

AN INVESTIGATION INTO SOME TRADITIONAL RITES

AMONG THE LETSOALO CLAN

by

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DECLARATION

Languages

I, **Ngoanamogale Maggie Letsoalo** declare that the mini-dissertation submitted for the University of Limpopo for the degree of **MA in African Languages** is my work and has not been previously been submitted to any university for a degree.

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SIGNATURE

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DATE

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband ISHMAEL SEJE LETSOALO who encouraged me to write on the Letsoalo clan and to my mother LILLIAN CAROLINE LETSOALO who instilled the love of studying and writing.

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SUMMARY

Chapter one deals with the background of the problem; aim of the study; significance of the study; methodology and literature review.

Chapter two deals with chieftainship in the Letsoalo clan.

Chapter three deals with marriage in the Letsoalo clan.

Chapter four deals with rain making powers.

Chapter five deals with death and burial rite.

Chapter six deals with conclusion, findings and recommendations.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

The envisaged research study intends to concentrate on the traditional rites of the Letsoalo people prior to the arrival of the Whites, the destruction of the *Mosate*'s way of life by Western way of life and how the Letsoalo sustained their tradition despite the encroachment.

The Letsoalo people, according to their historical totem, are the Northern Sotho speaking people who originated from their *Kgosi kgolo* Tshwane in Tshwane, around the present town of Pretoria.

According to Warmelon (1944:1), Letsoalo is the seventh and last born son of *Kgosi* Tshwane, who migrated eastwards of the then Transvaal, with his clan and established his kingdom in Bolaodi, around the present town of Sabie and Graskop, around the 15th century. At a later stage, a fight ensued against the Swazi speaking people and *Makgema* (Cannibals), were forced to migrate in the westward direction, along the eastern part of the Drakensberg Mountain/*Leolo* Mountain. They ended up reaching the Olifants river and they left behind their brother, *Timamogolo*, because of his eye problem and his clan was then named *BaMahlo*. Now, the *Banareng ba Mahlo* are referred to as *Banareng ba Sekororo*. At this stage, *Kgosi* Letsoalo Serurubele migrated Westerly along the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountain and crossed over Letsitele River and settled up at Wolkberg, above the new Agatha, where he re-established his Kingdom between the Letsitele River and the Letaba River. Due to his rainmaking powers, he overpowered all the smaller clans that he found around that area and, as such, all the clans were then subjugated under his Kingship, i.e., that of Serurubele Letsoalo.

According to Warmelon, in *Ethnological Publications No.10* (1944:4) in: 'The Ba Letswalo or Banarene,' writing about the Letsoalo clan, he says "Tradition has it that originally the Letsoalo clan lived in a country called Bolaodi, that is the country of the Balaodi which is supposed by then to have been the present town of Sabie".

The Letsoalo clan is of royal blood as they have their own history and genealogy of royal family. This clan believed in itself and did not want

other people to undermine it; thus it practised its own rites and had its distinctive totem, both of which were traditional in the sense that they were passed from one generation to another.

Monnig (1983:234) says that, “totemism is an extension of kingship and it is apart from the family and lineage groups; the only other social grouping based on kinship. The word totem is *moano/seano*, derived from the verb *go ana*, to honour, venerate or respect, also to swear an oath. The totem of the Pedi proper is *noko* (porcupine)”.

The Letsoalo clan also has its own totem, namely, *Nare* (buffalo) being *kgomo ya naga*. As a clan, the members also have the following as their own praise of the royal family:

*Mafefera a Letsoalo, fefera o mphe leselo bana
ba letse le tlaala maleng.*

This simply means “the winnower of Letsoalo, winnow and give me the basket, the children have gone to bed hungry”. The foregoing totem confirms that the Letsoalo people have their own tradition preserved by them only as part of sacred rituals and practices.

In addition, the Letsoalos believed in the power of snakes/*Mmadinoga*, as their sacred weapon during the battles with other tribes and even during the invasion/attack by the Boers. The present researcher’s elderly source told her about a snake that they believed in its power and could change any situation they find themselves in during their times. She also confirmed that *Mmadinoga* helped the Letsoalo males in battles. They would take along the clay pots containing the snake/*Mmadinoga* so that they should consult her for assistance when the battle becomes tough. *Mmadinoga* would help them win the battle.

The following traditional rites are some of the most significant rites among the Letsoalo people.

1.1.1. Chieftainship

Traditionally, only male offsprings could ascend to chieftainship and kingship in the Letsoalo clan. The traditional ruler had to be the first son of the deceased chief and the first wife married as *Mmasetshaba*/the candle/seed raiser. Female rulers were unheard of up until 1880.

According to present researcher's informants, the chief/king, on his dead bed, would hand over the sacred rainmaking power and other *ditaola/dipheko* to the rightful heir, with the assistance of the elderly *rakgadi*, who is the sister of the chief. These sacred charms would be handed to the son but kept by *rakgadi*. Immediately after the death of the *Kgosi*, they would be a contestation of leadership. All the sons of the chief who believe that they have the power to rule would be given a chance to open the door where the chief's body is put, the one who opens the door without any difficulty would be the one who would take over his father's throne. This rite is the main cause of discord, conflict, infighting, killings and murders in our tribe.

1.1.2. Marriage

The Letsoalos marry within their tribe. The royal family marries their cousins from Modiba, Bopape, Mokgoloboto, Molepo and Mamabolo. The most challenging and intriguing thing is the marriage within the family circle, wherein a Letsoalo marries a Letsoalo (as such, the question of incest is not an issue within this tribe). This type of marriage within their royal family circle is said to be practised in order to protect their sacred chieftainship and kingship.

According to Dos Santos (1601), as quoted by Krige (1980:307), it was formerly the custom of the kings of Sofala to commit suicide by poisoning when any disaster fell upon them or and further, though it was incest outside the royal cycle, kings marry their own sisters/daughters.

Even today there is evidence among some Shona of the right of the door, of women rulers, and of celibate female rain makers. Certain people, like the Sofala group and even the people of Israel in the Bible, were told not to marry their sister or brothers. In Leviticus, the Bible (2000:123)

records that, the Lord told Moses to tell the people of Israel the following:

Do not have sexual intercourse with any of your relatives. Do not disgrace your father by having intercourse with your mother, Do not have intercourse with your sister or stepsister whether or not she was brought up in the same house with you.

But to the Letsoalo clan, such practices are not taboo. In fact, they perform rituals on the basis of which such abhor deeds are justified as conforming to the norms and standard of society.

The present researcher's aunt said that the rightful heir of Letsoalo must marry a daughter of *Kgosi* Molepo- Royal Kraal at Ga-Molepo, as this will bring back the rightful heir in chieftainship lineage of Letsoalo. The above-mentioned shows that betrothal is practised among the Letsoalo clan. Monnig (1983:130) said infant betrothal, although possible and viewed with favour, does not occur very frequently. It occurs mostly in families of high political status, where it is important that an heir should be born of a properly designated mother. In such cases, the preferred partner is usually engaged shortly after birth or even before birth.

1.1.3. Rainmaking power

The rainmaking powers of the Letsoalos date back to many years, even before they left Bolaodi. Their rainmaking power is very sacred for only a limited few trusted individuals within the royal family know-how to perform this ritual of rainmaking. In their area of settlement, the kingdom is subdivided into sub-kraals (*Meboto/mebotwana*)- *Meboto* under chiefs and *mebotwana* under *mantona* (headman), each kraal has sacred charms that are carried out by a trusted *ngaka* (*traditional doctor*) who has the know how of the rainmaking.

But all these kraals possess the power to bring down rain that comes from the king's kraal. The permission to carry out such a rite is only granted from the royal family. The present researcher's informants mentioned that the neighbouring tribes such as that of Modjadji, relied on the Letsoalo people to give them rainmaking charms, which they used in conjunction with theirs.

According to Krige (1980:306) at one time when Podile ruled (1825:50), there was close contact between the Letswalo and the Lovedu, whereby the chiefs of the two tribes were exchanging rain medicines. The present researcher's informant also mentioned that there is a snake/*sekgopyane* used in the rainmaking ritual. During battles, this snake is kept in a very big, tall clay pot. For this snake to survive, it should suck the breast of a woman who is breastfeeding and the woman must be only married in the clan for such purpose. This means that the child and the snake/*sekgopyane* would be sharing the breast of a woman, meaning that when the child grows up and there is a need to appease the gods or for performing the rain rituals she/he is the only one that is going to be brought back for the ritual.

The source went further to reveal another issue of a woman who is married in the royal kraal by the chief for the purpose of feeding the snake/*sekgopyane* with stillborns. The stillborns that were put into the clay pots were taken by the Whites. According to the Pretoria National Cultural Museum, in their records of remains collected in the Letaba area around 1823, an archeologist collected three similar clay pots with the remains of stillborns.

1.1.4. Death and burial rite

The royal family of the Letsoalo people are buried in a secret graveside and their kings/chiefs are not buried the same way as any commoner. Most of the time, the burial of a chief will not be known to any commoner as to where and how he should be buried. Such information will not be known to an outsider but the royal family members will know. Traditionally, the chiefs are buried during the night without the presence of women and children.

Chiefs are buried in a scary cave-like place that is not easily accessible, because of the intertwined *lenetlwa* surrounding this place, it becomes even more difficult to access. This *lenetlwa* is a coiled sharp-thorn tree to trap lions. This shows how secretive their burial place is.

A dead chief's remains and fats are said to be used to strengthen the

clan's rainmaking charms, hence the burial of a chief remains a necessary rite among the Letsoalo clan. The present researcher's source says that the right to enter the royal(*mosate*) graveyard for ritual purposes is reserved only for the Letsoalo elderly *rakgadi*, as the place is considered sacred. When the rituals, which include slaughtering a "black sheep" (*nku entsho*) that is a human being to appease the gods, have been performed, the burial is then conducted. This mostly happens when a member from the royal family is to be buried or if the clan has offended the gods. The rituals are fading and this research intends to look into the factors that are contributing towards their demise.

2. AIM

The aim of this study is to investigate the role that traditional rites play among the Letsoalo clan.

1.2.1. OBJECTIVES

- To identify the traditional rites that create a sense of meaning among the Letsoalo clan.
- To identify individuals who play an important role in the practice and preservation of the Letsoalo rites.
- To determine the impact of Westernisation on the practice and the preservation of the rites.
- To evoke a sense of awareness in the youth about the values of their traditional rites.

1.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this envisaged study is in making the young people who are becoming too Westernised to develop a sense of self-identity with their roots. The study will encourage the clan members themselves to love, respect and understand their rites as some of the beliefs that will make them who they are supposed to be, and also to be proud to be part and parcel of this clan. The envisaged study will also help those who did

not know both their original heritage and their great grand parents' beliefs that guided their behaviour, and also to show that certain rites are only applicable to the Letsoalo clan and they are proud to expose such. It will give a good illustration of how people living together practice and treasure their beliefs and how they live according to these traditional rites, no matter where they are.

The envisaged study also intends to benefit the fellow Letsoalo people, who are far from their head kraal, as their rites will be well preserved in writing. In this regard, the Sepedi proverb says: "*Le se tlogele bagolo ba tsamaya le ditaola go ya badimong*". This simply means that do not let the elders die with the important information as one day you will need it and they will not be there to tell you about.

1.4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

1.4.1. Qualitative research

This is the research method that will be used as it will give a good explanation and description of what people know. Oral evidence will be used. Leddy and Ormrod (2005:95) define qualitative research process as being more holistic and emergent with the specific focus, design, measurement instruments (e.g. interviews) and interpretations developing and possibly changing along the way. Oral evidence is going to be used for sure as this method, according to Leddy and Ormrod, allows researchers to enter the setting with open minds, prepared to immerse themselves in complexity of the situation and interact with participants.

Creswell (1994:2) also defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding a social human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in natural setting.

This method is used mostly by the research who is aiming at understanding in totality the human being's behaviour and reaction in the environment that he/she finds himself/herself in. It is also used when one wants to make the people to tell things that are personal or secret.

Another scholar in the field of research methodology, Van Maanen

(1979:520), says that, “qualitative research is an ‘umbrella’ phase covering an array of interpretive techniques that seek to describe, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning of naturally occurring phenomena in the social world”. Therefore, qualitative approach is also fundamentally a descriptive form of research. Van Maanen goes further to say that, “the research method can be used successfully in the description of groups (small) communities and organization”. In this envisaged research, I will use interviews in different areas wherever there is a Letsoalo *mosate*. This will be done in small groups of ten.

1.4.2. Data collection

In this envisaged research study, data will be collected from knowledgeable elders of the clan through oral evidence, library resources and from newspapers.

1.4.2.1 Primary sources

This method happens when firsthand information is obtained from the respondents. An interview is a tool used to collect information. Cohen and Manion (1989:307) define interview as a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation.

It is a method whereby one gathers information through direct verbal interaction between two people.

Unstructured interviews will be used whereby I will be able to do follow ups. I will also make appointments in advance, to avoid inconveniencing the people chosen, as royal kraals are always busy with handling the clans’ issues. This will help the elders to talk freely as the set up will be face to face and conducted at their royal kraals/families.

The interviews will consist of the following:

- 10- headman from the Letsoalo *mosate* (Metz area)
- 10- *indunas* from the *mosate* (Callis area)
- 10- elders from the *mosate* (Tickyline area)

- 10- *banna ba kgoro* (Vianan area)
- 10- *dikgadi* from *mosate* (elderly aunts)

1.4.2.2. **Secondary sources**

When using this method, one will be focusing on the information that is already in the libraries, i.e., both those that are published and unpublished and press cuttings that one found from newspaper articles, dissertations, books and other information from the internet.

1.5. **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Literature review will deal with the works of writers who have written about the traditional rites of the African people that include their tradition, custom and cultural behaviours.

In the thesis of Seema (2004), Brink (1996:76) is quoted as defining literature review as a process that includes findings, readings, understanding and forming conclusions about the published and theory on a particular topic. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:22) maintains that the process of reading whatever had been published that appears relevant to the research topic is called Literature review.

The above definitions shows that literature review is important in any research as it determine what is already known about the topic to be studied, so that a comprehensive knowledge on the topic can be obtained. It also helps in establishing a historical perspective on the intended research and provides a vision of the need for additional research.

According to Delius (1983:62), colonialism has eroded the dignity, tradition and culture of the African people, amongst them the Sekhukhuni people but never became a hindrance to practising their traditional rites. Rakoma (1944: 47) says: “*Setshaba sa kgobokana gwa tswelala bana bohle e lego ba ka mosate go tlo topa tsholo*”. This simple means that the children of the *mosate* will be called to conduct a ritual of opening the door wherein the chief’s/*kgosi* corpse is placed.

Krige’s (1980:1) work will serve as a good example as mentioning is made of the pageants of the past, Fame of Mujaji, transformer of clouds- the cycle of the kings- the cycle of the queens- from the pageants to the people.

Pepeneo (1980:405) talks about rituals as something that consists of certain precise patterns of behaviour in relation to the sacred. He goes further to say that rituals are performed either to revive the powerful past experience of the secret to ask the sacred power for some favour.

1.5.1. Chieftainship

Monnig (1983:250) says; “succession to all political office in the tribe, including that of the chief, is hereditary in the male line according to the normal practices of the kinship system”.

This simply means that for one to become a chief he should be the one from the blood line and he is not chosen but born to be a chief. In Sepedi *bare kgosi ya belegelwa*.

Chiefs are honoured by their clans as their leaders and praised for what they have done for the clan. Praise poems are composed in honour for their chiefs. Monnig (1983:253) states, “the praise-poem (*sereto*) composed for every chief reflects the history of the Pedi”. These praise-poems are recited at feasts when the chief makes his appearance.

Krige (1980: 171) says, “the opening of the door, as known among neighbouring tribes, serves chiefly to resolve conflicts between rivals to the throne”.

The succession of chieftainship has its own ritual whereby the sons of the chief will be asked to open the door whereby the one who opens the door easily will be the chief of the clan.

Krige (1980:310) went further to say, “the Pedi pattern of the ‘tribal candle, the chief wife whose first son succeeds and whose bride-price is contributed by the tribe”

According to the tradition of the Pedi the one who will succeed the chief is the son born of *Mmasetshaba*, a woman who has been married as a candle raiser, whose *lobola* has been contributed by the clan.

1.5.2. Marriage

Light and Keller (1976:393) states that, “every society in the world has established laws and customs to guide its members in the choice of a husband or wife”.

The society believes that when two people marry, their union will binds together many people and it is no more a private matter. This is where rites are to be practiced in order to protect and preserve their culture and tradition.

Popeneo (1980:355) explains how societies choose marriage partners. All societies place some restrictions on the choice of marriage partners. Incest taboos, which typically apply to the nuclear family but sometimes include other relatives, are universal. Some cultures have norms that prescribe endogamy, marriage within one's own group. In the American society, endogamy is still the norm among many religious groups. Other cultures prescribe exogamy, i.e., the obligation to marry outside one's own group.

1.5.3. Rain making powers

The rain making powers are not for every one in the clan. Krige (1980:271) says, "the chief actor in the rain cult is the queen".

It is believed that only the queen can perform the rituals of rainmaking and good rains will fall if the ancestors wants. Krige (1980:275) states, "the powers of the queen to make rain are not absolute. The queen can control rain only in agreement with her ancestors who are able, if they wish".

This simply means that the queen can make rain fall as long as her ancestors are happy with how she has performed the ritual.

Krige (1980: 274) also says that, "the Rain-pots are great secrets and only after years of friendship were we privileged to see one; it was well hidden in the cleft of a rock and partly buried at the foot of a tree on the upper slopes of a hill where the owner's father had dwelt"

The rain pots are not ordinary pots that anyone can just see it is a clan's secret whereby it is kept in a safe place.

1.5.4. Death

Richard Kalish (1976) has identified the following four views of the meaning of death: as an organiser of time, death as loss, death as punishment and death as transcendence. The concentration will be death as punishment in this research as far as the Letsoalo clan is concerned.

Popenoe (1980:208) explains the customary rituals of death that includes

funerals, wakes, viewing and burial.

Richardson(1979:446) says, “a ritual can recall an aspect of religious belief, honour the sacred or establish a relation between a believer and the sacred”. He goes further and say, “it is usually highly symbolic often condensing several elements of belief into a single activity and striking a responsive chord deep in participants” (1979:446)

The above simply means that a ritual is a belief that is practiced by the participants who regard it as their sacred. During death there are many rituals performed in the presence of the *rakgadi* as it marks the importance of death among the clan. Monnig (1983:238) views the role played by sisters during death ritual in the following manner. “She must always be present and consulted on any ritual or ceremonial occasions performed in or on behalf of his household”

Conclusion

Seema (2004), in his thesis, quoted Brink (1996:75) as giving the purpose of Literature review as something that will minimize the unintentional duplication and increase the probability that the new study may make a distinctive contribution. Literature review is very important in the research study of an appraisal of traditional rite among the Letsoalo clan. Scholars such as Monning and Krige acknowledge that traditional rites are practised by different people, but they never say much about the Letsoalo clan and their traditional rites that are still practised among themselves. According to the informants, the Letsoalo clan is still taking its traditional rites very seriously, thus are still preserved and practised, and passed from one generation to another.

Mapeke (2004) in her thesis, quoted Makgoba (1996:196) explaining the importance of education and culture that the organized education of the youth of a community is part and parcel of the culture of the community, without culture there is no education; and without education... no culture and no community.

The above view shows that for a clan to be educated about its culture and tradition it need to be practiced, shared and passed on from one generation to another so that it should not fade.

CHAPTER 2

CHIEFTAINSHIP AMONG THE LETSOALO CLAN

2.1. Introduction

The history of the Letsoalo clan chieftainship as referred to Banareng ba Letsoalo dates back to very many centuries. The knowledge of the clan's origin we are going to rely mostly on elderly *bakgoma*, *bakgomana* and *dikgadi* from *mosate*.

Tradition has it that only males can be chief/ *kgosi* of the clan. The four *mesate* has been visited to unpack their chieftainship. In all the *mesate* there is no female chief/*kgosikgadi*.

My source says that the 1st *kgosi* of the Letsoalo clan was Lenokhunokhu I who lived and died in Sabie. The 2nd *kgosi* was Lenokhunokhu II who led the clan up to Olifants River and he died there.

Serurubele took the reign and led the people up to Agatha in Tzaneen. Serurubele was murdered by his younger brother Molate. He had a son called Podile who later avenged the death of his father then fled to his uncles in Ga-Molepo. He later came back to fight Molate and he became chief of the Letsoalo clan for a long time. Then his older son Ramatau became impatient to succeed him and he later assassinates him.

Hence the name Podile is named in many Letsoalo clan, this shows that names are given to children by their *rakgadi* as an honour to their heroes. My informants from an area called Metz *mosate* showed me the acting chief's kraal. He is the descendant of Mamathloa that is why he is acting as a chief, he is the descendant of *rakgadi* in the Letsoalo clan.

The following were acting to date:

Mmakaipea
Mmamathloa
Molalatladi
Malesela
Mmampipe
Molobe
Phuhane William
Mashile Malesela

According to my informant the name Mmakaipea means I appointed myself. Warmelon (1944:8) 22 Mmakaipea, whose name also suggests

that it is a praise -name of later origin (as it means “Mrs-I-appointed-myself”) by now had acquired considerable standing. She builds her head kraal at Modikone, a hill north east of the location, having the corner beacon of Brook 343, Combebank 345 and Tubbs Hill 344.

My source also states that Mmakaiepa married other wives to strengthen her kraal. She is the one who taught Mapula Mmamathola the secret of rain pots and this also gave Mapula Mmamathola the power to challenge the chieftainship in the Letsoalo clan.

According to the informants, Makoma (Mmakaiepa) was married Ga-Mampa and divorced because her husband said *wa nkimela mosadi yo*, meaning that she was too heavy/strong for him thus she could not conceive and she was returned back home to the Letsoalo clan.

My informants went further to say, Makoma was later married Ga Sekokotla. While she visited home according to tradition *go tsholola bongwetsi*, the first visit by the newly wed bride after the wedding back at home) as a practice by the Letsoalo clan. By the time she was on the practice at the Letsoalo clan, the very night that she left, the Sekokotla clan were attacked by the Swazis, almost all the entire Sekokotla clan including her second husband were killed.

Kgosi Podile the father of Mapula when realizing that her daughter is experiencing misfortune he gave her a place to stay as her home called Modikone in the banks of Letsitele River now known as Combebank. Later on the old man realised that Makoma cannot stay alone without assistance he advised his first born Ramatau to release her daughter Mapula to go and look after her aunt.

My informants says that at a later stage *Kgosi* Podile the father of both Makoma and Ramatau became sick and he asked for her daughter Makoma to come look after him. Ramatau was unable to look after his father according to the source because he wished his father to die so that he should become *kgosi*. This led to Ramatau instruction his sister to stop feeding his father *Kgosi* Podile, but Makoma continue secretly to feed his father and in the process she won the favour and trust of her father. Then the father taught Makoma the rainmaking charms as a rainmaking ritual.

2.2. Rituals practiced in Chieftainship ascendance

In the Letsoalo clan it is believed that for one to take over the reigns of Chieftainship, one has to have the rainmaking charms as it is one of their rituals. After *Kgosi* Podile has passed away Makoma returned back to her place Modikone and took the rainmaking charms safe under her care and was not willing to give it to anyone. Makoma saw an opportunity to keep the sacred pot. All the *kgosi* of *Banareng Ba* Letsoalo namely *Kgosi* Ramatau, Kheapea, Lekgadima, Mosohli never received the rainpots from Makoma she was always applying the delaying tactics to hand over the rain charms.

Makoma was always having disputes with the chiefs who were suppose to take the reign of chieftainship because she could not hand over the rainpots to the relevant people. She was always influencing the Letsoalo sons to kill their fathers so that at the end she could take over the reign as they will be seen as murders and Makoma being the respected *rakgadi* to the clan, as the clan does not know that she is the one orchestrating the murders.

According to my informants, Makoma took over the reign because all senior people were dead, she appointed herself at the chieftainees/*kgosikgadi* hence the name Makaipea- ‘Mrs-I-appointed myself’. At that stage Mapula who was staying with her aunt Makoma was grown up and knows how to use the rain charms. After Makoma’s death, Mosohli went to Mapula to ask for the rainpots but Mapula refused to hand it over to him and ran away with the rainmaking pots because she did not want to give it to anyone as she knows how to use them.

Mosohli fought with Mapula then the elders decided to call their maternal uncle from *Kgosi* Molepo to come solve the matter. By doing so, they wanted to practiced the tradition ritual of *go bula ntlo eswerego dipheko tsa pula*.

Rakoma (1944:47), “*Ka fao e lego tshwanelo ya Sesotho, bakgomana ba kgobokana mosate go bogela ngwana yoo Badimo ba tlo go mo kgetha go ba moetapele le kgosi ya setshaba sa ga Letsoalo. Setsaba ge se kgobokane gwa tswelala bana bohle e lego ba mosate go tlo topa tsholo. Ka tsatsi leo le Masaba le Pompi, mogolo wa gagwe, ba*

ile ba ba gona fao mokatong wa go topa seredi seo sa bogosi ka go leka go bula lebati leo setopo sa kgosi Mmakaipea se bego se letse ka gona. Mosohli o be a na le tshepo gore bokgosi bo tlo tsewa ke yena, fela la mo

palela. Ge a bona a paletswe bjalo , a se ke a dumela gore le mo paletse, fela a rata gore a leke gape le gape. Masaba le Pompe le bona ba a leka fela le bona tsa ba swela gomme tsa ba tsa tima”.

According to Rakoma the Letsoalo clan is supposed to do the opening of the door while the corpse of the *kgosi* is still lying in the room. The *Bakgoma* called the first sons of the royal family to come and try their luck in opening the door. Mosohli is one of the sons who tried again and again but failed to open the door, Masaba and his elder brother also tried but failed to open like Mosohli.

Rakoma(1944:47) further says, “*Bakgomana ge ba bona gobane bagale ba paletswe, ba thoma gore lebati a le lekwe ke Mmamahlola gore le yena a leke ho lahla letsofalelo. Tonakgolo Mosohli ge a ekwa fao a gana a re ga go kgonege gore lebati le bulwe ke mosadi banna ba le gona, gobane e le bona ba swanetsego bogosi”.*

When *bakgoma* realised that the door has been opened by Mmamahlola a woman for that matter, Mosohli started to complain that the door is not supposed to be opened by a woman and in Letsoalo clan it is not suppose to be opened by a woman while the males are there and the chieftainship is not for women.

Bakgomana ba ga Letsoalo realised that even if Mmamahlola has opened the door she will not rule because according to the Letsoalo clan there is no woman chief, they decided to call their maternal uncles from Ga-Molepo to come solve this problem.

Rakoma (1944:47) says, “*Mafelolong ba gopola gore Mmakaipea o hwetswe ke mosadi yo mogolo, e lego Mmamolope, yoo ge nka be a ile a sea ngwana e bego e le yena yeo a tlo go tsea bogosi lehono. Ka fao ba romela ga- Molepo go bitsa malome a ngwana, Molope gore a tle a phase Badimo”.*

The *Bakgoma* thought since Mmakaipea had married women there was one who gave birth to a son and their uncles from Molepo should be called to come appease the gods so that the son would take over the reign after the door has been opened.

The old man came and performed the rite, by calling Vuma to come open the door as it has been difficult to be opened by the strong men of the clan.

Rakoma(1944:47) puts it like this, “*Mokgalabje yoo wa batho a fihla gomme a tse Vuma e lego ngwana yo mogolo wa Mmamahlola, gore e be yena a lekago go bula lebati leo le palelago le dinatla. Molope a reta Badimo ba ga Letswalo gomme a ema fao kgauswi le lebati. Ge a phasitse Badimo bjalo, Mosimane a fo re le kgoma la fo ipulegela ka nosi e kego matete.*”

Rakoma simply says that the old man from Ga- Molepo came to perform the ritual of opening the door to where the corpse is, a young boy called Vuma was called to come open the door. The old man had to praise the gods of Letsoalo then wait near the door. After praising the gods the boy just touched the door and it opened easily, every body then starts ululating praising the Letsoalo gods, “*Vuma ke kgosi ya rena*”.

Even after the boy had opened the door Mosohli never stopped complaining and he wanted to try again. The uncle of Vuma instructed the *Bakgomana* to close the door again so that Mosohli and the others could be given chance to try again and they failed. It was clear that the contestation of this chieftainship was won by Vuma.

Mosohli wanted “*dipheko*” badly he went on to ask from Mmamahlola to give him *dipheko tsa mosate tsa bokgosi*. Mosohli was very angry saying that “*Dithokgola tseso di ka tsewe ke wena ngwanenyana, gona nna mong wa tsona ke le gona.*”

Mmamahlola did not give him, she answered him saying *rakgadi* Mmakaipea has given *dithokgola* to Vuma and this makes me not to give them to you.

According to the Letsoalo clan a woman was not suppose to touch *dipheko tsa ka mosate* and not to rule the clan. It was an unusual thing that Mmamahlola did thus the name Mmamahlola stuck with her.

Makau (1993:3) states, Mmapula aquired the name Mmamahlola before she ruled the tribe. The name comes from the Northern Sotho verb *hlola*

which means casting bad luck/omen when something unusual happens.

The Northern sotho prefix *mma-* symbolises a woman or mother. Mmapula acquired the name Mmamatlhola for various reasons. Firstly, she agreed to be married to a woman, her aunt Mmakaipea, something strange to the tribe in those days. Mmamatlhola also possessed some magical powers and rainmaking powers.

This rite was practiced among the clan and it caused conflicts, Mosohli end up fighting Mmamahlola because according to him *ditaola le dipitsa tsa pula* was rightful his and he was deprived by Mmamahlola who has been taught by their aunt/*rakgadi* how to use this sacred charms.

The rite of opening the door caused many murderers among the clan because any one who was not given a chance to take over the reigns with the rainpots murdered their predecessors

My informants in an area called Callies showed me the *kgosi* in *mosate* together with his *indunas*. He is the descendant of *kgosi* Setsoadi.

Kgosi Setsoadi
Kgosi Mathetha
Kgosi Mochapi

At an area called Vianan *banna ba kgoro* showed me their *kgosi*, *kgosi* John Molepa Letsoalo he is still waiting for the elders to choose a wife for him. He is supposed to marry a wife from Ga-Molepo as the chosen wife for him and the community. The following were the chiefs of Banareng ba Letsoalo Mathunyeng up to the one who is now the *kgosi*:

Kgosi Lekgadima
Kgosi Mosohli
Kgosi Thathane I

Kgosi Thathane II (Serokolo)
Kgosi Thathane III (John Molepa)

In all these *mesate* the *rakgadi* and the *indunas* are playing an important role in advising the chief. When the time is right for the opening of the door to where the sacred rainmaking power and other *ditaola* the elderly

rakgadi of *mosate* are the one's together with the *mosate*'s council performing the rite.

The ceremony of opening the door to where the sacred rainmaking power and other *diataolo* means that the one who is successful in opening will be the *kgosi* of the clan, meaning that he is going to use the rainmaking charms when the time is right together with the *bakgoma*, *bakgomana* and the elderly *rakgadi* of the clan. As *kgosi* he will be having the right to perform all the clans rites.



2.3. Royal house of *Kgosi* Mochapi Letsoalo

This is where all traditional rainmaking charms and other important *dipheko/ditaola tsa ka mosate* are kept. They are supposed to be kept in a traditional hut.

2.4. Hierarchy of the Letsoalo clan's chieftainship.

My source from Letsoalo clan gave me this hierarchy of the Letsoalo clan's chieftainship

children

RraMatau

Makoma

Legadima

Mapula Kheapea Mashaba

no children

Mosohli

Thathane

Moshitadi

CHAPTER 3

3. MARRIAGE

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Hornby (1996:718) states that marriage is a formal, usually recognized, agreement between a man and a woman making them husband and wife.

Traditionally, marriage is not an individual issue but a group's issue whereby both the man's and woman's family are involved. It unites two or more families together as one big family. If one is from a royal family, when he marries a woman the woman is married for the family and the community as she will be the mother of the clan. The *lobola* comes from the people thus we say it is a group's issue not individuals.

Monnig (1983:129) says that, "marriage (*lenyalo*) among the Pedi is not an individual affair, legalizing the relationship between a man and a woman, but a group concern legalizing a relationship between two groups of relatives".

Bruce and Carol Britten (1995:65) quoted Matthew in the Bible (19:5-6) when God says, "A man shall leave his father and mother, and be united to his wife, and they shall become one". So they are no longer two separate people, but one, No man may divorce what God has joined together.

Light and Keller (1980:383) states that, "marriage marks the start of a nuclear family or the expansion and continuation of an extended family.

When two people are married, even their families are married because they will start to be related and both the families will be extended as it will grow”.

The Letsoalo clan marries within one’s group, a practice called endogamy marriage. This is one of the rite that is still practised among the clan.

3.2. MARRIAGE IN THE LETSOALO CLAN AMONG THE COMMONERS

The Letsoalo clan are still practicing the arranged marriages, whereby the elders will talk to the parents of the bride in her absence. This can happen even before the girl is born or even after.

Light and Keller (1980:383) states that, “although systems of arranged marriages seem unromantic and constraining to those of us rose with values of individualism and free choice”.

When a girl gets married into the Letsoalo clan she is supposed to be given a name within the family by which she is going to be called e.g. *MmaDitshego* meaning the mother of *Ditshego* is the name of the elder brother of the groom. It means that when the bride gives birth to a child if the child is a boy/girl he/she will be named *Ditshego*. In the case where the groom is the first born in the family his wife will be named after his father so that when she gives birth to a child, the child will be given his grandfather’s name and if she is a girl she will be named after her father’s aunt.

The process of naming *ngwetsi*, according to my informant, the *rakgadi* of the groom together with *borakgadi* of the family would come to the groom’s house ululating, accompanied by all the family members, dancing and singing. The bride and groom would be asked to sit down on the african mat (*legogo*) then the elder *rakgadi* will explain why they have called the bride and groom, by that time the bride would be covered with a blanket and she is not supposed to take it off until the groom’s *rakgadi* take it off, as to uncover her face through a goat/*nku* (*go mo alola ka pudi*). A goat/*pudi* will be presented so that the blanket can be taken away from her body/face.

Then she can start the process of *go fa ngwetsi leina*, two names would be

said, the second name when called from the father's side all the people together with the bride and groom will clap hands.

My informant also informed me about the *lesago la gae/sago la gae/sago la mmotse*. All my informants talked about this rite as something that helps in keeping the *ngwetsi* at home no matter what the husband would do to her, she would never leave him.

There is a type of grass called *letsikere*, it is found mostly in mountains. They weave it in a big circle that can be kept under the fire place where fire is made in the family. The bride would be asked to make fire while the *letsikere* is underneath. This simply means that the grass that would make her stay forever with the family.

The other source from an area called Tickyline, says the *letsikere* would be put in a hole digged under the fireplace and it will also do the same as the above information. At the end the bride would inhale the smoke of the burning grass.

The Letsoalo clan also believes that when they burn *letsikere* it would keep the bride home no matter what, she can go anywhere during the day but in the evening she would be back home to cook for the family, whether the family is unable to provide for her she would never leave her husband, nor the family.

Another rite that they mentioned which has to do with childbearing and the process of searching as to who has the "*phea*", meaning; who has the problems between the man and the woman of a child-bearing. The source states that they would ask both the man and the woman to urinate in separate african bowl then put some sacred seeds in each bowl, leaving the sacred seeds in those bowls for seven days. After that, if they check and see that in all the bowls the sacred seeds did not germinate it means that there is a problem in both the man and the woman, but if the seed has not germinated in the man's bowl, then the man has a problem in giving birth and vice versa.

The source says that if there is a problem like that, the man or the woman would be helped by traditional herbs or the woman would be told to sleep with the brother of the groom or the man will be advised to marry another wife.

The Letsoalos sometimes burn course salt as a way of reducing the smog (*musi*), meaning the troubles that the two might have and also to chase away any evil spirit that could be the cause of barrenness.

Another rite is *go mokhina* meaning that they make it difficult for one to get pregnant. The informant says that the woman will never have children if the parents/grandmother/aunts has decided to lock her and not tell her exactly what they did to her.

My source says that the locking of girls(*go mokhina*) is practised while the girl is still at her teenage stage. The old woman says that she would asks for the girl's underwear or first menstruation after having her periods for the first time and hide it into a safe place only known by the old woman. When the girl gets married she would be given that underwear to wash it and bath with some *muthi* then she can have children. If it happens that the old woman dies before the girl gets married or before informing one of the family members the girl might die without having any child. My source also says that even in the Letsoalo clan family planning was long practiced by this method (*wa go mokhina ngwanenyana*) locking the girl.

The aunts/*borakgadi* of the Letsoalo clan practised this rite amongst their brothers daughters because they wanted them to be married within the family circle and they don't want these girls to fall pregnant at an early age or to be impregnated by a commoner.

Mapeke (2004) in her thesis quoted Magubane (1998:86) urges that the girls were given extensive education on sex, sexual behaviour, betrothal and marriage, and avoiding pregnancy outside marriage.

Even in the Letsoalo clan the *rakgadi* of the family would educate the girls as a rite of preparing them for marriage.

My informant went further to disclose that when the aunts */borakgadi* of the Letsoalos wants to discipline their brothers they use this rite of locking their brothers daughters, making them not to have children that is *go mokhina*. The aunts */borakgadi* believe that if their brothers did not marry the women they wanted them to, is time for them to pay because their brother's daughters won't have children and their brothers won't

have grandchildren.

The Letsoalo women especially the aunts /*borakgadi* are very strong and are given more powers as compared to their brothers.

The source says that the aunt/*borakgadi* of the Letsoalo are to be respected and be informed of all the things that their brothers are doing to avoid *dikgaba tsa borakgadi*. This simply translate to the internal complains of borakgadi whereby *ba go swara ka pelo gore dillo tsa gago di se go lokele*- this also means that the *rakgadi* will curse you that whatever your endeavour in life you will not succeed nor be able to achieve anything.

Due to this *dikgaba tsa borakgadi*/internal complains/bitterness the *borakgadi ba ga* Letsoalo are compared with a tea bag as Nancy Reagan quoted by Higgs (2000:167), says “A woman is like a tea bag you can’t tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.

The *rakgadi* in the Letsoalo clan if angry can curse their brother’s wives or daughters depending on whom are they crossed with.

My informant went further to explain that after the *ngwetsi* has been named the *rakgadi* would give her a broom and other gifts, immediately after drinking *mapotu* which is the african drink made out of soft porridge and mixed with sorghum powder made by women.

Another source from an area called Tickyline mentioned that there are some few Letsoalos who think they can go against the clan’s naming of their *ngwetsi* and children according to their tradition.

The Letsoalo clan believes that all the families that did not follow the naming rite correctly are punished at a later stage.

They believe that once the child is not named accordingly the child may not be successful or blessed. For instance the child can be cursed, by not being successful in education, job opportunities, marriage and childbearing in the family. Sometimes if he/she happens to have children, his/her children also may be cursed and experience misfortune. This will lead to the child suffering and compelled to appease the gods

and call the *rakgadi* to perform the naming ritual. The aunt /*rakgadi* would bring *mapotu* and snuff to appease the gods, inform the ancestors about the problem that was done and ask for forgiveness.

Monnig (1983:104) says this ceremony, called *rela maina*-giving of name-is a group ceremony, where all children of the appropriate age of a particular lineage group(*kgoro*) communally and publicly receive new names with which they are introduced and initiated into the status of members of the corporate matrilineal group.

This ceremony is known by the clan that it should be performed to the new member of the family so that he/she can be called according to his/her lineage.

According to the Letsoalo clan the *ngwetsi* is not supposed to name her children, only the *rakgadi* of the family is suppose to name their nieces and nephews. The *ngwetsi* in this clan are abide by the tradition and culture of the clan in naming their children. Groenewald (1996:14) states:

Culture acts as a screen between a person
and social reality, colouring it in such a way
that his or her interpretation and understanding
of reality may be totally different from that of a
person of another culture

The *ngwetsi* in the Letsoalo clan learns about the different cultural rites that are ways of living among themselves in the clan and as individuals practising what is seen as the most important rite among the clan. The clan makes this naming rite a serious issue and gives the *rakgadi* all powers to conduct such. This can also lead to the *rakgadi* abusing the powers given to them on their *mokgadibo*/sister-in-laws and their brothers.

If the nuclear family that is to name the child, there is no *rakgadi* they call another *rakgadi* according to their lineage to come perform the naming of the *ngwetsi* and the children.

My sources says that in most cases after the *rakgadi* has named their nieces and *nephews* they tend to behave like the person they are named after. What is in a name? *Lena lebe ke seromo* so says the Sepedi

proverb. In Sepedi they say “*wa thea ngwana leina a tsea le megwa ya mong lena*”. This simply means that the child starts to behave like the person she/he is named after.

One source states that if the *ngwetsi* in the Letsoalo clan does not take the *rakgadi* into consideration she will have no one to assist her with the family issues and she will end up being a loner. A loner in the Letsoalo clan according to Dirie and D’haem (2002: 19) is: a woman without relatives dances with her children on her back.

The way the Letsoalo clan gives powers to the *rakgadi* can make the *ngwetsi* suffer. The *ngwetsi* will be like a woman without relatives in the marriage, no one to help her settle and make her understand how to behave and live according to the clan’s rite.

3.3. MARRIAGE AMONG ROYAL

When the chief from Letsoalo clan wants to marry, he does not just marry any woman. The clan gives direction as to which clan the chief is going to marry the wife. Letsoalo clan as I have been told, marry from the Molepo Royal kraal, this rite is still being practiced.

The reason that makes the Letsoalo clan marries within the family circle as it very important for the clan is to protect their sacred chieftdom/kingship and their blood line.

Monnig (1983:256) says a *Mohumagadi*/wife is chosen by a chief in consultation with his councillors. She must be of royal blood and herself the daughter of a chief. Preferably, however, she will be the mother’s brother’s daughter of the chief.

The above view shows that a chief don’t just marry any woman, there is a specific family lineage where he is expected to marry a candle raiser.

According to informants, when a woman is married into the royal family of the Letsoalo clan she is suppose to be given a family name that she will be called by all the family members.

The elderly *rakgadi* from the *mosate* says that when they name the *ngwetsi* from the *mosate* family, she would be named around the *thokgola* where both the bride and groom knelt down and the african beer and snuff is poured down to inform the ancestors that a new family member has arrived they should welcome her. After the bride has been named the family will slaughter a *pudi*/goat to appease the gods.

Monnig (1983: 259) says marriage of the *mohumagadi* differs from the other marriages of a chief, which are similar to ordinary marriages, in two features essentially. In the first place it is distinguished by the whole tribe donating *magadi* for her marriage. This means that the tribe becomes related to her and that she is indeed a tribal wife married by the tribe. The above just simply means that the *lobola* that is used to marry a candle raiser is from the clan and this makes her to be related to all members of the clan and the community.

The informants from the Letsoalo clan says, *Kgosi RraMatau* married a candle raiser/*Mmasetshaba*, a daughter of *Kgosi Molepo* at Ga-Molepo and they had three children namely: Mapula, Kheapea and Mashaba. Makoma Mmakaipea (Mrs -I- appointed-myself) was married Ga-Mampa later divorced and married again Ga-Sekokotla and she never had children

My source states, that Mosohli married eight wives:

- Mma Kantoro
- Mma Serokolo (no children)
- Mma Makome (candle raiser/*Mmasetshaba*)
- Mma Thutlwa Morokwe
- Mma Serokolo
- Mma Maishe
- Mma Nkapole

According to Monnig (1983:211): “Larger compound families are however, frequently found among chiefs. The present chief Sekwati Mampuru has eighteen wives, his father Malekutu had seven, and his grandfather Mampuru had eleven”.

My source says that chief Marothi Diapo Mosohli Letsoalo of Banareng ba Mathunyeng *mosate* married eight wives as a proof that the practice of marriage by chiefs in marrying many women still stands. The principal wife always comes from the paternal lineage as it was in the case of *Kgosi Mosohli*.

According to my sources even if the chief marries many wives they are not supposed to be equal in rank and each is supposed to have her own hut where the chief will meet her during the night.

Monnig (1983:211-212) states this:

Each wife has her own independent status, and the wives in a compound family are not equal in rank. The basis for the ranking of wives is according to precedence of marriage. Normally a woman in a compound family is superior to all women married after her and inferior to all married before her and the first wife married is a man's principal wife. However, wives of preferred unions should precede other wives in ranking, and particularly if a man marries his mother's brother's daughter she should be his principal wife.

In the Letsoalo clan, there is a rare practice of marriage that differs greatly and intensely with other tribes as marriage is conducted in this manner.

The sons of brothers from both paternal sides are encouraged to marry their father's brother's daughters which is very rare in other tribes and it is considered a taboo/incest. This practice is intended to protect the kingship and chieftainship, to avoid having contamination of royal blood by commoners.

CHAPTER 4

RAIN MAKING POWERS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Krige (1980: 271) highlights that as a centre of agricultural cycle, rain is the focus of many human interests, as the elixir of life, it is one of the ultimate bases of man's sense of security, and as a manifestation of celestial grace.

The Letsoalo clan has the rainmaking power that they possess and also practiced within the royal family. According to my sources in the three mesate, Metz, Callies and Vianan they all have the horns, drums, sticks and a sacred human dried hand named *mosupatsela/mphampha wa letsogo*. This is a hand of a human being specifically that of a child born within the royal family for that particular purpose. The Letsoalo's do not use any human hand outside their own blood line.

My informant states that these practices were very secret, some of this rainmaking charms one cannot see them with own eyes as they may turn your eyes blind. For one not to be blinded, they must use some *molora le moshidi wa setso (ash and sooth)* to smear on your face, hands and legs in the meantime the person who is conducting this ritual will be talking to the gods, to introduce you to them. So that they may not harm you, they will call to the spirits to welcome you without any harm. In the process of conducting these rain charms one of the old *rakgadi* will be singing the following song to appease the spirit's, the song goes like this:

*a ene pula ya medupi !,a ene pula ya medupi!
tlhatlha medupi ya bo podile,wa bo ramatau
ramatau wa bo kheapea, kheapea wa bo
marothi, marothi wa bo legadima, legadima
la bo makaepeya, makaepea, wa bo mosohli
Mosohli wa bo thathane , thathane wa bo
serokolo sa bo matheta pula ya medupi
a ene pula a ene!!!*

Then the wind will start blowing and the clouds will gather and the rain will fall. If the ritual has been conducted properly the rain will be peaceful but if it was not properly conducted the wind will be violent and the cloud will be blown away or a heavy storm with violent thunder and hail will take place.

When the drought is severe for many months *kgosi le bakgoma* will perform another rainmaking ritual.

My informants states that they will conduct a ritual at *badimong ba Letsoalo* where kings and chiefs are buried with *ngaka ya mosate* this ritual will be conducted by slaughtering *nku e nsho* which means sacrificing one of the relevant child or grown up man or woman within the royal family to the gods. This will be done according to tradition where everyone in the village will be warned that, that desperate period has come, *ledimo letlo utswa* or *go tsea nku entsho*.

By so saying all the village people will stay in doors especially during the evening because what will be done is a sacred and it is not suppose to be seen by the village people.

Sowetan (2008.10.10) Alex Matlala wrote about “Rain making rituals starts” like this:

The Modjadji royal family known the world over for their rain-making powers will tomorrow begin with ritual to bring rain to Limpopo. The family will blow a secret rain making horn to invoke the powers of their ancestors.

The Modjadji royal family performs their rainmaking powers by pleading with their ancestors for rain. This is similar to the Letsoalo clan in the sense that only the chosen people are to perform such rituals. The Modjadji are performing this ritual around the *thokgoleng* as their sacred piece of earth. The Letsoalo clan performs the rain making rituals at *badimong* where their *dikgosi* has been buried. Only the *bakgomana* together with the *ngaka ya ka mosate* are to perform such rituals.



4.1.1. Rain making horn Callies mosate.

According to the informants at *mosate* Callies they said not all people can perform this ritual of rainmaking, no one can touch the horns only the chosen and trained ones.

Krige (1980:271,275) said the chief actor in the rain cult is the queen. The queen can control only in agreement with her ancestors who are able if they wish. According to what Krige wrote it suggests that not all people are to perform in the rainmaking cult but a chosen one and the Modjadji are also doing the same as the Letsoalo clan are doing not all but the specific person is in charge of that.



4.1.2. Spear of mixing muti for rain making

This is the picture of the spear for mixing *muti* of the rainmaking powers and the original rain calling drums in the *mosate of Setsoadi* at an area called Callies. According to sources this *lerumo/spear* after used it should be put upright for seven days before it could be placed back on the roof of the thatched hut. On the seventh day the *ngaka ya ka mosate* together with the elderly *rakgadi* are the ones to do that ritual of returning the *lerumo* back to its place while praising their ancestors for the good rain received. It is believed that when the ritual is performed well the rain will fall peaceful and this is another sign that the Letsoalo ancestors are pleased with the performance of the ritual.

The rainmaking horn/*lenaka*, spear/*lerumo*, drums/*meropa* and sacret dried human hand/*mosupatsela* are kept in a traditional mud hut roofed with thatch.



4.1.3. Letsoalo traditional rain making pot at *mosate* of Callies.

These are African pots, different in sizes, horn (*lenaka la phala*), the long *lenaka* of impala and the drums/*meropa* are for calling the people when is time to come perform the ritual.

My sources says that before the performance they bring ashes to the chosen people that it mixed with *muti* to smear their hands, face and legs then one will blow the horn of impala/*lenaka la phala* that has *muti* inside and the other one will be beating drums, the other one will be busy stirring water/*mapotu* in an african pot. The rest of the people would kneel down and clapping hands as a sign of showing that they are in agreement of what is happening at *mosate*.



4.1.4. The inside of the house where the rain horn is kept.

This is another picture showing where exactly in the house the rain horn is kept in the royal kraal in Callies. This hut keeps a lot of things like the *setsha sa koma/byale/dikomana* the traditional stick that is used to open the initiation school and it also used to protect the school against evil spirit and enemies.

The hut that keeps this rainmaking powers is suppose to be taken care of by an old *rakgadi* who goes in weekly to clean and make sure that everything is still in tact. The young girls and boys at *mosate* are forbidden to play near the hut that keeps the rainmaking charms as it is believed that if anyone can see nor touch those rainmaking charms might be blind.



4.1.5. A tree where rituals are conducted.

This is a picture of a tree where rituals are conducted hence we see beads, cups and a horn at the acting chief's home. They are kept at the tree, no one can touch or use without being given the authority to do so. Under the tree it is believed that no one is suppose to sit except when it is the day for rainmaking ritual.

Both Callies and Metz *mesate* uses the horns for the rainmaking ritual and all these are well preserved by the people responsible for that. My source also says, they use the old grinding stone/*kika ya kgale* to grind the traditional herbs that is to be used during the ritual ceremony. Only the old women are asked to grind especially those who have stopped having their menstrual periods, it is done like that to avoid bad men.



4.1.6. *The old traditional 'kika' used around 1902 by Kheitswadi for rain charms*

This is a picture of a *kika* that is used to grind the traditional herbs and other food materials at the traditional family. When the time is right for the royal kraal to perform the rainmaking ritual the elderly women are asked to grind the traditional herbs that is to be mixed with the *muthi* that is going to be burnt by the *mosate's* traditional healer.

According to my sources at Vianan before the rainmaking ritual can be performed the women of the village would cook african beer and the girls who are not yet menstruating will go to the fields starting with the *mosate's* yard to collect each and every rubbish they can find and bring it back to *mosate*. The chief will burn this rubbish together with the *muthi* and the horns will be blown, drums beaten, young girls and young women dancing and the elderly men drinking the african beer.

My informants says that today their rainmaking powers that include the horn is not well kept it was also difficult for me neither see it nor gets a picture of it.

In all these *mesate* the rainmaking ritual is not performed by just an ordinary person, it is only the chief and the chosen elderly people together with the royal traditional healer. The elderly *rakgadi* is always there to give directions as the chiefs of today are still young.

Another important thing that these three *mesate* stressed is when you enter into the traditional ritual hut uninvited or before you are given the ash and the *muthi* to smear your hands, face and legs you can end up blind or mad. Just to see or touch the rituals things you can be in danger of not having sight anymore. This warning was stressed always when I started interviewing the *bakgomana ba mosate*.

In one of these *mesate* I was lucky to have met one *mokgomana* who said he went into the traditional hut where the rainmaking power rituals were kept and he is now talking alone saying that the people in *mosate* are not good people because *ba re ke a kgafa ge ke kgafisa ke bona, ere nka ba bolaya*. The man simply says that the people from *mosate* are saying that he is mad whereas they are the one's who has made be to be mad and he wish he can kill them. His behaviour shows that he is mentally disturbed as he is also calling names of the deceased people.

My source says in all the three *mesates* the *bakgoma*, *bakgomana* and the *borakgadi* are still assisting each other in performing these rainmaking rituals.

One of my sources from Metz explained that the house that kept the rainmaking powers is no more taken care of and that is the reason most of the rainmaking powers are on the tree.

One of the *bakgomana* mentioned that before the rainmaking powers are performed the people responsible are to appease the gods. The traditional healer should throw bones first so that they can know how to perform this ritual and also to be informed as to when the rituals are to be performed exactly.

He went further to explain that if the *rakgadi* is married or the husband is still alive, she would be asked to come sleep in one of the *mosates* house *a tlo go ikilela* so that she can perform the ritual very clean. The old woman says is like Christians when they fast. With the clan this is done when the *rakgadi* is still married or not staying at *mosate*. For the *rakgadi* who is always at *mosate* and not married there is no need for her *gore a ikilele*, she can only do that if she wants to teach the young *rakgadi*.

During this preparation of the rain making ritual a song to appease the spirit is taught to the *borakgadi babanyane*/ young aunts to know how to lead it, calling all the ancestors one by one especially those who were chiefs */dikgosi tsa ga* Letsoalo.

The clan should understand that on the ritual day when the rain falls violently with thunder it means the ancestors are angry and trying to inform the clan, and this will mean that the *ngaka ya mosate*/royal kraal traditional healer will have to throw the bones again so that the goat/pudi should be slaughtered at the royal kraal after the rain has cooled off to appease the angry ancestors.

The source also states that when the rain falls peacefully, a thanksgiving ritual is performed after a week. Thereafter the people of the clan will start ploughing the fields, starting with the one at *mosate*, when they finish at *mosate* they will start ploughing their individual fields.

CHAPTER 5

DEATH AND BURIAL RITE

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Hornby (1996:299) defines death as the end of life and burial as a ceremony of burying especially a dead body.

The Letsoalo clan has their own death and burial rites whereby they practice these rites without any fear. These rites also depend on the person who passed away, if the person who passed away is the *kgosi* from *mosate*, the rites of burying will be different from that of a commoner of the Letsoalo clan.

Hornby (1996: 1015) defines rites as a religious ceremony and ritual as actions that are always done at a fixed time and in the same way especially as part of a religious or other ceremony.

The fore-going tells us that rites can be many and practised by people at their own given time following their own order of actions. Rites can be of death, funeral, and burial and are going to be discussed below:

5.1.1. Death and burial rite of a commoner

According to my informants, the Letsoalo clan have a way of informing their relative who are living far from them about the passing away of one Letsoalo. They put course salt *letswai la dithoro* to the fire it will burn and whoever is from the Letsoalo clan wherever he/she is will be able to know that someone of his/her clan has passed away and he/she won't have people teasing or troubling him/her.

When the person dies at home the elders are to put his/her body on the ground/floor and put one big stone at the feet and another stone at the head so that he/she must not expand and become taller than his/her normal height.

The other rite that my sources informed me about is when the head of the family passed away, the entrance gate will be changed and be opened in a different direction. It is also said the woman will put *bolao fasi* meaning that she will put the mattress down, as she is no longer expected to sleep comfortable on bed until the man is buried.

Another rite mentioned at Callies, when a man passes away his last born whether is the boy or girl, he/she is going to cook for his/her mother who is now called *Mohlologadi*, a widow. If there is an elderly woman who is also a *mohlologadi* and a relative will be the one cooking for the new *mohlologadi*.

The source from the clans states another rite that is performed immediately after the burial of any person in the clan, *ba re ba bofa diaparo tsa mohu, di bofa ke bomalume wa gagwe*. This means that after the burial the following day the uncles from the maternal of the deceased are to put the deceased clothes in one big cloth and ties them tight and then keep them safe in the house so that it can be untied the following year during the month that the person has passed away. If it is the child's clothes they tie it for only three months but for an elderly person it is tied for twelve months.

If the clothes tied was for an elderly male/father of the house, the uncles will come back to untie the clothes. A ritual ceremony will be performed whereby the family will slaughter the goat of a specific colour according to what their tradition dictates, food cooked and people in the neighbourhood will be invited. The family male members together with the *rakgadi* will sit down in the *lapa* making a circle. Then the tied clothes will be brought to the centre where the maternal uncles of the deceased will untie the clothes then *molora* will also circulate around the people so that they can smear their faces and hands. Thereafter the uncle will pick any clothe he wants then let the rest of the family members to pick any clothe. According to my source the rite is called *go phatlalatsa diaparo tsa mohu*. This means distributing clothes of the late person.

Mabuza (1992:48) says, *hi le mutini wa Muzamani. Lembe ri herile a heleketiwile. Ku nghena madoda ya muti. Mukhegula Thandeka na Nkaxaka va tshama eka masangu yo hambana. Swiambalo swa mufi, tisuti, tihembe, tijesi, swi lo forisiwa kwala mubedweni.*

The above means that it is at Muzamana's home, a year has passed after he has been buried. The male members of the family came in, the mother in law Thandeka and the widow Nkaxaka sit on different african mats. The clothes of the deceased, suits, shirts, jerseys ties puts on the bed.

This is what the clan calls *go phatlalatsa diaparo tsa mohu*/distributing

the clothes of the deceased among the relatives of the deceased as they are to choose any of the clothes for themselves.

Another stage during the distribution of the deceased's clothes is to let the widow to choose the one who will *hlatswa dirope*/to wash the thighs meaning *the* man from the family who will take over the family especially the biological brother of the deceased.

An african beer will be put at the centre before the widow can be asked to choose a male among the family members who are still alive to can take care of her henceforth.

Rakgadi will take an african cup *a kha bjala a nea mohlologadi go nwa a siela o mongwe wa banna ba lelapa, yo a tlo mo neago e ra gore e tla ba yena o a tlo salago a hlokometse lapa la mogolo wa gwe. O tlaya seyantlo/go hlatswa dirupi* to wash the thighs as it is believed that it is dirty due to the death of the husband.

This simply means that the *rakgadi* will pour the african beer into the african cup and give it to the widow to drink and hand it to one of the family males, by so doing it means the one drinking with the widow in one cup will be the one who will be taking care of her.

If the widow does not want any male to take over the family of her late husband she(widow/*mohlologadi*) will just take a sip of the african beer and the rest she will pour it on the ground.

Usually when the widow refuse to be taken care of, it makes the *rakgadi* and the male members very angry, as it is believed that she wants to be married by other males out of the clan.

Mabuza (1992: 49) highlights this; *fanele ya hina a hi kona ku hletela yona ndzhaka ya sirha ku nga vona vana lava emisiheni ya vona ku nga khulukaka yona ngati ya Vahlave hi tlhela hi vona leswaku yona ndzhaka yeleyi yi tshama kwala tshangeni ra Vahlave xana?*

The view is all about the widow to choose a man who will be fathering her children as it is believed that it is the family member's right to see to it that the children of their late brother children are taken care of with their inheritance. The only person the family belief can do such is the one who is from their clan as they say, their blood is running throw the children's vein so this means that a family member is in good position to

can do such as long as the widow chose one among them.

The informant says, if the widow does not choose a man among the Letsoalo clan the *rakgadi* together with the *bakgomana* will curse her.

The *rakgadi* due to the powers given to her can make the widow to suffer as the widow/*mohlologadi* she will look like a woman who has no relatives to assist her.

Dirie and D'haem (2002: 19) says a woman without relatives dances with her children on her back.

This will happen to the *mohlologadi*/widow who did not listen and take the clan's ritual seriously.

When the woman passes away the first born mostly the girl is the one who will be tasked to stay and mourn her mother, she will be staying one place and not to go to the kitchen to cook anything. Someone of a relative will be tasked to cook for her. The source says that the girl was *ikilela morago ga lehu la motswadi wa gagwe* and there are other rituals that she is to perform with the assistance of the elderly family members as the one mourning her mother.

During the time of the funeral at the Letsoalo clan, the *bakgomana* will stay together under the tree where they will be given *mageo* or *maputu* to drink while discussing how the burial should go about. The *mageo* that the *bakgomana* drinks are mixed with *muthi* that will create peace amongst them while planning.

My sources states that when a member of the Letsoalo clan who is not of the royal passed away they only go to the traditional healer to find out what kills him/her if they have doubts about how he/she passed away.

One source also said that there is a snake called *letsbutsa* when it can be killed by one of the family members after 2-3 days the rain will fall and thereafter one member of that family will pass away. The source believes that it is another way of being informed about the death that will happen in the family by that snake. According to source the snake here symbolises the ancestors coming to inform the clan about the death that will happen in due days.

5.1.2. Death and burial rite of the royal person

The Letsoalo clan has rites on funerals and burial whereby only the *rakgadi* (paternal aunt) and the elders are to perform some rituals before entering the burial site when the royal member has passed away.

The source says, the rite of performing rituals at the graveside whereby a black sheep/*nku ye ntsho* is to be slaughtered, its blood sprinkled all over the place. Upon entering the graveyard, those allowed would be sprinkled with this blood. Later on, snuff will be used next to the open grave if someone is to be buried and it is to appease the ancestors, it will be sniffed first by all of them, then poured at the head of the grave.

The death and burial rite of the royal person is different from the commoner. My sources helped to unpack the difference by disclosing how the death is announced to the *bakgoma*, *bakgomana*, *borakgadi* and the community, where exactly is the grave going to be, who are to dig the grave, when are they suppose to and who is to perform the rituals .

My informants states that immediately after the royal person has passed away, the *bakgoma*, *bakgomana*, *borakgadi*, the *mosate's* messenger will be called by the drums. The calling drum of the *bakgoma*, *bakgomana* and *borakgadi* is beaten differently especially the one that calls them to be informed about the passing away of their chief. It is beaten differently thrice and slowly. After their arrival one *mokgoma* who is very close to the chief will inform the rest by saying “*kgomo ya rena ewile re paletswe ke go disa*”, meaning our cow has fallen we failed to be good shepherds.(our loved one has passed away)

The *bakgoma*, *bakgomana* and *borakgadi* will look down, some will show the signs of surprise, all will *tswha mathi/spit salva* as a sign of disbelief. Then the traditional healer of the *mosate* will be consulted to throw his bones as to check who killed the deceased and how should the preparation go about.

By this time the community is not yet informed about the death of the chief. The Letsoalo clan wants the confirmation first from the ancestors through their traditional healer.

When the ancestors confirms that the chief has passed away through the *mosate's* traditional healer and the instruction given as to how the funeral will go about they now call the community to inform them that their chief has passed away and he should be buried the following day.

The community will be informed as to when the chief is going to be buried but the chief is not going to be buried on that day. My sources states that the community is not suppose to know when is the *kgosi*/chief is going to be buried because it is a secret they don't want people to experience the rituals that are to be performed when the *kgosi*/chief is buried, The *bakgoma*, *bokgamana* and *borakgadi* will sit together and start planning according to what the traditional healer has said.

The first ritual to be done, the elderly *rakgadi* will together with the *bakgoma* and *bokgomana* go to the burial site to show the one's to dig as to where exactly is the grave suppose to be. My source says that, an elderly *rakgadi* will throw some mealies, appease the gods by sniffing the snuff while talking to their ancestors informing them that, so and so is coming to join them so they should welcome him/her. The place where she has thrown the mealies is where the *bakgomana* are going to dig the grave.

The second ritual the *bakgomana* together with the traditional healer will be sent to the graveyard to do the family ritual immediately after the men have finished digging the grave. The ritual is, *go bereka lebitla* before they can bury their loved one. The traditional healer will go into the grave with one *mokgoma*, holding all the *muthi* that is going to be smeared around the edges of the grave. Some *muthi* will be burnt inside the grave while the immediate *mokgoma* of the deceased speaking to the ancestors.

The third ritual is performed at the grave side on the day of the funeral by *rakgadi*. My informants states that the responsible *rakgadi* will go first before the gates of the graveyard are opened.

She will pour snuff while talking to the ancestors, thereafter one of the *bakgomana* will open the gates then the rest of the people will follow.

The old women are the one's going to the burial site for the royal person, when they arrive they will sit one side and the male's one side and the men will just stand up.

At the grave before the skin covering /coffin go down, the *rakgadi* together with one of the *bakgomana* will pour the *muthi* and the *rakgadi* will pour snuff informing the ancestors that here he/she comes praising him/her with a poet, calling the ancestors one by one up until the last one

according to their geonology.

My sources also states that when the *kgosi*/chief of Letsoalo clan passes away a traditional healer is consulted. Most rituals that are done during the day when one member of the Letsoalo clan passes away are to be done during the night when it is the chief who has passed away.

The planning of how the *kgosi* is going to be buried and is done during the early hours of the morning when most of the people are still sleeping. The burial too, will be done after two weeks during the night and only the few are allowed to go to the burial site. The wives of the chief and the daughters are not allowed to go to the burial site. Only the *bakgoma*, *bakgomana* , elderly *borakgadi* and the sons of the chief are the ones allowed to go to the burial site.

My sources went further to states that immediately after the *kgosi*/chief has passed away he is kept in one of the *mosate's* hut for two weeks, so that the traditional healer together with the *rakgadi* and *bakgomana* can smear some *muthi* on the corpse. The *muthi* smeared on the corpse will make the corpse to dry fast as the fats will be squeezed and poured into an african pot for later use during the rainmaking ritual. These fats are also used *go thekga/tiisa lapa la kgosi goba kgoro ya kgosi*.

During the burial of *kgosi* the elderly *rakgadi* will bring along the black sheep/*nku ye ntsho* that is a human being to appease the gods before entering the burial site.

This black sheep is referred as the bed of *kgosi*, meaning that when the chief lie down he is suppose to have a bed to lie on and the bed will be that black sheep that is going to be placed in the grave before the skin covering the coffin is put into the grave.

After the burial the *rakgadi* will also plant the *lenetlwa* so that it can be secretive as the *lenetlwa* will grow and make the place dense and ordinary people should not be able to come to the burial site.

Another rite my sources mentioned, when a person buried is the male they slaughter a bull then use the skin to cover his corpse and even today they still cover the coffin with the skin of a bull as an honour for males in the Letsoalo clan especially for men with high status.

On the funeral day the family will cook meat that is mixed with the penis of that bull as a ritual and this meat will be given to people who attended the funeral. The liver and the testicles are given to the males who slaughtered the bull a day before the funeral to fry/braai. It is believed that when the males braai the liver and the testicles it makes them strong and improves their endurance.

When the person buried is the female any cow is slaughtered and the skin will be used to cover the corpse in order to bury the person. Today the coffin of the deceased, especially of the royal person is also covered with the skin of the slaughtered cow. The elderly *rakgadi* is the one who will be informing the ancestors about the female member of the Letsoalo in the form of *go mo reta ge setopo se theogela lebitleng/* the deceased while the corpse goes down the grave.

A day after the funeral the *rakgadi* of the family will be assisting the traditional healer in doing the family ritual.

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All the family members will be smeared with *muthi* after the traditional healer has used a razor to make marks that will allow the *muthi* mixed with ashes to penetrate the body. The ashes is taken where the women were cooking on the funeral day.

This will be left on the family members' body until is dry, all members of the family will bath the following day using another traditional herb called *lengana*. This *lengana* can be planted at home as my sources believes that it is a good herb anyone can bath with it as it is a belief that it reduces bad luck.

My informants also states that after a year the family will visit the burial site to check on the graves. Before entering the burial site of a chief a black sheep/*nku ye ntsho* is needed again to appease the gods. If the sheep is not slaughtered before entering the burial site there will be more deaths than expected in the family. My sources believes that the gods are angry with them when more death happens. If any of the family members can try to go to the burial site without the *rakgadi*, he/she will be punished as the gods will be angry.

My informant believes that where they have buried their chiefs they are not supposed to frequent like any other burial site where one just goes at any time he/she feels like. Their burial site is a sacred place, one goes there with *rakgadi* after the *bakgoma*, *bakgomana* and the traditional healer are informed so that the necessary rituals of the black/*nku ye ntsho* sheep can be slaughtered before entering.

If it can happen that one of the family members can go to the burial site without informing the *rakgadi* and the traditional healer that person will not last he will be punished by the ancestors, he will die. The clan believes that the burial site should be respected especially where their chiefs are laid to rest. The rituals performed are the ones that make it impossible for any other person to visit the graveside unannounced, meaning that any one going there should be known at *mosate* and the reason of him/her going there.

Before the individual can be allowed to go there with the *rakgadi* a traditional healer is consulted to check whether the person concerned is supposed to. If they discover that the individual is not supposed to go to the graveside they will just tell him/her that *badimo ba gana* meaning that the ancestors are refusing.

The Letsoalo clan are still practicing this rite of appeasing the gods by slaughtering a black sheep/*nku entsho* very seriously before entering the graveside, their burial site are not the playing ground where anyone can just visit at any time. Due to this practice it is difficult for one to have a picture of their burial site especially where they have buried their *dikgosi tsa ga* Letsoalo.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

6.1. Findings

The aim of this study was to investigate the role, that the rites play among the Letsoalo clan, identify those rites that create sense of meaning and individuals who play important roles in practicing and preserving those rites. Furthermore, to determine the impact of Westernisation and to evoke a sense of awareness in the youth about the values of their traditional rites.

The following findings came to light and they are discussed below:

- 6.1.1. From this study it has been discovered that rites play an important role in the Letsoalo clan as they are still practicing them and passing them from one generation to another. Through this study one comes to the realization that the clan respects, their rites very much. For instance in naming no one can name the *ngwetsi* nor the child of the family except the *rakgadi*. According to the Letsoalo clan's culture the *ngwetsi* and the children in the family are named by the *rakgadi*. The Letsoalo clan does not compromise their naming rites.
- 6.1.2. The study has shown that elders are important in the Letsoalo clan. The elderly *rakgadi* is always involved in everything that is happening in the family or *mosate* of the Letsoalo clan. The involvement of elderly *rakgadi* in all the rites and rituals performed at *mosate*, shows that without the *rakgadi* no one can lead the act as she is the one. It has been discovered that *borakgadi* are respected by all family members of the Letsoalo clan. This makes their rituals preserved and passed to the young *rakgadi*.
- 6.1.3. From this study it has been discovered that the traditional healer is still taken in high status in the Letsoalo clan. Whenever they have a crisis they ask the traditional healer to throw the bones and check what might be the problem.
- 6.1.4. One has to come to the realisation that marriage plays an important role in this clan, as to where and who to marry. Royal family marries their cousins within the family circle. They marry within

the family as a way of protecting their sacred charms. Family means a lot in this clan.

- 6.1.5. The study has shown that the Letsoalo clan does not believe in divorce, marriage means a lot to them, thus we see the clan using *letsikere*. According to the clan the *letsikere* makes the woman to stay with the family no matter what happens to her.
- 6.1.6. One has come to the realization that the Letsoalo clan respect their *kgosi*, they are buried in a secret place where a *lenetlwa* is planted so that no one can just visit. The study also shows that the Letsoalo royal ascendancy to chieftainship and kingship is that they are ruled by males only.

6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher would like to propose that in terms of the research findings, the following should be taken into consideration:

- 6.2.1. The elders are respected especially for the smooth running of the performance of the clan's rites. All clans' rites are taught to the new generation to live according to the family clans' rites.
- 6.2.2. To evoke the sense of awareness amongst the youth about the values of their traditional rites.
- 6.2.3. Concept of practising and preserving the Letsoalo rites is taken seriously as it has rich culture and it need not be compromised by any member of the clan.
- 6.2.4. The clan to keep on marrying within, as it protects their sacred charm and their bloodline.
- 6.2.5. Naming the *ngwetsi* and children according to their lineage as it keeps the clan united.
- 6.2.6. The issue of who plays an important role is explained in all these rites.

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Names of Informants

Motatane Isaya Letsoalo (94) Banareng ba Mathunyeng Letsoalo

Lestetina Letsoalo (99) Rakgadi of Banareng ba Mathunyeng Letsoalo

Marothi Harry Letsoalo (83) Vianan Mosate

Marothi Letsoalo (78) Vianan Mosate

Jimmy Tebele Letsoalo (73) Metz area

Phataphata Vincent Letsoalo (67) Tickyline

Podile Elias Letsoalo (59) Vianan Mosate

John Mosohli Letsoalo (45) Vianan Mosate

Moshitadi Dorah Letsoalo (77) Vianan Mosate

Tlodipyane Melita Letsoalo (89) Vianan Mosate

Mosibudi Florina Letsoalo (92) Callis area

Maite Letsoalo (80) Tickyline area

