-part harmony, admittedly "the most influential system of pitch organization in western Europe" (*ibid*.: 335) that initially "rode roughshod" (336) over African aesthetic norms, in ways that are strikingly creative, even within such limits.

Indeed, in a recent new critical edition of more than 180 works (Lucia 2015), Mohapeloa reveals a life-long struggle to write within the limitations of short diatonic tonal forms and tonic solfa notation while still keeping faith with older African traditions and modern African idioms.[4] Short choral works were his only expressive option, and they remain relevant to today's African choirs as a "naturalized *African* mod[e] of expression" (Agawu 2016a: 350; his emphasis), even though, as has been argued by Mokale Koapeng, a substantial "body of *African* choral art music" (Koapeng 2014: 53; my emphasis), has yet to emerge.[5] Bearing in mind the double bind that Agawu alerts me to (if I had a "who cares" attitude (*ibid*.: 350) or despised the music I would not be

[2] 'Phraseology' refers to the way prose affects sung texts, resulting in totally different views of prosody in Western and African music, as Agawu notes (336).

[3] A note on terminology: Mohapeloa's country is Lesotho (formerly Basutoland); the language is called '(se)Sotho' in this article but is also (still) commonly called 'Sesotho'; the citizens of Lesotho are referred to here as '(se)Sotho-speaking people' rather than the (still) commonly used 'Basotho', which is only retained when it occurs within quotes.

[4] The *Joshua Pulumo Mohapeloa Critical Edition in Six Volumes* was published by African Composers Edition in 2015 on www.african-composers-edition.co.za. It contains 145 scores of 183 works, all of which are transcribed from tonic solfa and edited, with critical commentary and historical introduction added.

[5] The African art music in the region still remains mostly choral, for lack of easy access to training in Western instrumental fields and lack of instruments.

writing about it at all, and when I celebrate it as a successful hybrid I am patronizing (*ibid.*)), I engage in this article with the music as an expression of the 'other forms' of colonial violence mentioned earlier. I take a single work by Mohapeloa, 'A Song for the Coronation of King George VI' (Mohapeloa 1937; hereafter 'Coronation Song') and subject it to a close semantic reading that situates its musical language within a larger colonial context.[6] My approach is drawn from previous semantic readings of individual works by, among others, Rose Subotnik, Susan McClary and Roger Parker. My models are Parker's account of the progress of Handel's '*Dove sei amato bene*' ('Art Thou Troubled'; Parker 2006: 121–40, 158-60) across time and space or the multiple readings of 'We Shall Not Be Moved' (Spener 2016). The case of 'Coronation Song', however, is different from both these sources, because it is not well known as a song and has not been re-used and re-inscribed down the decades, acquiring new meanings with different people across large, political, space-time flows. It has only a limited performance history, as far as I can tell, and a very modest and localised re-use by the composer himself; but this is what interests me, the local transformations he made of minimal material in a context of which few are aware. My focus thus throws the argument very much onto the work as text rather than onto its subtexts and contexts, although I connect all three.

My narration shifts between music analysis and political history and sometimes back and forth between different time frames, which I hope will not be confusing, in an effort to understand the song's colonizing and decolonizing resonances. One of the challenges implicit in Agawu's (2016a) critique is to be critical, and for me this requires exposing not only the music's weaknesses and the damage wrought by Empire on one of its composers but also Lesotho's political troubles. I am (as ever) inspired by Agawu's ongoing, Fanonesque, polemical challenges to treat African composition as equal to western composition in terms of training serious analytical, sociological and historical lenses on it.

**Colonial song**

Like Mohapeloa's other works, 'Coronation Song' emerged from the colonial context of an early 20th-century African mission culture in Morija, southern Basutoland. It was printed, as almost all his other songs were, in tonic solfa, and disseminated through songbooks.[7] The text is shown in Figure 1 and comprises a Verse and a Coda, each sung twice. In the score, the two verses are sung consecutively before the Coda, which is repeated, making the overall musical structure binary (AABB), a structure common to African choral music that seems to fly in the face of both the western hymn, where each verse would be concluded by the coda (chorus), and African call-and-response

[6] A preliminary version of this article was a paper read at the Eugene Casalis Symposium convened by the National University of Lesotho on 29–31 August, 2012. I would like to thank David Ambrose for his feedback on that paper and the two anonymous reviewers of this article for their comments.

[7] For a discussion of the production and dissemination of his music *cf* 'General Introduction to the Mohapeloa Critical Edition' (xi-xii) on www.african-music-edition.co.za/mohapeloa/critical-edition.

form. The bar numbering on the right-hand side corresponds to four sections of the score distributed through Figures 3–6 below:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Verse 1: | Verse 2: | |
| Come and with music sweet and strong | Far, far from us in England's land | (bars 1-17) |
| Make this a day of joy and song | The eager thousands waiting stand | |
| With all the nations the world round | By their rejoicing eyes are seen | (bars 18-25) |
| Who in his empire may be found (x2) | The gracious Sovereign and his Queen | |
| Let us with hearts and voices sing | We cannot see them but we sing | (bars 26-40) |
| In honour of our new-crowned King! | As glad as they to hail our King. | |
| Coda: | | |
| We of this land where mountains lift their peaks on high would add our gift. | | (bars 42-73) |
| We cannot bring the wealth or powers of people greater far than ours. | | |
| Yet none with truer fervour sing "God save and bless our new-crowned King! | | |

Figure 1. 'Coronation Song' by J.P. Mohapeloa

In phrases redolent of Tennyson, children in faraway lands hail the British monarchy, with Verse 1 imagining Empire and Verse 2, London, with its newly-crowned Emperor and Empress gazing on crowds that gaze back; all of this serving to reinforce Basutoland's remoteness from anyone's gaze. The Coda reminds London that impoverished Basutoland has nothing to offer except its rugged, mountainous landscape and its colonial 'song'. The different sections of this song reveal subtly different responses to this colonial event.[8]

The song as a whole was the response of a subaltern composer in a country still subjugated to Britain in 1937 as a 'protectorate' (to all intents and purposes a colony), to the coronation of King George VI in faraway London. The first 15 bars shown in Figure 2 (the original solfa) or 16½ bars shown in Figure 3 (transcribed into staff notation) demonstrate how well Mohapeloa had absorbed Western "tonal thinking" (Agawu 2016a: 340). In four balanced 4-bar phrases he moves from tonic to dominant, then subdominant, and returns to tonic, his tune as much an "education in melodic architecture" (Dean and Knapp, in Parker 2006: 127) as any English air, reaching a high point in bar 10 and gently descending to a $I_{6/4}$-V-I cadence. A trace of John Dowland's "Come, Come Away, Sweet Love Doth Now Invite" is discernible, especially in the way Mohapeloa's lingers on the word "come" and in the rhythmic elasticity of his English word setting.[9] The style owes as much to the madrigal as to the hymn although perhaps in its late 19th-century incarnation in the works of Gilbert and Sullivan.

[8] For those unfamiliar with tonic solfa scores: there are three musical systems here, of 5 bars each. The Soprano and Alto parts are written above one line of text while a second line of (the same) text comes between Tenor and Bass. In Sop and Alto, the note d, (lower doh) is written in a different octave from the same note as it is written in Ten and Bass (d) – as can be seen in the transcription in Figure 3. (All transcriptions are by the author.)

[9] The Stairwell Carollers on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JB9LXUtW2FM [accessed 13 June 2017] give a good rendering of the choir version of this song.

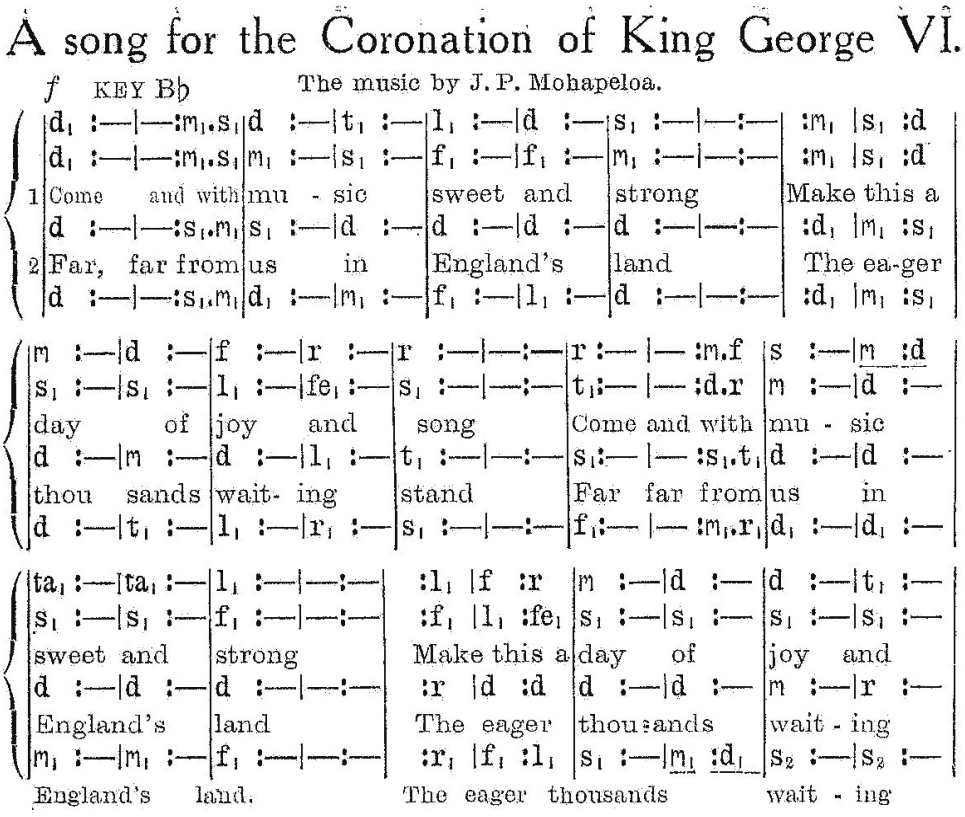


Figure 2. 'A Song for the Coronation of King George VI' by J.P. Mohapeloa, *Basutoland Teachers' Magazine* No. 1, Nov. 1937, p. 6 (bars 1-15 in the original tonic solfa notation).

The music matches the stilted, verbal imagery of the text and echoes a history of colonial deference that stretches back to the end of Moshoeshoe I's reign in Basutoland. When Queen Victoria's son, Prince Alfred, visited his territory in 1860, Moshoeshoe, powerful as he was in the region as a Paramount Chief, was obliged to seek for his nation the goal of British protection against Boer farmers, which was nominally granted in 1868 (Gill 1993: 101, 115). As Helen Sapire puts it, "the septuagenarian was more deferential towards the young prince at this meeting than he had been to any other white figure of authority" (Sapire 2016: 39) and she also records that Moshoeshoe's son, Tsekelo, conducted a "three-part rendering of God Save the Queen' in welcome of the Prince" (*ibid.*: 40).

Deference is the tone of the first section of a work whose genre was typically called 'school song' (Wells 1994: 197–209) to distinguish it from traditional song. Nor was school song confined to schools but was, by Mohapeloa's time, a community choir tradition throughout southern Africa. For mission-educated Africans who equated traditional music with paganism, this colonial choral idiom was a symbol of modernity:

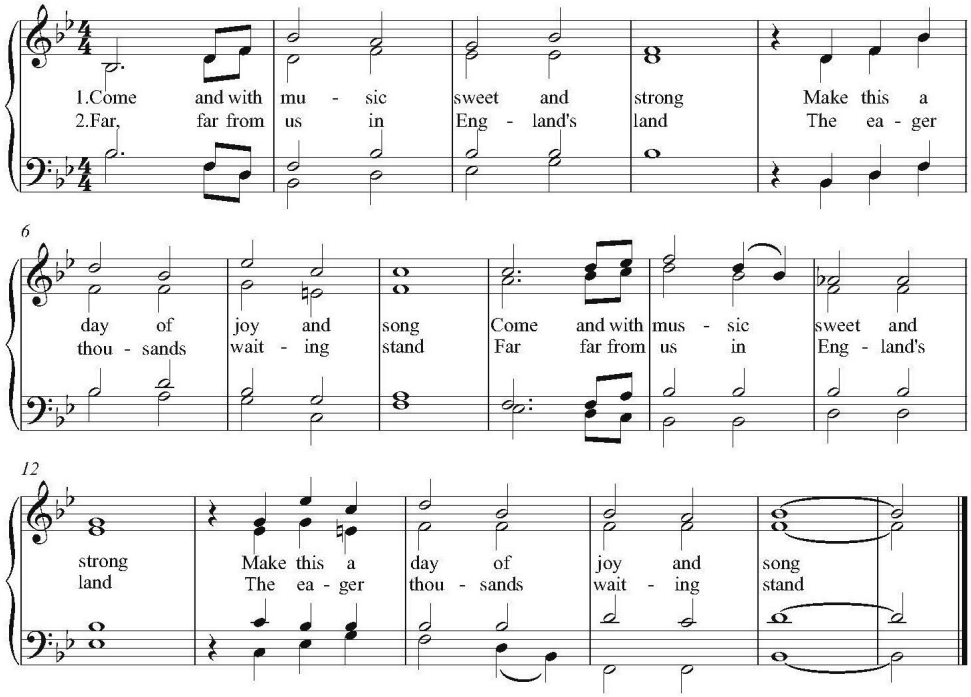


Figure 3. 'A Song for the Coronation of King George VI' (bars 1-16/ii of the 1937 tonic solfa score. Transcribed by author into staff notation).

"since the advent of Christianity and civilization, music has seen the light of a better day. It has gained in breadth of outlook, in richer and more varied melody and harmony; and it is fast becoming a suitable vehicle for the expression of high and noble sentiment" (Mashologu 1952: 51).[10]

Neither the opening section (see Figure 3) nor the English text, were entirely typical of Mohapeloa's music thus far. It was his first 'English' song after 63 songs in which he used his own (se)Sotho texts, a number of them based on folk songs. As an anonymous commentator in the Maseru newspaper, *The Echo* (1973) explains, "Miss Bull, a white woman wrote a song and asked Mr Mohapeloa to make a melody for it" (*The Echo* 1973: 3), meaning, presumably, that she asked him to set her text [song] to music in four part-harmony [melody].[11] The song was on a subject very different from his usual engagement with nature, landscape, farming, religious faith, and everyday life. The score atypically appeared in the first issue of the *Basutoland Teachers' Magazine*

[10] I assume this was B.N. Mashologu, Mohapeloa's neighbour in Morija for many years, who was Precentor of the new Lutheran Evangelical Church (Mohapeloa, J.M. 1985: photo opp. p.25) and conducted on some of the Gallo recordings of JP's music made by the Morija Training Institute Choir in Johannesburg in late 1936 (Gallo metadata courtesy Rob Allingham, e-mail 7 October 2009).

[11] If Miss Bull did write a 'melody' in the musical sense, it can only have been for the first 16 bars, for reasons made clear in this article.

published in Maseru, rather than in one of Mohapeloa's songbooks, usually published in Morija. And it atypically responded to, indeed celebrated, an event directly linked to the centre of the colonial Empire: the coronation of George VI and his wife Elizabeth as 'King and Queen of Britain and its Dominions and Emperor and Empress of India', on 12 May 1937.[12]

For a mission-educated African, the burden of being a kind of composer laureate was normal. If this song was an anomaly in Mohapeloa's output so far, it was not so in the larger scheme of things. His school, Morija Training Institute, hosted choir competitions in which "'God Bless the Prince of Wales' was an obligatory competition number" (Wells 1994: 198). Zulu composer Reuben Caluza wrote 'Bayete Nkosi' in 1925 "in honor of the Prince of Wales's visit to South Africa, combin[ing] a triadic melodic structure with lyrics that a reviewer called "loyal to the core"' (Erlmann 1991: 121). AmaXhosa composer Benjamin Tyamzashe marked the silver Jubilee of George V (1935) in song, and later wrote '*Zweliyaduduma*' ('Thundering World') for the visit of George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1947 (Hansen 1968: 21).

Mohapeloa, like these composers, is placed in an ironic position, that of celebrating his subservience to a powerful political order. He responds to this by creating a disjuncture within the music between two frames, the one colonising and the other decolonising. The paratexts in the *Basutoland Teachers' Magazine* show how the song was ostensibly framed as a colonial response. The solfa score was preceded by two short introductory pieces written by Basutoland Director of Education, Mr O.B. Bull (who must have been related to the Miss Bull who wrote the words). In the first, Bull speaks about "the doors of advancement" as being "increasingly opened" for those who "show themselves fitted to profit by such education" (Bull 1937a: 2) and in the second, he exhorts people to "see their true place in the forward march of Basutoland" (Bull 1937b: 3). This rhetoric is perhaps expected. Rather more surprising are the "Greetings to the Children of Basutoland and Empire from the Children of the City of London" (*Basutoland Teachers Magazine* 1937: 9) that follows the score, which speak about a "great meeting of thousands of the scholars of the Elementary Schools of the City of London" on Empire Day (24 May), at which "a resolution was passed unanimously to send to the other children in all the other lands of the Empire of King George *a message of cordiality, love and goodwill*" (*ibid*.; emphasis in the original). Thousands of London children, naively unaware of the violence perpetrated on African children in the name of colonialism, wish them love and goodwill, and 'Coronation Song' is the polite reply from the children of Basutoland, voiced through Mohapeloa. He is living proof, even, of good work being done in "other lands of the Empire", clearly someone "fitted to profit" by the open "doors of advancement", or, seen from a contemporary perspective, by the

[12] The prominence given to a solfa song in an educational magazine was normal at that time. It could be read almost as easily as anything else in the magazine; song was an acknowledged medium of education in colonies such as Basutoland, solfa being established there since the late 19th century (*cf* Christol 1897: 174–5), and songs attracted public attention to events of local, national, or – as in this case – international significance. Solfa scores often appeared in London publications such as the *Musical Times* (*cf* Olwage, 2003).

straight-jacket of "arrested development" in music, as Grant Olwage puts it (Olwage 2003: 9, 15, 16; *cf* Olwage 2003: 69–79 for a detailed exposition of the "double binary" of race and class that kept this wheel of arrested development turning).

If the first 16 bars seem rooted in Empire, the next two sections, shown in Figures 4 and 5, begin to place it at some remove:

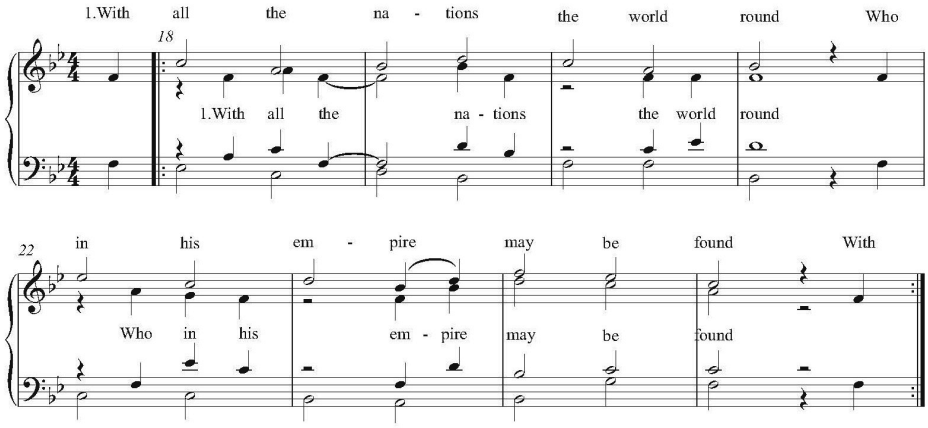


Figure 4. 'A Song for the Coronation of King George VI' bars 18–25 (Verse 1).

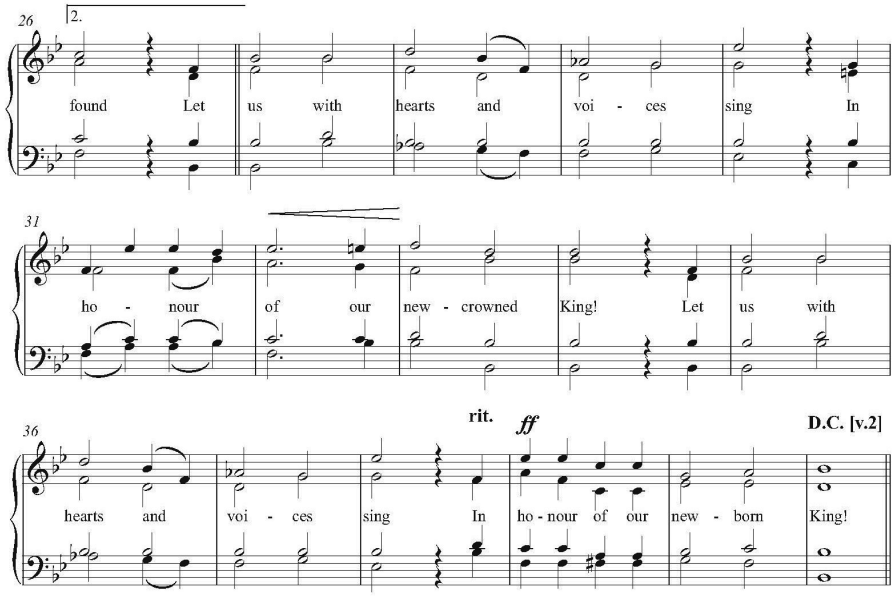


Figure 5. 'A Song for the Coronation of King George VI' bars 25–41 (Verse 1 contd.).

In Figure 4, the three lower voices gain more control of the texture, pointing to a traditional tendency in the music of Lesotho to drive song from the bass line. The tonality still revolves around I and V, but is not as cadence-driven as in Figure 3; and the repeat underscores the restless reiteration of the Altos' syncopated 'F' (the dominant), which undermines the predictable harmonic phraseology of Figure 3.

In Figure 5, the harmonies become more odd: Mohapeloa refutes some of the text-book rules he displayed in Figure 3 and introduces unprepared 7th chords (bars 28, 33) that do not resolve in expected ways. He jumps from IV to I in bar 38 where one might expect IV-V. He uses harmony decoratively rather than teleologically, and in ways that subtly differ from the way he uses them in Figure 3. In Figures 4 and 5 Mohapeloa unsettles the conventional Western harmonic expectation-fulfilment aesthetic of Figure 3 in order to prepare us for what comes next (see Figure 6).

**Decolonizing the song**

In Figure 6, the 'Coda', there are musical traces of a different kind, even though the "tonal freight" of I, IV, V (Agawu 2016a: 341) still predominates. Mohapeloa's listening ear is tuned into something other than madrigals. Bars 43–58 convey a hint of the first few bars of a 12-bar blues (taking two bars of the song as a single bar in blues), with a trace of Duke Ellington's "Mood Indigo" somewhere in the background. If Mohapeloa had enough grasp of harmony to parody an English style, he surely had enough to reference a popular music style, more especially the close harmony, vocal jazz that black South Africans of all classes were "infatuated" with in the 1930s, along with other American popular music (Ballantine 2012: 18). As if to underscore this, he expands the four voices to five in this section.

During the 1920s, 30s and 40s there was regular musical traffic between migrant workers in Gauteng and families and friends back home in Basutoland, which is partly how recordings of black American popular music circulated. Mohapeloa lived in Johannesburg from 1939 to 1942, when he was exposed for a while directly to the melee of urban music, dance, and entertainment that from the turn of the 20th century to the 1930s had arisen with the rapid development of mining, creating a number of new hybrid styles such as *isicathamiya*, *marabi*, and *sefela*, styles that did not have a clear "hermeneutic boundary" (Coplan 1994: 8) and so their musical, textual, choreographic and other elements were often interchangeable. The characteristic feature of this new South African black music of the late 1930s and early 1940s was a cyclic harmonic rhythm fuelled by the progression I-IV-V-I, but as bars 42 to 70 illustrate, and as Agawu showed in his analysis of Ladysmith Black Mambazo's *isicathamiya* style (2016a: 340–41), there is a tendency to prolong or repeat chords.

Bars 42-45 are mostly based on chord I, bars 47–48 on chord IV, bars 49–54 mostly on I, and then there is a decorated V-I cadence in bars 55–58. In bars 59–70 the progression IV, I, $V_7$, I, IV, I is represented through two bars devoted to each chord, and a slowing down of the harmonic rhythm that is followed by an extended cadence almost identical to the one in bars 38–41 (the end of the Verse). Even if Mohapeloa did

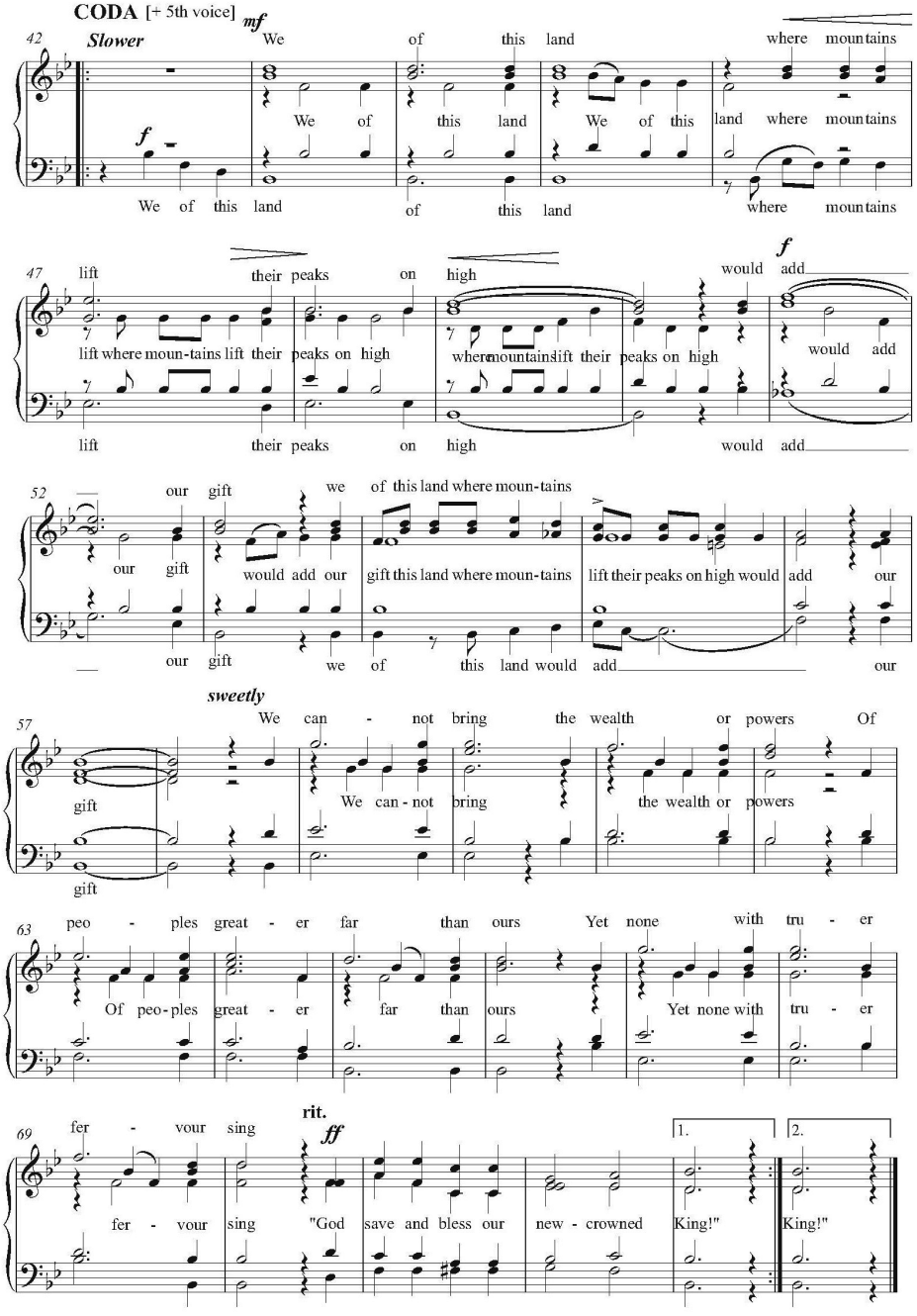


Figure 6. 'A Song for the Coronation of King George VI', bars 42–75. Transcription by author.

not follow the classic 12-bar blues use of I, IV and V, his harmonic prolongations in the 'Coda' seem to reflect that usage, rather than the faster harmonic rhythm and more cadence-driven phrasing of 16-bar closed tonal forms, as represented by bars 1–16.

There are two kinds of musical and political identification going on here: one (bars 1–16) with the musical and political conformity of the British Empire, as demanded of Mohapeloa by composing a song in honour of George VI, and the other (bars 42–70) with the less stable, culturally heterophonic township world of migrant labour, as represented by American blues or African marabi. The way Mohapeloa progresses from one approach to the other within one song, moving from a European tonal force-field to "an audible signature of America" (Frederick Schenker, in Radano and Olaniyan 2016: 6) via a harmonically destabilizing transition (17–41), can be seen, I suggest, as an instantiation of the "construction, negotiation, and transformation of [new] sociocultural identities" (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000: 31), not only allowing 'Coronation Song' to enunciate "underlying social relations and structures" - in both halves of the song - but also allowing "a play with, a performance of, and an imaginary exploration of [those two] identities" (*ibid.*). The tonal language represents colonial stability in the first part of the song and a decolonizing tendency in the second.

'Colonial Song' is, also *about* song. "We cannot see them but we sing" is the Verse's call and the Coda's response is, "Yet none with truer fervour sing". The idea of singing together is the binding factor. All 'we' have is song: poor in capital, which anyway belongs to others, we have song; we are not seen, but we see, and we can be heard; indeed, the one thing that nobody can stop us from doing, is singing! One-time migrant worker and trade union poet, Alf Qabula, has articulated this invisible yet audible political power of song with striking eloquence:

> What we have made moves forward
> When its wheels wear out, our unity jolts it forward
> When they block it on its way to Cape town
> it does not lose its power, it roars ahead.
> When they block it on the road to Johannesburg
> it does not lose its power, it roars ahead
> it grumbles on, with flames and fumes and anger
> But they gossip and plot out its undoing
> and they accuse its anger of a communist plot
> and its roar of subversion
> And we follow in its tracks, also singing
> The powerful ask:
> Who allowed these stalks of cane, these blades of grass
> to sing?
> Songs are the property of trees, you have to be tall
> you have to have stature, substance and trunk to sing
> But we sing
> Many with eyes get confused by the stature of trees
> But at least our song reaches the blind
> They listen to it closely
> and understand (Qabula 1989: 70–71).

Mohapeloa's diplomatic composition is hardly a "roar of subversion" but what he has made in song does "move forward", from one style to another. As such, it can be read as a play of racial hierarchy, represented by moving from circumscribed form to more repetitive, slowed-down harmonies that reach cadences in a leisurely way.

'Coronation Song' as a written text progressed from its genesis in 1937 through republication in 1939 and reprints of 1945, 55, 66, and 80, to a radical recycling in the 1970s – to which can be added its two new appearances as a text in 2015, in Volumes II and VI of the *Joshua Pulumo Mohapeloa Critical Edition in Six Volumes* (African Composers Edition 2015).[13] But as much as I engage with the work as an autonomous text, I also look "outside the library window", as Roger Parker puts it, at the political crucible in which its harmonies were mixed, and at the "route the music traveled" (Parker 2006: 139).

After 1937, the song follows two routes, as score and performance. When the score first appeared and was sung in Basutoland's schools, it must have seemed at odds with some of the country's political problems, which included an ongoing legal-administrative wrangle around the question of Basutoland's administration by Britain, following on from decades of reform aimed at "reducing the power of traditional authorities [to] make the Basotho more compliant to foreign rule" (Rosenberg and Weisfelder 2013: 97). A National Council had been set up in the early 20th century to improve the legal and administrative running of Basutoland, without, however, investing in its economic or political development, since the British "primarily viewed it as a source of migrant labor for the South African mines" (*ibid.*). By the 1920s, (se)Sotho-speaking people had begun to migrate *en masse* to work on the mines of 'Gaudeng' as it is called in (se)Sotho (now Gauteng Province). People in Basutoland saw the 1930s open with an extensive drought and close not only with the outbreak of a distant colonial war (World War II) but also, closer to home, with the Proclamations on Native and Administrative Courts (1938). These finally "integrated the colonial administration and the chieftainship, ending the system of parallel rule in Basutoland and replacing it with the system of indirect rule [from London]" (Rosenberg and Weisfelder 2013: 98–99).

Lesotho had its own monarch, Paramount Chief Griffith Lerotholi, whom some may have thought had equal claim to being hailed in song as 'our King' although Mohapeloa did not celebrate him in song. Lerotholi was the great-grandson of Moshoeshoe (to whom Mohapeloa paid tribute in many songs), but since he had not been first in line for the paramountcy on the death of his father, his succession in 1913 was "a controversial decision" (Gill 1993: 162). His reign was even more controversial, because of the power that chiefs acquired under him, while commoners and agricultural land suffered neglect (*ibid.*: 178-84). Lerotholi died in 1939, just as many of his compatriots were sent to fight in the war, as British colonial subjects. After the war

> many soldiers became strong advocates for reform and greater popular participation […] aware of the huge economic differentials between Basutoland and Europe and more sensitized to racial discrimination [… ] [T]hey joined the Basutoland African

[13] And also online, *cf* www.african-composers-edition.co.za/mohapeloa.

> Congress and its successor, the Basutoland Congress Party, in demanding constitutional evolution toward self-government and independence, and an end to racial discrimination (Rosenberg and Weisfelder 2013: 541–42).

This rather rapid overview of Basutoland in the 1930s is the backdrop to the republication of 'Coronation Song' in 1939 at the end of Mohapeloa's second songbook, as 'Coronation March' (Mohapeloa 1939: 81–84). Not only does 'song' become 'march' with no visible difference other than the title, but the song itself becomes anomalous in a book where it is preceded by many songs whose texts deal with African resistance struggles and hoped-for independence. '*Thoko ea Maafrika*' ('Praise Song for Africans'; *ibid*.: 40–41) for example, or '*Mo-Afrika, Tsoha*' ('African, Arise!'; *ibid*.: 42–43) also draw on the extreme vocal ranges and heptatonic modality associated with traditional music, even if the overriding style is still tonal.

Did Mohapeloa wish to distance himself from the colonial origins of 'Coronation Song'? Did he want to associate 'Coronation March', rather, with (se)Sotho-speaking troops marching off to war? Or was the new title an unconscious response, as World War II began, to what Radano and Olaniyan have called "the march-based instrumental conventions [that] defined the international sound of the West" for musicians in the colonies? (Radano and Olaniyan 2016: 6).

In the new context of the 1939 edition, the song went through a second edition in 1945 where everything in it was replicated, with even the odd discrepancy (both 'empire' and 'Empire' in the text), and a lack of clarity about the repeats. (One repeat is enfolded within another and it is unclear how the overall structure works.) But when the first reprint of the second edition appeared in 1955, not only were these discrepancies corrected and the page layout made more spacious, but several notes in the lower voices acquired a new chromatic inflection (bars 21, 24, 29, 54) or a different duration (bars 8, 16–17 – a rest is inserted in bar 17 before the next entries, 21, 56, 60, 62).[14] More obvious was the adjustment of the lyrics in honour of Queen Elizabeth II. "The gracious Queen and her consort", whose tour of southern Africa in 1947 when they were Princess Elizabeth and consort had so inspired Tyamzashe, were now the couple whom the 'eager thousands' thronged to see (at a coronation that had occurred in 1953). Mohapeloa was prepared to modernize, but not yet eschew, the colonializing tendency of the song.

Book II went through two further reprints in 1966 and 1980 with no change, although Mohapeloa continued to develop his style and approach in newer work throughout the 1960s and 70s. The parallel reprinting of old songbooks with newer ones showed a continuing need for them in schools, at least until the 1980s, but for evidence of which choirs sung them or how often, the only comprehensive source is the archive of competition recordings held in the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) Radio Sound Archive in Johannesburg. There is only one recording in this

[14] The only typo is in bar 57, where the Soprano has doh' (high Bb, above the staff) which doesn't match the surrounding at all, and must be Bb on the middle line. Mohapeloa worked as a proof-reader at Morija Printing Works, where his books were printed, and there are otherwise very few typos.

archive of 'Coronation March', between 1962 when these SABC recordings were first made (for Radio Bantu), and the early 2000s, and it is made by the (Lesotho) Quthing Evangelical Musical Society. Digitised onto CD in 2001 from an undated LP (LT3947) originally issued in the *SABC Media Libraries Transcriptions* series, it is archived as Track 9 of CDT1949, and can be listened to on www.african-composers-edition.co.za/sales/audio/cd-ace-001/20.[15]

The conductor's name is not recorded on the metadata provided by the SABC, nor the recording date. Judging from the recording quality and the vocal style – small choir, no vibrato, and a just intonation which comes from reliance on solfa (with its relational notion of pitch – *cf* Olwage 2002, and 2003: 25–32) without the keyboard's equal temperament, perhaps, as a nearby practice tool, I hazard a guess that the recording was made in the early 1980s, perhaps during a year when it was prescribed for school competitions in Lesotho. It is the only 'living text' of this song, revealing much about how the piece sounded to the practitioners of African choralism. A truly 'historic' recording by what sounds like a school choir, that sings it with restraint and great attention to detail. Their performance encapsulates the gap between colony and metropole to which the song speaks: the children in London sending their 'Greetings' would have sung it very differently. The Quthing choir's performance is the only recording of this song that I have encountered, however, and I have not come across a competition programme or any other document that suggests that the song enjoyed any popularity. Does this point to a later distaste by choirs at its colonial message? Was the text too British, the topic no longer topical in a Lesotho that had gained independence in 1966?

**Singing with truer fervour**

As Basutoland headed towards that independence, Mohapeloa composed two patriotic songs in praise of its new king, Constantinus Bereng Seeiso as King Moshoeshoe II, who returned from exile in 1960: *Leheshe-heshe* (Helter-skelter; Mohapeloa 1963) for his installation (Mohapeloa 1960, *cf* Gill 1993: 212) and a week later, *Likhomo Mokoena* (Greetings Mokoena! Mohapeloa 1960), which was published in the newspaper, *Leselinyana le Lesotho*. He also wrote two songs for the Independence Day celebrations on 4 October 1966, and "a very paradoxical song [called] 'Tona-Kholo oa busa, Motlotlehi oa rena' (The Prime Minister rules and the King reigns)" for the 1st anniversary of independence (*The Echo* 1973: 3). In this song, explained *The Echo* reporter, Prime Minister Jonathan was "scornfully nicknamed 'Popompo', suggesting a grotesquely big but useless thing; but Mr. Mohapeloa playfully turned the tables over by turning that same nickname into a symbolically Atlantic figure [the King] who is gallantly carrying the whole Basotho Nation on his shoulders, in a pillar fashion, 'Ke Popompo tsiea ea Sechaba'". The score and text of this particular song have not survived, at least under that title (was it censored?), but it seems to have morphed into a later song in praise of the King, '*E, Molimo o'k'o boloke Motlotlehi le Sechaba*' ('God Save His Royal

[15] The track appears on the CD *African Choral Heritage: Historical Recordings of Joshua Pulumo Mohapeloa* (Mohapeloa 2013) as track 20.

Highness'; Mohapeloa 1976: 49–52). After 1967, Mohapeloa wrote "at least one song for each [subsequent] independence celebration, excluding the 1970 one "because of that Qomatsi thing" (*The Echo* 1973: 3).[16] Mohapeloa praised the new nation and its social institutions in many other subsequent songs, and it is clear that he had a strong sense of his new role as the sonic conscience of a new nation.

Towards the end of his life, Mohapeloa revived 'Coronation March'. The landscape outside the window in the 1970s was as damaged as it was in the 1930s by drought, over-grazing and bitter internal conflict, but Mohapeloa chose to tune into the renewed pride and self-respect that came with self-government, and proved this by, among other things, an extraordinary reworking of 'Coronation March' into a new song called '*Lesotho Lefa la R*ōna' ('Lesotho Our Heritage'). Mohapeloa began working on this new version in 1973, according to *The Echo*: "this year on October 4 [the sixth anniversary of Lesotho's independence] the choir will sing 'Thothokiso ea Lesotho' Adapted from 'Coronation March'" (*The Echo* 1973: 3). '*Lesotho Lefa la R*ōna' was the title Mohapeloa eventually gave this song, which he must have continued working on, for it does not appear in his last songbook, *Meluluetsa ea Ntšetso-pele le Bosechaba Lesotho* (Anthems for the Development of the Lesotho Nation) (1976). As with a handful of other late songs, it remained unpublished during his lifetime. These must have been written for the National (now Lesotho) Teachers Training College choir and were intended for publication, since an Obituary written shortly after Mohapeloa's death mentions that he "died while he was a music teacher at Lesotho teachers' college (NTTC)" and "was busy preparing the fourth Lithallere book" (*Leselinyana la Lesotho* 1982; translation by Mantoa Motinyane-Smouse).

'*Lesotho Lefa la Rōna*' transforms 'Coronation March' into a praise song for Lesotho, through both textual and musical changes. The handwritten manuscript, with new (se)Sotho lyrics and many minor changes to the harmony (and a few to the melody) was at the home of Mohapeloa's daughter-in-law Ntsiuoa Joyce Mohapeloa when I visited her in 2006. The first few bars are shown in Figure 7, with circles indicating changes to pitch or duration.

Here it is Lesotho's cultural heritage rather than Britain's that is celebrated, as the new song text shows, in Figure 8. In the left column, one can see how the (se)Sotho words and syllables fitted the original rhythms: 'Come-and-with-music-sweet-and-strong' becomes 'He-lang Ba-so-tho tu-mi-sang'; 'Make-this-a-day-of-joy-and-song' evolves into 'Fa-phang le-fa-tše le ra-toang' [pronounced 'Fapang lefatshe le ratwang'].

[16] In 1970 the opposition Basutoland Congress Party won the general election but sitting Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan refused to cede power, suspended the constitution, and declared a state of emergency. His Police Mobile Unit suppressed resistance "forcibly with considerable loss of life"; most opposition leaders were jailed and Moshoeshoe II was forced back into exile (Rosenberg and Weisfelder 2013: xxix–xxx). The (se)Sotho name for such a turbulent upheaval is 'qomatsi' and 'that Qomatsi thing' was the phrase Mohapeloa used, according to the journalist in *The Echo*.

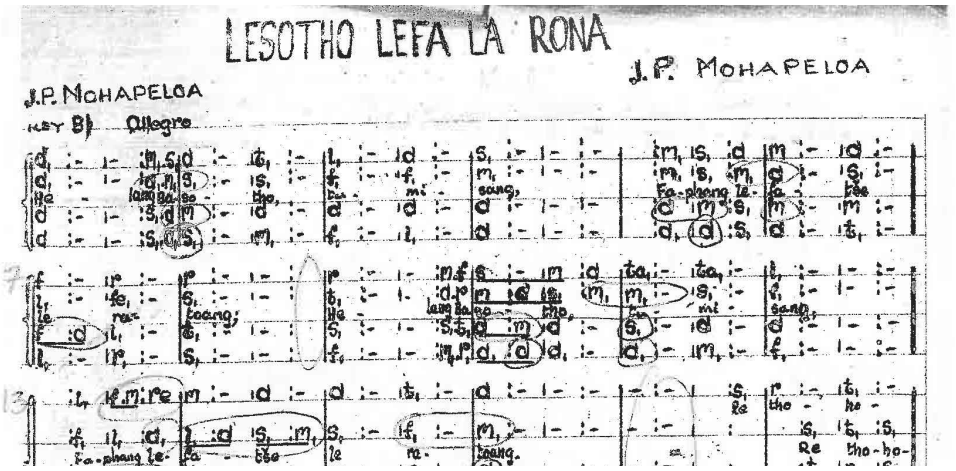


Figure 7. Page 1 of the handwritten manuscript '*Lesotho Lefa la Rōna*' (Lesotho Our Heritage) by J.P. Mohapeloa. (Joyce Mohapeloa Private Collection).

| | |
|---|---|
| **Verse:** | |
| *Helang Basotho, tumisang,* | Hey, Basotho, worship! |
| *Faphang lefatše le ratoang.* | Praise! our beloved country. |
| *Re thoholetseng linatla,* | Let's applaud the strong people, |
| *Bahale ba ileng le ba teng:* | The past and present warriors: |
| *Re thoholetseng linatla,* | Let's applaud the brave warriors, |
| *Bahale bao ba ileng le bona ba leng teng.* | The past and present warriors. |
| *Ba hahileng,* | Those who built, |
| *ba ntseng ba haha,* | and those who continue to build, |
| *baha naha e hlahise nala, khotso;* | building the county to give abundance of food, peace; |
| *Ba hahileng,* | Those who built |
| *ba ntseng ba haha,* | and those who continue to build, |
| *Lesotho, fa la rōna.* | Lesotho, our heritage. |
| *Helang, hle utloang, ke sena sehou* | Hey, please listen to our singing, |
| *Re hoa, re roka* | We shout, we praise, |
| *Re bina fatše la lithaba tse phahameng.* | We sing of the country with high mountains. |
| *Mali a borremoholo* | The blood of our forefathers |
| *A nontšitse mobu'a lona* | Has nourished its soil, |
| *Re le roka ka meokho* | We praise it with tears |
| *Lesotho, fa la rōna.* | Lesotho, our heritage. |
| **Coda:** | |
| *Helang, hle utloang, ke sena sehou* | Hey, please listen to our singing, |
| *Re hoa, re roka* | We shout, we praise, |
| *Re bina fatše la lithaba tse phahameng.* | We sing of the country with high mountains. |
| *Mali a borremoholo* | The blood of our forefathers |
| *A nontšitse mobu'a lona* | Has nourished its soil, |
| *Re le roka ka meokho* | We praise it with tears |
| *Lesotho, fa la rōna.* | Lesotho, our heritage. |

Figure 8. Text of '*Lesotho Lefa la Rōna*'. Translated by Mantoa Motinyane- Smouse.

The music is the same in outline: a madrigalian Verse followed by a blues-inflected Coda. But the new words and the crowd of new harmonic detail and some shorter note values, lend more energy to the music, without, however, drawing on African aesthetics. He does not, for example, make the song's melody any more pentatonic, or the harmonies more modal. Nor does the slightly increased energy of the song come from any use of traditional rhythmic figuration, but, on the contrary, it comes from a chromaticism that is inherently Western. Although the Soprano melody is more or less the same there are many pitch differences in the lower voices: they occur in almost every bar. It is the text that changes the work most radically, from patriotic English song honouring the British monarch to a nationalistic, post-independence Sotho song praising 'the motherland' as Mohapeloa calls it (not fatherland).[17]

Another difference is that there is only one verse in '*Lesotho Lefa la Rōna*' rather than the two in 'Coronation March', and instead of the repeat sign in bars 17–25 the same text is repeated but the musical repeat is fully written out. Thus, the score of '*Lesotho Lefa la Rōna*' has more bars than 'Coronation March'. The pitch changes in '*Lesotho Lefa la Rōna*' seem to bear no relationship to the textual changes. They are there, perhaps, to distance the relationship to the old song. Figure 9, showing the end of section B going into section C in both versions, illustrates the nature of the changes.

**Coda**

Although '*Lesotho Lefa la Rōna*' still sings of Lesotho's high mountains they are our mountains, washed in the blood of our forefathers and our tears: words written in full knowledge of Lesotho's past and ongoing struggles and with pride in its post-colonial status. In recycling this material, perhaps Mohapeloa was simply doing what many composers do, re-using material, either under pressure to produce a new song, or because he felt the material – more than 70 bars of it – had not been exploited enough. Mohapeloa's recycling makes a political statement, however. He writes two rather different songs, born out of different demands and circumstances.

Music was, and remains, intimately linked in Lesotho to notions of emotional agency and cultural authority. Each of the minor changes shown in Figure 9 - rhythmic and chromatic inflections and new voicings - is not in itself radical, but they amount, collectively, to a fairly radical rethink, taken together with the textual change. In this changing "politics of close harmony" (Ballantine 1999), it is music's own internal tracings that are transformed, but the motivating factor, I have argued here, is the changing political landscape. Both 'Coronation March' and '*Lesotho Lefa la Rōna*' are stages on the journey of a song that travels a road from imperialist greeting to nationalist declaration. Although these songs as 'works' have a historical life that is not reflected in the current lives of choirs, they reflect two very different nodes of history in the complex network of Lesotho's past.

It is through this song, in all its incarnations, that this past can be read, because it is

[17] For this reason, '*Lesotho Lefa la Rōna*' is treated in the complete edition as a different work from 'Coronation March', despite their obvious affinities.

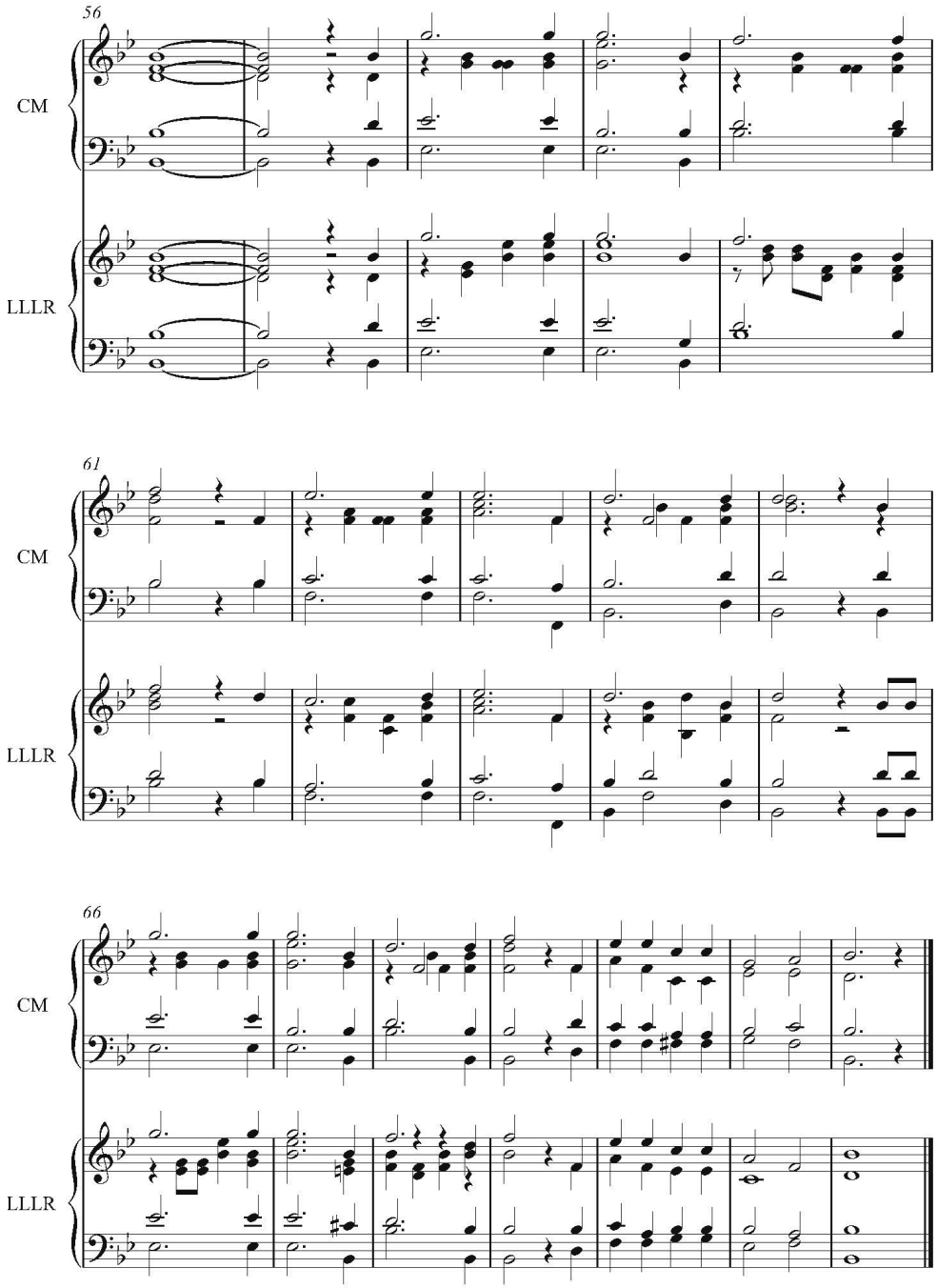


Figure 9. 'Coronation March' and '*Lesotho Lefa la Rōna*', bars 21–40 compared (Sop and Altos 1–2 on the upper stave, Ten and Bass on the lower).

through this song that Mohapeloa himself read the changes that were immanent in his day. It gently and discreetly - too subtly, perhaps - reflects both the colonizing tendencies of the British nation and the decolonizing aspirations of a future Lesotho nation. The shift in the second half of the song almost foreshadows its later conversion to a fully decolonial song. As colonial tribute became nationalist song, no fervour was, I am sure, lost in the singing of it, but the song itself remains testimony to the musical losses and gains that attended colonialism, and to a composer trapped on the cusp of time.

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