

**Naomi/Laban Showers and the Creation of
Womanist-Botho/Ubuntu Ethic of
Communal Living Spaces**

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Abstract

Marriage in Setswana culture is a community of relationships. One of these important relationships is the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law. This relationship has historically been wrought with tensions and difficulties. In 2014, a group of Pentecostal Christian women formed the mother-in-

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law and father-in-law showers. They chose biblical eponyms, Naomi and Laban to name parental showers. This article explores Naomi/Laban Showers. Our exploration is based on data collected in Gaborone and surrounding areas over a period of eighteen months (2016-2018). We examine critically how Naomi/Laban Showers build community. We investigate also how the showers construct and reconstruct gender. Our analysis of the data is framed by the intersectionality of Womanist (or Womanism) Social Theory and Botho/Ubuntu African Philosophy. We conclude that Naomi/Laban Showers create a Womanist-Botho/Ubuntu Ethic of Communal Living in which the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law exist in harmonious relationship. Furthermore, the showers create the mother-in-law subjectivity by insisting that her subjectivity must un-Other her daughter-in-law.

Keywords: *Naomi/Laban Showers, Womanist Social Theory, Botho/Ubuntu, Mother-in-law, Subjectivity, Gaborone, Botswana*

Introduction

Women adorned in blue traditional *mateisi*,⁴ their shoulders garlanded in either blue-checked-mini-blankets or white scarves, own the veranda space. Their garb is the Setswana symbol of their marital

⁴ Sometimes called shweshwe attire. They are common traditional attire for weddings and celebrations.

*Naomi/Laban Showers and
the Creation of Womanist*

statuses. The women are gathered for a new urban celebration: the mother/father-in-law shower. The celebrated mother-in-law is either a mother, a sister, an aunt, or a friend to any of the gathered women. Either her daughter or son is getting married. The women gathered are an important cloud of witnesses. Their gathering demonstrates the gendered and women centeredness of the mother-in-law shower. Moreover, the congregated women are a gathered community of women seeking to assist, prepare and advise the mother-in-law on the values of receiving either a *ngwetsi* (daughter-in-law) or *mogwe* (son-in-law).

Traditionally, socially, and historically, we are accustomed to women organizing rites of passages like bridal and baby showers. There is, currently, a new addition called the Mother-in-law Shower. Similar to the bridal and baby showers, the mother-in-law shower is a new gendered ritual. It traces its origins to the year 2016 when four church women founded what they as signified Naomi/Laban Showers. The shower was a product of their particular context; one of the founder woman's son was getting married. According to the founders, she was a towering figure in her son's life. The co-founders articulated that she fitted the stereotypical image of the unwelcoming and domineering mother-in-law. The founders viewed her role fundamental to her daughter-in-law's relationship with her husband's relatives.

Therefore, their goal was to prepare her for the mother-in-law role so she "welcomes and fosters a

healthy mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship” (NL Data, 2016). The founders created the Naomi/Laban Showers spaces to socially recreate and reconstruct a new mother-in-law identity. Their decision to host a shower in honour of the future-mother-in-law reflects what Beth Montemurro calls a “collective conscience, a feeling that they belong to the community and thus are morally obligated to it” (2002: 70).

Unlike the bridal and baby showers, the mother/father-in-law shower is not signified by its adjectival noun. It is, instead, signified by biblical character names, Naomi and Laban. Naomi is a mother-in-law to Ruth and Laban is Jacob’s father-in-law. Naomi and Ruth’s narrative are told in one of only two biblical books named after women, the book of Ruth. Naomi was an Israelite woman from Bethlehem, whereas Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabite. When famine hit Bethlehem, Naomi, along with her husband and sons moved to Moab for better productive lives. While sojourning in the foreign land of Moab, her sons married Moabite women. Soon, tragedy struck. Her husband died. Her sons followed suit. She, then, was left with her Moabite daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. The three widows are, according to Amy-Jill Levine (1992), now defined by lack of husbands and offspring. However, while in Moab and seasoned with a poor, bitter and tragic life, Naomi learns that God had remembered Bethlehem with plenty and harvest.

Naomi decides to journey alone back to Bethlehem. She urges her daughters-in-law to return to their

respective homes. She blesses and releases them to find new husbands. However, they instantly do not share Naomi's sentiments. They insist on accompanying her back. Naomi refuses. They all wail. Naomi makes her case. Orpah relents. She goes back to her mother's house to remain with her people. We will not hear about Orpah again. Her decision exits her from the Naomi-Ruth stage (Judith McKinlay, 1999: 151). Whereas Ruth insists on accompanying Naomi to Bethlehem. However, Naomi is still hesitant. Ruth makes a vow to Naomi. Naomi gives in. Ruth poetically declares:

Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you (Ruth 1:16-17).

The vow Ruth makes to Naomi sets the foundation of their future relationship. Ruth makes a commitment to accompany Naomi when she returns to her people. She will not allow Naomi to sojourn alone, so she makes a claim upon Naomi. She and Naomi will bond forever, Ruth promises. Ruth will build a life with Naomi, she vows. She leaves her people and her gods to be joined with Naomi's people and their God. Naomi becomes Ruth's mother-in-law and also her mentor in the ways of her people and of her God (see Judith McKinlay, 1999 & 2004). McKinlay further states that, "for the Moabite

herself, there will be no return; her bones will not lie in the soil of Moab” (1999: 152). Only death can separate them. These claims reaffirm the bond between the two. They both return to Bethlehem where they will live together⁵. In the end, Ruth’s mother-in-law, Naomi, organizes for Ruth a man to marry her. Ruth bears Naomi a son, and the community calls Naomi the blessed one.

The Laban shower is derived from the narrative of Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban, in Genesis 29-31. By the well, Jacob meets Laban’s daughter, Rachel and falls in love with her. He decides he wants to marry her. In order to allow him to marry Rachel, Laban sets for Jacob a seven-year *lobola* labour requirement. On the day of his wedding to Rachel, Laban tricks Jacob into marrying Rachel’s elder sister, Leah. When Jacob discovers and confronts Laban, he informs Jacob that the younger cannot marry first. Jacob again labours seven more years to marry Rachel, the love of his life. In the end, Jacob succeeds and marries both sisters. Thereafter, Jacob continues living with his wives and Laban’s family while breeding goats and sheep that Laban gifted him. Laban continues to cheat Jacob by breaking his promises concerning the domestic animals that he allocates to him.

The biblical narratives of Naomi, Ruth, Laban and Jacob are key narratives of value and importance to

⁵ McKinlay says “...the two of them. Naomi returns: Bethlehem, home of plenty, is home to Naomi, but Ruth, despite her speech, is explicitly the Moabite, the daughter-in-law” (1999: 152).

the Naomi/Laban shower founders. They set the background to the Naomi/Laban Showers. The narratives are pertinent in establishing and building in-law relations, community, and knowledge. The narratives partly construct the values and belief systems of the Naomi/Laban Showers practices.

On one hand, Naomi/Laban Showers are produced and function in a Setswana social marriage setting along with its norms and values. On the other hand, the Naomi and Laban narratives are paradigms reading the Setswana contemporary world of in-law relations. In fact, Naomi/Laban narratives are used to think and write (or think with) mother-in-law and fathers-in-law relationships in Setswana marital relationships. Thinking with Naomi and Laban biblical narratives is an analytical and critical endeavor. To think with Naomi and Laban biblical in-law narratives is to conceptualise biblical narratives into modern contexts. For Naomi and Laban Showers are sources of practical theology to the founders. After all, the church women define themselves as Pentecostal Christians who find solace and strength in the Bible as the Word of God. Thinking with Naomi and Laban biblical narratives assists in excavating and making meaning and knowledge. Thinking through Naomi and Laban biblical narratives conceptualizes new socio-religious meaning.

In their appropriation of the biblical narratives, or thinking with Naomi and Laban narratives, new values, norms, ideas, beliefs, and constructions of in-law relationship are created. Therefore, the biblical

Naomi and Laban narratives assist the shower facilitators to hypothesise liberating in-law relations. Thinking with Naomi and Laban biblical narratives create a Christian-religious-social meaning. It assists in creating discursive spaces that have culturally been ignored. Naomi/Laban Showers use biblical narratives to articulate and construct informed and idealized social and religious relationships. The Naomi and Laban narratives are a mirror held to the mothers- and fathers-in-laws and their relationship with their daughters- and sons-in-law. It is used to challenge prevailing oral norms, values, and tensions traditionally governing in-law relations.

Second, Naomi/Laban showers are intersectional practices. Intersectionality, coined historically to address the interaction of gender, race and class categories also implies the amalgamation of multiple identities. Intersectionality, initially formulated to scrutinize what black feminists called the “interlocking systems of oppression,”⁶ helped to identify a combination of oppression, domination, exploitation, and privilege. However, this is not the line of thought we want to take. We locate Naomi/Laban Showers as practices of

⁶ The concept Interlocking Systems of Oppression emerges in the work of three black women thinkers, namely Bell Hooks. (1989). In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (3rd ed; New York: Routledge); Kimberley Crenshaw. (1991, July), Mapping the Margin: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against women of Colour. *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6), 1241-1299 and Patricia Hill Collins. (1990) In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman).

intersectionality in that Naomi/Laban Showers intersect with Setswana Marriage values, norms, and belief systems. Therefore, the significance of intersectionality is the interconnecting of systems, categories, and practices central to women's lives. Intersectionality reveals that Naomi/Laban Showers occupy multiple locations where the interlocking systems can either be liberating or oppressive. We, therefore, establish that not only is Naomi/Laban Shower categorized as a religious group with Christian values, belief system and practical theology, but it is categorized through (or by) traditional Setswana marriage with its culture/tradition and gender constructs.

A Setswana marriage is both a nuclear and an extended family affair. According to Isaac Schapera, a Motswana woman or man marries into the family of their spouse. Schapera writes about a "mutual agreement between the two families concerned, as reflected in the formalities of betrothal"⁷ The litany of Setswana marriage rituals and practices like *patlo*, *bogadi*, *lenyalo* and *kgoroso*⁸ are observed. For this article, we are more interested in the latter, namely, the Setswana marriage practice of Kgoroso. Kgoroso takes place after wedding celebrations at the bride's place, normally known as the first leg of the wedding. Once that first leg is completed, the bride is taken to her new home, which is her husband's

⁷ Isaac Schapera. (1970). *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Customs*. London: James Curry Publishers.

⁸ Some scholars call it Go isiwa ga Ngwetsi. I prefer the more formalized name, Kgoroso and will stick to that throughout.

parents' homestead. At her parents-in-law's homestead, another marital practice, *Go-Laya* is conducted. However, the *kgoroso* practices of *Go-Laya* is replicated in different forms within Naomi/Laban Showers.

According to James Denbow and Pheny C. Thebe (2006), *Go-Laya* is “one of the traditional customs that occur for the bride and groom to be given advice” (149). Similarly, Sibonile Ellece asserts that *Go-laya* in Setswana weddings is premarital advice or counselling (2011: 44). It is a wedding ritual for the bride. Bakadzi Moeti and Hilda Mokgolodi write that premarital counselling is viewed as vital for instilling values of perseverance, tolerance, patience, and sacrifice in women entering into marriage (2017: 65). Denbow and Thebe note that *Go-Laya* consists of the bride and groom's “obligations and responsibilities to one another by the married members of their families” (2006: 149). Further, Ellece asserts that the responsibilities of *Go-Laya* lie with the bride's aunt and other married female relatives (Ellece, 2011: 45; Moeti, 2018: 82). *Go-Laya* forbids unmarried women participation. However, the *Go-Laya* process does not solely lie with the bride and her married female relatives – the groom is also counseled by his uncles and married male relatives (2011: 45). Nonetheless, there are challenges and issues pertaining to the process of *Go-Laya* which are often gendered and implicated in “unequal power relations in the family” (Ellece 2011: 45). Our focus is not on the production and implications of *Go-Laya* by married persons. Our proposal, rather, is that Naomi/Laban Showers

appropriate the Setswana practice of *Go-Laya* to counsel and advise the mother- and father-in-law.

The Naomi/Laban Showers' appropriation of *Go-Laya* of the mother-in-law and father-in-law was constructed parallel to *Go-Laya* of the bride and groom. Realising that there are no cultural practices or counsel to prepare the mother-in-law in receiving her *ngwetsi*, the founders created Naomi/Laban shower to complete this dearth. Their objective was to create a space for a harmonious transition and to welcome the bride into her mother-in-law's space and homestead. Given that Naomi/Laban Showers appropriate Setswana marital practice of *Go-Laya*, we posit that Naomi/Laban Showers are doubly embodied. On the one hand, they are driven by their biblical appropriation, and on the other, by the appropriation of Setswana practice of *Go-Laya* of the mother- and father-in-law. Through the Naomi/Laban showers' appropriation of the biblical mother-in-law, the appropriation of Naomi as a model of a good mother-in-law is intersected with the Setswana marriage concept of *Go-Laya*. Given this background, this article analyses data from the ethnographic study of *Botho/Ubuntu* Community Building in Naomi/Laban showers, which was carried out in Gaborone and its surrounding areas in 2016-2018.

Methodology and Data Collection

During the period from 1st August 2016 to 31st March 2017, a group of researchers from the University of

Botswana undertook field work and collected data on Naomi/Laban, Bridal and Baby showers. We were divided into three groups according to the showers. Ours, as the preceding discussion demonstrates, collected data on Naomi/Laban showers. We initially concentrated our data collection in the city of Gaborone. However, due to the newness of Naomi/Laban showers, we chose to extend our collection of data to the surrounding semi-urban villages. The villages were Kanye, Thamaga, Molepolole, Ramotswa and Mochudi. We collected Naomi/Laban shower data from a total of twelve showers.⁹

Our focus group were people invited and attending Naomi/Laban showers. There was no sampling conducted as we did not have an existing available list of Naomi/Laban shower participants. We used the observation-survey-participant-questionnaire. Specific questions guided our observation. A self-administered questionnaire for individual participants addressed participants' biographical data. Moreover, in-depth interviews were given to the Naomi/Laban shower honorees and organisers. Our collection of data was driven by five objectives.

The objectives were as follows:

- a) Explore the theological and spiritual base of *Botho/Ubuntu* values/ethics

⁹ This study was possible through the generous funding of the Nagel-Institute.

- b) Examine how the *Botho/Ubuntu* ethic was understood and manifested in traditional Botswana communities
- c) Analyse how the *Botho/Ubuntu* ethic is experienced and expressed in contemporary urban settings of Botswana
- d) Investigate how *Botho/Ubuntu* activities in the urban space construct and reconstruct gender and, lastly
- e) Highlight how *Botho/Ubuntu* spirituality can inform the building and maintenance of justice-loving communities.

This article, therefore, draws and works only on two of the aforementioned objectives, which are as follows:

- a) Examine how the *Botho/Ubuntu* ethic was understood and manifested in traditional Botswana communities, and
- b) Investigate how *Botho/Ubuntu* activities in the urban space construct and reconstruct gender.

In order to examine and explore how the above objectives are met and fulfilled, we focused on two objective questions from the data as follows:

- a) How do Naomi/Laban Showers build on or divert from African ways of community building?

- b) How do Naomi/Laban Showers activities in the urban space construct and reconstruct gender?

We argue that the focus on the *Botho/Ubuntu* ethic of the Mother-in-law and father-in-law shower locates and places the woman at the centre of community building. In fact, the focus on the mother-in-law creates the mother-in-law subjectivity, a Naomi/Laban Shower constructed identity that is hardly endowed on women but enabled by the *Botho/Ubuntu* community logic. We frame our investigation of the mother-in-law's subjectivity, women building and creating spaces of *Botho/Ubuntu* harmonious community with Womanist Social theory and *Botho/Ubuntu* Philosophy. We explore how Naomi/Laban showers' facilitators' counseling and teaching construct the practice and philosophy of *Botho/Ubuntu*. In the next section, we map the concept of *Botho/Ubuntu* African Philosophy and social theory of Womanism.

On the African Philosophy of *Botho/Ubuntu*

The African philosophical concept of *Botho/Ubuntu* was the driving objective of our research and data collection. Since our goal was to investigate how Naomi/Laban Showers demonstrated or cultivated the essence of *Botho/Ubuntu* and community building, this section will map the logic of *Botho/Ubuntu*.

Botho/Ubuntu's genealogy is traced to the Sotho and Nguni language groups of Southern Africa. According to Dumi Mmualefe (2007) "*Botho* and

Ubuntu can be used interchangeably” (1). It is rendered in Setswana as *motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe* and in Nguni as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (2007: 1). *Botho/Ubuntu* is a philosophical understanding that equates one’s human identity with respecting, welcoming, caring and empowering the “Other.”

In his essay, “*Botho/Ubuntu: The Heart of African Ethics*” (2013), Ramathate Dolamo defines *Botho/Ubuntu* as “an agent or an instrument factor in human relationship and interaction” (1). He provides that *Botho/Ubuntu* as an “ethical concept and expresses a vision of what is valuable and worthwhile in life” (2013: 2). Dolamo asserts that *Botho/Ubuntu* is a “vision rooted in the history and centre of the culture of most African countries” (2013: 2-3). He argues that the secret in *Botho/Ubuntu* is “for individuals to realise that they would become human only by becoming members of their respective communities” (2013: 1). According to Domamo, the axiom “I am, therefore we are” (2013: 1) embodies an “understanding of what it is to be human and what is necessary for human beings to grow and find fulfilment” (ibid).

Dolamo references Shutte’s *Botho/Ubuntu* definition which we quote at great length below:

Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human, and this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So, although the goal is personal fulfilment, selfishness is excluded.

The concept of *Botho/Ubuntu* embodies an understanding of what it is to be human and what it is necessary for human being to grow and find fulfillment. It is an ethical concept which expresses a vision of what is valuable and worthwhile in life. This vision is rooted in the history of Africa (2013: 1, 3).

Shutte's definition recognises *Botho/Ubuntu* with both moral and ethical principles. Its "moral obligation" (2013: 1) has no room for selfishness but is driven by and towards "personal fulfilment" (ibid). According to Shutte, *Botho/Ubuntu's* ethical concept is marked with an important and worth life pursuing vision. In essence, *Botho/Ubuntu* is relational at its core. It encompasses relational principles in which social beings form a community with the Other.

We comprehend *Botho/Ubuntu* as a community building ethic and therefore, we cannot speak of *Botho/Ubuntu* "outside community" (See Dube et al, 2016). In "*Botho/Ubuntu, Community Building and Gender Construction in Botswana*" (2016), we noted that for Batswana of Botswana, *Botho/Ubuntu* is a "concept of acceptable relational living" (3). We asserted that "it was measured by one's relationship to family, community, the environment and the divine powers (ancestors and God)" (2016: 3). *Botho/Ubuntu* has also a theological aspect. Mmualefhe captures *Botho/Ubuntu's* theological function thus: "*Botho* is what constitutes God's image in us, and that...according to the *Botho* worldview, one can never be a Christian or attain salvation without *Botho*" (2008: 22).

We discovered further that *Botho/Ubuntu* pervaded all aspects of individual and communal human relations. These included “local governance...ethic of valuing community” (2016: 9) and welcoming and giving land not only to members of the community but to strangers (2016: 9). We defined “community” to include the “living, the divine powers, and the environment in an interconnected fashion” (2016: 2). Dube et al reveal that “the *Botho/Ubuntu* concept of communicating includes non-human members of the earth” (2016: 3). Puleng Lenka-Bula underlines that “relationality and respect for humanity is explicit in the understanding that human life cannot be full unless it is lived within a web of interactions of life which include creation” (2008: 380). Augustine Shutte, in his article, “*Ubuntu* as the African Ethical Vision” (2009), locates *Botho/Ubuntu* as the conception of community. Shutte says it is “the insight that persons depend on persons to be persons; ...It is this insight that gives the African conception of community its distinctive character” (93). Community lies at the centre of *Botho/Ubuntu*. According to Shutte, community is an integral space where *Botho/Ubuntu* is practiced. In his discussion, he references Leopold Senghor’s concept of “communalism” (2013). The value of *Botho/Ubuntu* is for “individuals to realize that they become human only by becoming members of their respective communities” (Shutte, 2013). Thus, *Botho/Ubuntu* tells the story of humans as intertwined.

Botswana Vision 2016 provided a definition of *Botho/Ubuntu* which became the national principle of the country. The vision defined *Botho/Ubuntu* as

the “process of earning respect by first giving it and of gaining empowerment by empowering others” (Botswana Government, Vision 2016 Towards Prosperity for All, 2013). This vision also defined relationality as humanity to others (2013). It holds that our humanity is only realised through other human beings. We can only exist through relations to the other. We are all others, and we exist as others to others. It is “an integral part of African ethics that is steeped in issues of liberation, development, identity, etc. It has to do with a person’s integrity and dignity” (2013: 2). Social beings understand the world through “an ethicality that inheres in our being with inescapable obligations” (Shutte, 2013: 3). This social bond demands then “that since it is an ethical one, this social bond is always demanding the rethinking of what the ethical and therefore, politico-ideological demand” (2013: 3). They also see *Botho/Ubuntu* as a philosophy on “how human beings are intertwined in a world of ethical relations from the moment they are born” (2013: 2).

Botho/Ubuntu defines how the individual social can become fully human through relational practise with other individuals. Drucilla Cornell and Karin van Marle (2015) signify this relational practice of *Botho/Ubuntu* as relational philosophy in their article “*Ubuntu* Feminism”. They assert that *Botho/Ubuntu* marks “how human beings are intertwined in a world of ethical relations from the moment they are born” (2015: 3). Human are born as social beings. They are born, according to Cornell and van Marle, into “a language, a kinship group, a tribe, a nation, and a family” (2015: 3). They note further that we are

mutually obligated to support each other on our respective paths to becoming unique and singular persons” (2015: 3). The secret here is for individuals to realise that they can only become fully human by becoming members of their respective communities.

Having provided the various definitions and understandings of *Botho/Ubuntu*, we conclude that marriage, as we discuss elsewhere, is also a communal practice of the “philosophy of *Botho/Ubuntu* specifically in its practice of families uniting and continuing a lineage” (2016: 9). We asserted also that since marriage is the “uniting of two families, the practice and ethics of *Botho/Ubuntu* were at the forefront of this union” (2016: 9). Therefore, the Naomi/Laban Showers build *Botho/Ubuntu* communities and relations between in-laws. It does this through an empowering and supportive community to the mother-in-law and her relationship with her daughter-in-law. However, the origins of Naomi/Laban Showers by church women compels a gendered analysis of the data. We, therefore, locate our theoretical framework within Womanism or Womanist¹⁰ Social Theory, which we discuss below.

Theoretical Framework

Since this research is woman-centred and focused, a woman focused theory is relevant to frame the Naomi/Laban Showers. Therefore, this article is

¹⁰ Womanist and Womanism will be used interchangeably throughout our discussion.

framed with Womanist Social Theory. Womanist Social Theory is relevant because the objectives of our research and collection of data are attuned to the social and philosophical thought of African Women lived and material experiences. Womanist Social Theory incorporates particular cultural practices.

Womanist Theory

Womanism is historically traced to the work of Alice Walker, a writer and philosopher. Walker details Womanism in her book, *In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) where she provides a number of definitions. Subsequently, other black women took up womanism and expanded its meaning and agenda. This section explores the work of two womanist scholars in addition to Walker's womanism. They are Chikwenye Ojojo Ogenyemi and Clenora Hudson-Weems. Both Ogenyemi and Hudson-Weems slightly depart from Walker's womanism while keeping the overlaps between them clear.

From *In Search for Our Mother's Gardens* (1983), Walker provides the following definitions:

- i.** From womanish (Opp. Of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious). A black feminist or feminist of colour. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown-up. Being grown-up. Responsible. In charge. Serious.
- ii.** Also: a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually.

- Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universal. Traditionally capable.
- iii. Loves music. Loves dance. Love the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Regardless.
 - iv. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender (1983: xi).

Walker's first definition relies on the particularities of Black American women and ties gender and race to reveal womanism as both a raced and gendered theory. It provides a certain quality of maturity and consciousness. Walker's second definition is about love (the epitome of womanism) and black women. Not only is the love filial but also sexual. Love is not only about a black woman's self-love, rather loving herself, her relatives, loves nature, but she has permission to also love other women sexually. However, the second definition's highlight is its last sentences in which Walker articulates and accentuates communal relationship, cooperation, and emphasis on relationship with men. Walker's succinct point that a womanist is "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist..." (1983: xi) is an important

value to Naomi/Laban Showers. The last definition lays the relationship and point of departure between womanism and feminism. It insists the difference between the two are shades than anything else: “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” (1983: xi). This now famous axiom foregrounded the multiple voices of women of colour by their demand for seats at the theoretical table of women’s rights and quest for freedom.

Monica A. Coleman (2013: 3) asserts that Walker’s definitions set the flame for a theoretical development of womanism as a social theory and philosophical analysis. Coleman, however, argues that Walker’s definition raises “two significant challenges” (2013: 3). First, that Walker’s “definition” is not really a definition” (2013: 3) even though Coleman appreciates Walker’s “poetic in nature” (2013: 3) definitions. Coleman says Walker’s definitions create resonance and rhetoric that is appealing to women of colour’s sensibilities. Moreover, Coleman notes that Walker’s definition is a “point of departure” (2013: 4) to a distinct black or women of colour’s own untangling of gender and race politics and intersectionality. This is a response against the history of feminism. Womanist was, therefore, historically set against the narrow political and social constructs of white feminism. Womanism argued against white feminism’s sole focus on gender as a category of analysis. It argued that race and other categories are important too.

***African Women, African American Women and
Womanist Social Theory***

Ogunyemi is another Womanist who articulates an African Womanism similar to Walker's. In her essay, "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English" (1985), Ogunyemi holds that she came up with "Womanism" (1985: 38) independently of Walker though both she and Walker see Womanism as a "departure from white feminism" (1985: 35). While Walker describes a distinctive African American Woman experience (that perhaps doesn't cater per se for African women), Ogunyemi uses Womanism to describe both the African American and African female experiences which she identifies as Black Womanism (1985: 38-44). She defines Black Womanism as an "ideology created and designed for all women of African descent" (1985: 36). Its foundations are "African culture" (1985: 36). And its concentrations are the "unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of African women" (1985: 36). Furthermore, Black Womanist is celebratory in motive and drive. It is a "philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womanhood" (1985: 37). Not only is it celebratory, but its goal seeks a totality of Black womanhood in the "dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive, integrative endings of womanist novels" (1985: 35).

Ogunyemi demonstrates Black Womanism by reading African and African American women's creative novels. She argues that, in comparison to

White Feminist novels, Black Womanist's creative novels are an articulation of (a purely) African Womanist Ethos. Ogunyemi asserts the following: "many black female novelists writing in English have understandably not allied themselves with radical white feminists, rather, they have explored the gamut of other positions and produced an exciting, fluid corpus the defies rigid categorization. (1985: 26). Ogunyemi writes that the African Womanist "incorporates racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy" (25) and that is why she is not "limited to issues defined by their femaleness but attempts to tackle questions raised by their humanity" (25).

Similarly, Clarence Hudson-Weems creates a form of Africana Womanist literary theory in a number of books and articles. In *Africana Womanist Literary Theory* (2004), Hudson-Weems sees Africana Womanism as separate and different from all other women-based outlooks. She asserts that Africana Womanism is "an endemic paradigm, separate and distinct from all other female-based perspectives" (35). She traces the tenets of Womanism to Africa as signified by the prefix: Africana. Africana Womanism is a theoretical construct that unapologetically restores meaning within the African and African Diasporas women's experiences. According to Hudson-Weems, the Africana Woman, "perceives herself as the companion to the African man and works diligently toward continuing their established union" (41).

Hudson-Weems follows a similar trajectory to Ogunyemi by creating a Womanist theory that strictly departs and is not informed by the theoretical framework of “feminism” (39). Hudson-Weems, however, differentiates her Africana Womanism from Walker’s. Hudson-Weems argues that Africana Womanism should be not confused with Walker’s womanist. Focusing on Walker’s third definition which is “almost exclusively in the women, her sexuality and her culture” (1983) and Walker’s “affinity between the womanist and the feminist” (1983: ix) are not how Hudson-Weems postulates her Africana Womanism. Hudson-Weems defines Africana Womanism thus, “an ideology created and designed for all of African descent grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of African women” (1994: 24). Hudson-Weems still asserts one other common thread between herself, Walker and Ogunyemi which African Women have “historically demonstrated that they are dramatically opposed to the concept of many white feminists who want independence from family responsibility” (2004: 38).

For Hudson-Weems, the Africana woman’s role and opinions are critical to the overall community. She outlines about eighteen features important to Africana Womanism and its community building. These include the following: Self-Definition, family centeredness, wholeness, role flexibility, adaptability, black female sisterhood, struggling with male oppression, male compatibility, recognition, ambition, nurturing, strength, respect, respect for

elders, mothering and spirituality form and create African Womanism's first category (1994: 40).

The characteristics are paramount to understanding the Naomi/Laban shower community building. Some of the defining characteristics are "family-centered; in concert with males in the struggle, spiritual, adaptable, mothering and nurturing" (1994: 40). These are important in the translation and understanding of African Womanists. Therefore, Womanism is a theoretical framework that is viable to read and analyse the Naomi/Laban shower's *Botho/Ubuntu* creation of community.

Common to the three thinkers, viz. Walker, Ogunyemi and Hudson-Weems, is their insistence on the multiplicity of women of colour's particular contexts. They note also that women of colour are conscious of their ever-shifting identities. Their reading of culture and society should incorporate the politics of gender, politics of sexuality, racial, cultural, and national issues affecting black women and women of colour. Womanism (or Womanist) Social theory as already noted is, therefore, a theoretical analysis for this article. Walker's "committed to survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female. Not a separatist" (1983: xi) is poignant and relevant to Naomi/Laban Shower's concerns and goals. Ogunyemi's "foundation of African culture" (1985: 26) the celebratory practice, balanced presentation of womanhood and Ogunyemi's search for the "dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive, integrative endings" (1985: 35) are African

Womanism tenets apt and relevant for Naomi/Laban Showers. The aforementioned are relevant for articulating Naomi/Laban showers as female spaces where meaning and community building of male and females is paramount. Thus, commitment to the flourishing and survival of black people is important to the framing and analysis of the Naomi/Laban shower. The Naomi/Laban shower forms of facilitation, goals and objectives reveal an exclusive negotiation and articulation of the African female experience, which in this case is the Motswana Pentecostal Christian woman's experiences.

Data Analysis of Naomi/Laban Showers
***The Creation of the Womanist-Botho/Ubuntu
Community***

From the *Botho/Ubuntu* and Womanist discussion above, this article proposes that Naomi/Laban showers create a *Womanist-Botho/Ubuntu Ethic of Communal Living*. In order to demonstrate this proposition, we examine the Naomi/Laban Showers Data to show how the *Botho/Ubuntu* ethic was understood and manifested in traditional Botswana communities. Second, we investigate the Data for *Botho/Ubuntu* activities in the urban space and how they construct and reconstruct gender. The following analyses answers from Naomi/Laban shower participants to demonstrate the Womanist-*Botho/Ubuntu* Ethic of Communal Living:

When asked, "how do Naomi/Laban showers build or divert from African ways of community building?" the Naomi/Laban participants provided the following answers:

NL11: “Understanding each other through the teaching of Naomi/Laban showers adds to the community building and the African spirit of *Botho*.”

NL12: “The shower strengthens the prevailing value and cultures, e.g., ways of dressing, respect of family and marriage.” Although it was not clear what ways of dressing ultimately meant, its function in the “prevailing value and cultures of respect for family and marriage” were palpable.

NL13: “The stakeholders begin to know and understand themselves better as they open to a wider spectrum of people, friends, colleagues, etc.”

NL 14: In African culture people support one another in every way. When one family is in need, financially or needing food or clothes, other families provide. Therefore, the showers are similar in that family needing support is supported by well-wishers.

NL11, 12, 13 and 14 (2016) articulate Naomi/Laban Showers as spaces of community building. They asserted also that Naomi/Laban Shower teachings “added to community building and the spirit of *Botho/Ubuntu*” (NL12:2016) and stated the showers as spaces to share, learn and teach each other. Mabogo More, cited in Cornel and Van Marle (2015: 3), notes that *Botho/Ubuntu* is a “philosophical

concept forming the basis of relations...a traditional politico-ideological concept referring to sociopolitical action.” The communal gathering reveals the *Botho/Ubuntu* ethical relations which form the basis of unity and inscribes participatory obligation “to others and those others who are obligated to them...and ontologically narrated social being are actually intertwined” (2015: 3).

Data NL13 reveals the participants’ own learning process when they observe themselves as beginning “to know and understand themselves better as they open to a wider spectrum of people, friends, colleagues, etc” (2016). This consciousness is well noted by Masolo’s discussion of “participatory difference,” again cited in Cornell and Van Marle (2015). A concept that “recognizes that each one of us is indeed different from all other people. The crucial part of this difference, however, is that we are also called to make a difference by contributing to the creation and sustenance of a human and ethical community” (2015:2). The participants stipulated that the Naomi/Laban showers teaching enabled them to play a role in the “creation and substance of a human and ethical community” (2).

Participants responded variously regarding the creation of harmonious relationships. They noted the support people gave each other in African culture. One participant noted that “When one family is in need, financially or needing food or clothes, other families provide” (NL16, 2016). Another observed that Naomi/Laban Showers “...add to the African ways of bringing people together as a team-

encouraging ‘tirisanyo mmogo (*communal practice*)’¹¹ (NL15, 2016). The participants recognized the Naomi/Laban Showers as a social force at work in creating harmonious relationships that are non-stereotypical but affirming. Dube et al cite Jean-Miller, Gillian and Jordan who assert women’s communitarian harmony as instances where “women organize themselves around relationships and the ethic of responsibility care, and nurturing others” (2016: 9). According to these researchers, “women are involved in other people live through empathy, caring, and capacity for intimacy” (Dube et al., 2016: 9). This is Womanist-*Botho/Ubuntu* Ethic Communal Living in its practice, logic and value.

Again Dube et al. (2016) assert that Naomi/Laban Showers practice the all-encompassing spirit of women from various walks of life. They note that “a significant indicator of *Botho/Ubuntu*” (2016: 9) is marked by being a “driver and community builder in the shower movements of Botswana” (2016: 9). This sentiment was highlighted by Naomi/Laban Showers participants. They note that not only are Naomi/Laban Showers spaces of women communal gathering but are open and inclusive to women of different marital statuses. Naomi/Laban Showers operates the Womanist-*Botho/Ubuntu* Ethic of Communal living with its emphasis on the value of every woman participant. Naomi/Laban Shower participants noted that though marriage is the uniting

¹¹ Phrase and emphasis added.

of marrying families, Naomi/Laban Showers extend the unity of marrying families through the creation of a non-blood related community. These non-blood families are self-created and self-chosen. This, we note, reflects a Womanist-*Botho/Ubuntu* Communal Ethic in which “self-definition, family centeredness and commitment to family are major African community values” (Hudson-Weems, 2004: 45). In addition, the inclusive gathering of women produces a social bond that narrates and emphasizes the ontology of *Botho/Ubuntu* in which women, through a Womanist logic, are socially united for a Womanist-*Botho/Ubuntu* Ethic of communal existence.

Go-Laya and the Production of the Mother-in-Law

NL15: The showers’ focus on *matsala* (mother-in-law) is to be commended. For a long time, things have been concealed and not spoken about. It is good since it chastises the mother-in-law and sisters-in-law and we hope they hear. Therefore, it can build a nation. For a war within the family starts when a woman marries their breadwinner, so the wife is going to be seen as the one who uses their breadwinner’s money. Note: it should be advertised, well known, and used.

In one of the first preceding discussions of this article, we proposed that Naomi/Laban Showers appropriate the Setswana concept of *Go-Laya*. Following Ellece, we defined *Go-Laya* as pre-

marital/advice or counselling practice (2011: 44). Similarly, Denbow and Thebe (2006: 149) note that *Go-Laya* is a traditional custom of “advice” to the bride and groom. Naomi/Laban Showers appropriate this Setswana traditional custom of pre-marital/advice and instruction. NL15 participant demonstrates that Naomi/Laban Shower’s focus on the mother-in-law is an appropriation of the Setswana Ethic of *Go-Laya* or counselling. The participants note that the “focus on the mother-in-law” (NL15:2016) is a wise move because the role and representation of the mother-in-law was historically hidden if not ignored yet she held an important role. Another participant noted that the “mother-in-law was hardly advised on how to treat her daughter-in-law” (NL15:2016). We propose that one of Naomi/Laban Showers’ goals is to reproduce the mother-in-law. With this point, we note Naomi/Laban Showers communal spaces as sites of the mother-in-law production.

Participants at NL15 articulate that the “focus on matsale (mother-in-law) is to be commended” (2016), thus making the mother-in-law the protagonist of the showers. Her well-being and that of her social relations are given priority through the guided, envisioned, organized social, ethical, and spiritual teachings dominating the showers. Apparently, social, cultural, and traditional practices of Setswana marriage had historically concealed information regarding the role of the mother-in-law. Schapera writes that when the *ngwetsi* (daughter-in-law) went to live with her in-laws, “her lot is notoriously difficult, for her conduct will be closely

scrutinized. She is expected to be humble and respectful, work hard and in effect be the general servant of the household” (1994: 149). The mother-in-law’s role in making “her lot notoriously difficult” (1994: 149) is one element Naomi/Laban Showers sought to undo and deconstruct.

The incessant practice to produce Naomi/Laban Showers as sites of the production of the mother-in-law is not to produce as per Angelo Nicolaidis “ideology of radical individualism” (2015: 5) but reproduce her in relation to her daughter-in-law. Her community is “not abstract and outside” (5) but is “part of who and how we are with others,” (5) that is, part of who the mother-in-law is and how she is with others. This *Botho/Ubuntu* logic and practice realized in Naomi/Laban Showers reflects “an intertwinement that makes (*Botho*)/*Ubuntu* transformative as there is always more work to do together in shaping” in-law future relations (5).

Participants noted that Naomi/Laban Showers performed forms of preparation and advise in resolving and addressing conflicts. They note that often tensions exist between the mother-in-law and her daughter or son-in-law. For example, tensions can brew when a daughter-in-law marries a man who is closely tied to his family because her in-laws will expect or demand the right to full financial support from their son. If a woman marries their breadwinner-son, “a war within the family starts, for the wife is going to be seen as one who uses their breadwinner’s money” (NL16: 2016). Therefore, Naomi/Laban Showers’ goal is to empower, or *Go-*

Laya, in-law relations by reimagining and reconfiguring a new harmonious and communal relations of family in-laws.

Furthermore, it is important to note that when Naomi/Laban showers appropriate *Go-Laya* or counsel the mother-in-law, they do not replace the original Setswana practice. Instead, they differently build on the *Go-Laya* concept. Furthermore, they do not replicate its tenets but reproduce its logic. They deconstruct and reshape the cultural expectation (or assumption) and construction of the difficult and unwelcoming mother-in-law. Through *Go-Laya* of the Mother-in-law, Naomi/Laban showers seek to achieve a smoother effect of community building and transition. The showers shape *Go-Laya* with Naomi/Laban logic of values, beliefs system and communal living ethic. Therefore, the decision to counsel/*Go-Laya* the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law reconfigures what was culturally a difficult in-law-relationship between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law. This reconfiguration is affirmed with Mmualefe's assertion that *Botho/Ubuntu* "emphasizes relationships; it is about concern for others. *Motho* is a 'relating thing'" (2007: 3).¹²

The theme of inclusivity recurs in a deconstructive move in the Naomi/Laban Showers' *Go-Laya* Practice. Naomi/Laban participants noted that the

¹² See also Musa Dube. (2018), "I am because we are: Giving primacy to African indigenous values in HIV/AIDS prevention" in M.F. Murove, ed. *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*. (University of KwaZulu Natal Press).

Setswana *Go-Laya* marital practice is exclusive to married people. They alone qualify *Go-Laya*. According to Ellece, “the duty of counselling the bride lies with her married aunts and other married female relatives. The groom is counseled by his married uncles and other married male relatives” (2013: 45). However, Naomi/Laban Showers are inclusive. Comparing and marking Naomi/Laban Shower unique from Setswana traditional marriage activities, participants articulated openness and inclusivity “to a wider spectrum of people, relatives, friends, colleagues, unmarried individuals, etc. Setswana traditional marriage practices limit attendance to specific groups” (NL 2016). The Naomi/Laban Showers include all women, be they single, married, divorced, or widowed. Its logic is that the community of Setswana marriage includes single, married, divorced and widowed relatives of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

This practice, according to Dolamo (2013), demonstrates that “*Botho/Ubuntu* is an agent or a factor in human relationship and interaction” (1). Dolamo further argues that the secret in *Botho/Ubuntu* is “for individuals to realize that they would become human only by becoming members of their respective communities” (*Ibid.*). Therefore, this inclusion thinks and writes a *Botho/Ubuntu* “ontology and epistemology” (Dolamo, 2013: 3) of an inclusive community that is determined by every individual forming a community of “I am, therefore, we are” (Mmualefhe 2007: 7). *Botho/Ubuntu* “always entails a social bond, but one that is always in the course of being shaped and reshaped by the

heavy ethical demands it puts on all its participants” (2013: 3).

The Naomi/Laban Shower narratives and the Creation of the Mother-in-Law Womanist-Botho/Ubuntu Subjectivity

This section investigates how *Botho/Ubuntu* activities in the urban space construct and reconstruct gender. We closely read and critically analyse the Naomi/Laban showers’ facilitators’ narratives for the following objective as initially stated: How the Naomi/Laban Shower facilitators’ data narratives construct and reconstruct gender through the representation of the mother-in-law as a driver and builder of the community and how that representation is an example of manifesting community.

The narratives of the Showers’ Facilitators are the foundational texts of the showers. The narratives can be signified as the arts and transcripts of reconstruction and reconfiguration.¹³ The narrative transcripts forge and create Naomi/Laban Showers as new cultural spaces. *In the Kitchen* (1991), Olga Idriss Davis cites Martin and Nakayama who define cultural spaces as “both a particular location that has

¹³ This art of reconstruction and reconfiguration is informed by James C. Scott’s famous book, *Domination, and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990). Domination proposes that in any context, a public script be produced and displayed in the face of direct surveillance while simultaneously a hidden transcript is spoken on stage. Naomi/Laban Showers do not fulfil either. However, the idea of transcripts or arts is quite relevant to the work that the showers perform.

culturally constructed meaning and a metaphorical space from which we communicate” (1991: 365). Naomi/Laban Showers create female “particular locations” (365) that culturally construct and reconstruct gender meaning. Naomi/Laban showers are also “metaphorical spaces” (365) located in the “experiences to focus on the relationship between communication and culture” (365). Since gender is an important focus of the showers, the facilitators’ narratives foreground the mother-in-law as the driver and builder of community. The facilitators’ narratives emphasized her reign within the domestic space. There were instances where the mother-in-law was advised to seek her own independent space from her husband by not becoming the link between her daughter-in-law and husband.

Both Womanist and *Botho/Ubuntu* have similar values and have the potential to enable more liberating and emancipatory experiences for women. The Womanist ethic insists on turning a critical eye on culture and social images – Naomi/Laban Showers turn a critical eye on negative cultural experiences of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Through the narratives, the showers critically intervene in gender discourses of oppression.

The Naomi/Laban Showers Facilitators’ opening statements are reproduced below

NL17: We are here to explore how to receive daughters-in-law in our families and to build affirming relationships. We are holding this shower so that we can honor God the creator

of marriage, so that we can avoid the curse of Miriam. We realize that while there are numerous bridal showers held for the soon to be brides, to prepare them for the marriage institution, no one, on the other hand, prepares the parents of the couples who about to marry. There is an assumption, rather, that these parents know how to receive a daughter-in-law or a son-in-law. Evidence on the grounds, however, indicates otherwise, since mothers-in-laws are known to oppress their daughters-in-laws leading to marriage break. Reading the book of Naomi gives us a good example on building a healthy relationship with our daughter-in laws (2016).

The facilitators' narratives indicate they are intentional in their *Go-Laya*/counsel. The facilitators noted there was a dearth in pre-marital and marital practices like bridal showers or *Go-laya* marital practices. They observed that the brides are often thoroughly prepared. However, they pointed out that the parents of the marrying couple are hardly initiated into receiving and relating with their daughters or sons-in-laws. They cautioned that this important relation is often left to unfold on its own. Their goal, therefore, was to prepare how mothers-in-law can receive their daughters-in-law and build life affirming relationships.

They argued that mothers-in-law are historically instrumental in the in-law relationships and have often played a role in their children's marriage. The

showers facilitators indicated the tyranny of the mother-in-law was produced by the mother-in-law's unwelcoming domestic spaces and bad attitude towards her daughter-in-law. They disclosed that "evidence on the ground says the mother-in-law" (NL16:2016) is the instigator of tensed relationship with and to her daughter-in-law. They noted that "mothers-in-laws are known to oppress their daughters-in-laws leading to marriage break" (NL16:2016). They also pointed the difficulty of mothers-in-law letting go or releasing their sons for marriage. Using the metaphors of cutting, they asserted they want to cut "the chain of the mother-in-law revenge on their daughter-in-law, for the mothers-in-law have suffered "traditionally from their (own) mothers-in-law" (NL16:2016).

Noting the mother-in-law as the instigator may perhaps be unfair particularly if looked through gender stereotyping. However, the fact that the mother-in-law can create difficult communal existence is because the showers acknowledge and recognise the domestic space as traditionally female. The mother-in-law occupies and controls the "container of social actions".¹⁴ The mother-in-law's gender control of the domestic space is where she wields her power. Low, referenced in Cataline-Ionela Rezeanu (2015: 12), argues that "gender and

¹⁴ See Cataline-Ionela Rezeanu (2016, winter) "The Relationship between domestic space and gender identity: Some signs of the emergence of alternative domestic femininity and masculinity." *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology*, 6 (2).

space are produced in interactions influencing and being influenced by larger social structures and that gender identity and gender relations are produced in interactions that reproduce the cultural construction of gender differences.” However, the mother-in-law should not be solely seen as the one and only actor. She is also an “actor influencing and being influenced by social interactions” (2015:9) like her own in-law socialization and experiences. Naomi/Laban Showers seek to reinvent the mother-in-law’s domestic space and its social interactions from oppressive and tyrannical practices.

A Womanist Ethic’s interaction with *Botho/Ubuntu* Community building has the potential to present and initiate liberating communal spaces. Naomi/Laban Shower facilitators articulate the following: “We the Naomi/Laban shower facilitators, focus on the mother-in-law (particularly the groom’s mother)” (NL3:2016) because the “mother-in-law is the most important person in the lives of her married son” (NL3:2016). Since the mother-in-law is the central figure, or the showers’ protagonist, we propose that her subjectivity is the driving power in building Womanist-*Botho/Ubuntu* Ethics of Communal Living. We posit that Naomi/Laban showers create the *Mother-in-Law Subjectivity*. Subjectivity simply means created identity. Identity can be socially, politically, culturally, and religiously constructed. Most importantly, subjectivity means the “to take the perspective of the individual self, rather than some neutral, objective, perspective, from outside the

self's experience".¹⁵ In the Naomi/Laban Showers' context, the subjectivity of the mother-in-law requires both a "kind of (*social*) empathy"¹⁶ towards her daughter-in-law. The mother-in-law's subjectivity as discussed in the preceding paragraphs often entailed tyrannical and oppressive mother-in-law subjectivities to her daughter-in-law; that is the subject acts on the object. After all, the mother-in-law was in her space and site of power and control. However, the Shower Facilitators take the "seriously the lived experiences"¹⁷ of both the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

Naomi/Laban Showers seek to create the mother-in-law's subjectivity as a non-domineering figure. Because the mother-in-law's subjectivity is ontologically her being, it constitutes how she sees and creates her social world.¹⁸ In fact, their purpose is to deconstruct the (historically and socially) domineering mother-in-law subjectivity with an intention to create and reproduce domestic spaces of harmony, liberation, empowerment, and resistance against tyrannical representations of the mother-in-

¹⁵ See Jone Johnson Lewis. "Subjectivity in Women's History and Gender Studies." ThoughtCo, Feb. 11, 2020, [thoughtco.com/subjectivity-in-womens-history-3530472](https://www.thoughtco.com/subjectivity-in-womens-history-3530472).

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ See Gaie and Mmolai. (2007). *The Concept of Botho and HIV/AIDS in Botswana*. Edoret, Kenya: Zapf Chancery.

law subjectivity. In simple terms, the mother should create an ethical relationship.

Botho/Ubuntu narrates that ontologically social beings are actually intertwined, while Womanist insist on transformative women subjectivities. Since the mother-in-law's subjectivity is a recurring theme if not the foundation of the showers, the mother-in-law's subjectivity is linked and connected to her daughter-in-law or son-in-law. The showers seek to reconstitute her subjectivity. Paola Rebughini says that subjectivity is "relational, when the subject is the result of the relationship he or she has with other subjects and with immediate environment..." (2015: 2). As a Womanist-*Botho/Ubuntu* Subject, the mother-in-law's role is a social and religious subject engaged in *Botho/Ubuntu* relational processes with her daughter-in-law. Davies states that "Womanism is also a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community" (1999: 366).

How then does the mother-in-law's subjectivity function to perform and create affirming and conducive relationships? The mother-in-law's subjectivity is rebuilt and reconfigured from the traditional and gendered identities and practices of oppression and domination to a welcoming and liberating figure to her daughter-in-law. Two practices emerge in the subjectivity of the mother-in-law: first is the womanist consciousness of the mother-in-law's new subjectivity, and second is that the mother-in-law's subjectivity is one with agency.

The mother-in-law's agency is deployed through the practice of the "resisting subject" (1994: 37). She (must) resist in meddling in her son's marriage through initiating harmonious relationship with her daughter-in-law. But subjectivity is not an individual identity. It is an identity produced by articulating the *Botho/Ubuntu* logic about character and conduct of the mother-in-law. Her subjectivity is an important vehicle through which *Botho/Ubuntu*'s can build interdependence of persons for the development and fulfilment of their potential to be both individuals and community through the practice of Un-Othering.

The Un-Othering of the daughter-in-law is one of the key driving values of Naomi/Laban shower. We appropriate the logic of Othering to frame the daughter-in-law's identity in relation to her mother-in-law. Subjectivity in identity and culture has always developed through its interaction with the Other. If the mother-in-law is the subject, the daughter-in-law is located in the Other. She is in essence an Other. Othering is a term that expresses prejudice based on group or individual identities. It signifies the many various forms of prejudice and oppression. John A. Powell and Stephen Menendian define Othering as "a set of dynamics, process, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human different based on group identities."¹⁹ Powell and

¹⁹ From John A. Powell and Stephen Menendian's "The Problem of Othering: Towards Inclusiveness and Belonging." www.otheringandbelonging.org, June 29, 2019.

Menendian point out that Othering captures “expressions of prejudice and behaviours” that are unwanted and undesired. The Other is an identity that is the complete opposite of the subject. The Other is often an anomaly. The Other is a stranger to be known only through negativity and limitations. The Other is often marginal. The Other is unwanted, unwelcome and remains in the periphery. The mother-in-law’s subjectivity is critical in the Un-Othering of the daughter-in-law.

When a woman marries into a family, she is an Other and a foreigner to her husband’s people, particularly to her husband’s mother. Foreignness relates to strange, unknown, and un-belonging. Therefore, her foreignness and Otherness is opposite to her mother-in-law. The Naomi/Laban shower facilitators rightly noted the daughter-in-law’s foreignness. They pointed that she is a foreigner, because she “has been raised differently; (the mother-in-law) doesn’t actually know how her daughter-in-law was raised; therefore, (the mother-in-law) must receive her, and (the mother-in-law) and was often required, traditionally, to create a space for her demonstrated in famous songs, like song, ‘*mosutele, mosutele, ke yoo fitlhile...*’²⁰ (NL15:2016) (translation: “Make room for your daughter-in-law. She has arrived.”).

²⁰ This is a song that usually accompanies Setswana wedding celebrations. It goes like this: “Mmatswale tlogela dipitsa tseo; Monnga tsona ke yo o fitlhile; Mosutele, Mosutele, ke yo o fitlhile.” This song translates as “the mother-in-law should refrain from cooking, as the owner has arrived; the mother-in-law should step aside for her daughter-in-law to take over.”

Moeti and others claim this song is sang to welcome the bride to her husband's family. They say the song underscores "communalism that the wife is coming to a place where the mother in-law has been in control of the kitchen, so the mother-in-law has to create a space for the wife to participate in household duties so that together they may know each other better and hence build a relationship" (2017: 69). The song's sentiment, however gendered, echoes the mother-in-law's welcoming of her daughter-in-law. However, Naomi/Laban Showers are not so easily lulled. They insist on a visible real practice and ceremonial practice of receiving the daughter-in-law. Therefore, the mother-in-law should rework to un-Other her daughter-in-law. Like the biblical Naomi, the mother-in-law should make a home for her daughter-in-law. She must create a harmonious social existence.

The following biblical allusions were used to emphasise the mother-in-law's role in 'un-Othering' her daughter-in-law:

NL17: Naomi took a daughter-in-law, and they were not from the same place. Naomi was a mother-in-law from Bethlehem and her son married Ruth from Moab. Naomi called Ruth, "my daughter", and taught her how-to live in the Bethlehem culture. Her survival is on her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law, Mrs. Dinake, needs to be trained on how to receive her daughter-in-law (2016).

In their insistence that the daughter-in-law should be un-Othered, Naomi/Laban Shower facilitators use pregnancy, labour pain and delivery metaphors. The Naomi/Laban Shower facilitators insist that the mother-in-law should think herself delivering a new daughter through the practice of *Kgoroso*. (The term describes the official ceremony for bringing the new wife to the home of her husband's family). Since the husband is the head of the family in Setswana culture, the wife is usually taken or delivered at her husband's people. Even though the daughter-in-law and her husband live in a different geographical place, the husband's mother's homestead becomes the most important space of their lives. It is where the daughter-in-law will first make her home and will always remain part of his family, apart from her independent home and in the city (workplace). Therefore, the daughter-in-law's relationship with her mother-in-law is very important. The Naomi/Laban shower facilitators insist that prior to the *Kgoroso*, the mother-in-law should begin to think with the idea of pregnancy, labour and delivery of a new daughter.

How then do these metaphors function in the Un-Othering of her daughter-in-law? On the day of *Kgoroso*, the mother-in-law should receive her daughter-in-law with a mindset of delivery and imagine birth pangs. They suggested the following to one of the mothers-in-laws:

Mrs. Stella²¹, you are receiving a daughter on the 3rd of November 2016. We pray that you should be highly expectant and give birth to a daughter on November 5th. Deliver a daughter. After delivery, you can no longer call her ngwetsi or daughter-in-law. She is your daughter. If you fail to deliver her, you will not properly receive her.

The metaphor is a theoretical significance for the mother-in-law to think herself as giving birth to a daughter. The mother-in-law will birth her daughter-in-law through *Kgoroso* marital celebrations. The metaphor of birthing or delivering a baby, rather a daughter-in-law, was appropriated to reframe her role and transfer her status from mother-in-law to mother proper. The mother-in-law will encounter her daughter-in-law in the “singularity of the other”,²² and not in the opposition of the self and the other. The mother-in-law must “not only create inclusive structures, but (she) must foster new identities ad inclusive narratives that can support all.”²³ After that,

²¹ Not her real name.

²² See Mayra Rivera (2007) *The Touch of the Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 65.

²³ Karen Barkey. (2017, June). “Contemporary cases of shared sacred sites: Forms of othering or belonging?”
www.otheringandbelonging.org.

the daughter-in-law will no longer be othered. She, like, her mother, is a subject, in fact, a daughter.²⁴

Conclusion

This article explored Womanist-*Botho/Ubuntu* Ethic of Communal Living in Naomi/Laban Showers in Gaborone and surrounding semi-urban areas. We drew from both Womanist/Womanism Social theory and the African Philosophy of *Botho/Ubuntu* to read gender construction and creation of *Botho/Ubuntu* community in Naomi/Laban Showers. This study discussed how reading with and through biblical in-law narratives was essential to Naomi/Laban facilitators' counsel while simultaneously drawing on the Setswana marital practices of *Go-Laya* to counsel the mother-in-law. We argued through a close reading and analysis of the Naomi/Laban Shower data that the Showers create and build inclusive Womanist spaces and *Botho/Ubuntu* community living with the focus on the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. The mother-in-law as the protagonist of the Naomi/Laban shower is empowered to forge her own unique identity with her daughter-in-law. This unique identity is constructed against the deconstruction of negative scripts of a traditional Motswana mother-in-law which may possibly be patriarchal constructs of women and their relations with each other. Given the

²⁴ In fact, the new endearing labels are now mother-in-love and daughter-in-love, replacing mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

*Naomi/Laban Showers and
the Creation of Womanist*

above summation of our study, more questions can be posed to the nature of the showers such as, for example, their construction of Womanist centeredness spaces. Therefore, we have proposed and demonstrated that the Naomi/Laban showers are in the business of creating a Womanist-*Botho/Ubuntu* Ethic of Communal Living.

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*Naomi/Laban Showers and
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