

Emergent rites of passage in Botswana: The case study of Naomi/Laban showers

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Abstract

A group of researchers from the University of Botswana carried out research on “Botho/Ubuntu and Community Building in the Urban Space: An exploration of Naomi, Laban, Bridal and Baby Showers in Gaborone” which was generously funded by the John Templeton Foundation. The aim of the research was to explore how the African/Setswana concept of Botho/Ubuntu inspires the showers in urban and peri-urban villages in Botswana. Our observation on these showers is that the beneficiaries are assisted, oriented and re-orientated, taught, advised, and supported materially, emotionally and morally by the community as they enter new stages and statuses of their lives. The study was carried out within Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana and the surrounding villages. This paper is limited to two of the four showers studied, namely, Naomi and Laban showers. The said showers are the newest in the country. The project employed a mixed method design which combined quantitative and qualitative research methods. The paper examined how, and to what extent, the two showers constitute emergent rites of passage and how these express the Ubuntu/botho ethos. The main findings of the study were that the Laban /Naomi showers are emerging rites of passage, which, like traditional rites of passage, express the Botho/Ubuntu ethos. However, these emergent rites of passage go beyond the traditional ones in that they are more inclusive, and cater for the needs of contemporary urban citizens.

Keywords: Botho/Ubuntu, Community Building, Emergent Rites, Naomi, Laban

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Introduction

In 2016, a group of scholars from different faculties of the University of Botswana conducted an empirical field work study under the title, “*Botho/Ubuntu* and Community Building in the Urban Space: An exploration of Naomi, Laban, Bridal and Baby Showers in Gaborone”, henceforth the “Botho/Ubuntu Project.” The research was made possible by the generous funding of the John Templeton Foundation through the Nagel Institute. It focused on four showers namely; Baby, Bridal, Naomi and Laban showers. The field work was carried out in Gaborone and the peri-urban villages of Tlokweng, Mmopane, Mogoditshane, Ramotswa, Kanye and Molepolole. This paper therefore presents the findings of an investigation on two of the four showers; namely, the Naomi and Laban showers, and argues that these seem to be emerging rites of passage in Botswana. We interpret these rites of passage within the framework of *Botho/Ubuntu*, a Tswana/African ethos best captured in the words of Desmond Tutu:

A person is a person through other persons. None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human (2004: 25).

The term ‘emergent’ (or ‘emerging’) seems appropriate because baby and bridal showers are common practice in Botswana, as is in many other parts of the world. For instance, Montemuro (2005, 2006) suggests that bridal showers (also known as kitchen showers) can be traced back to the sixteenth and seventeenth century Western Europe as pre-wedding activities organized by women for women. Baby showers too have a long history, as scholarly literature indicates that they originated in ancient times and have continued to evolve to the present-day baby showers. In contrast, Naomi and Laban showers are relatively new in Botswana and, as far as we are aware, are practiced nowhere else. Before we continue, we would like to briefly explain the concept of *Botho/Ubuntu* which is the conceptual framework of the larger research project from which this paper has emerged.

***Botho/Ubuntu* ethos**

Defining *botho/ubuntu* ethos and spirituality is not easy because, as one scholar observed, it is illusive and difficult to pin down (Gaie 2007: 32). However, we provide the sense in which concept is commonly understood, as the ethos that gives society the thread that connects and unites it. John Mbiti popularized the saying that “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti 1970:141). At the heart of *Botho/Ubuntu* ethos, therefore, is the communal ideal of reciprocal and symbiotic human relations. *Botho* expresses the shared African philosophy which underlines the importance of human relationships and shared values (Mmualefhe 2007:3). The concept is founded on the understanding that the existence and wellbeing of an individual person cannot be separated from those of others. Thus, one’s well-being is defined by that of others in the spirit of “I relate, therefore, I am” (Mmualefhe 2007: 3, following Mbiti 1970: 282). In Setswana culture, according to Gaie (2007: 30), “*Botho* is the essence of being human.” Further, society expects certain behaviours from individuals that reflect the metaphysical reality called *motho* (human being) as a being that captures the moral concept of *Botho*” (Gaie 2007: 32). Therefore, without trying to provide an exhaustive definition of *Botho/Ubuntu*, we want to point out that *Botho* recognizes the rights and responsibilities of all people, individually and collectively; it promotes the social

wholeness of all (Dube et.al. 2018: 6). This is the force (as we shall see shortly) that drives the Naomi and Laban showers which were the object of the study we carried out.

First we describe our understanding of rites of passage in order to be able to situate the Naomi and Laban showers within the framework of rites of passage as they emerge in the context of Botswana.

Understanding rites of passage in Botswana: An historical background

Rites of passage are “ceremonies that mark important transitional periods in a person's life. They include birth, puberty, marriage, having children, and death. The ceremonies usually involve ritual activities and teachings designed to strip individuals of their [old] roles and prepare them for new ones.”¹ Rites of passage are therefore rituals and/or ceremonies that accompany major personal transitions by individuals as they move from birth to death (Fischer and Gainer 1993: 320). A famous folklorist, Arnold Van Gennep (1960) found that virtually all rituals share or follow the same tripartite sequential structure of separation, transition and incorporation. According to Walter Gmelch (2000: 3) the first phase consists of separating a person from the familiar social-context; the second phase represents a gap between the old way of being and the new; the final stage is when the inner changes have happened, and the person re-enters the social order on a new basis. Thus, rites of passage mark a process by which an individual is separated from their old self or status to transition into a new self and status and be incorporated into a new position and status in life. The process, which is necessitated by growth and development, begins at birth and spans over a person's life, marked at every stage by rites of passage enacted in ritualized activities or ceremonies.

We now briefly discuss rites of passage in the context of Setswana culture and in Botswana more generally. This is to provide the backdrop against which the Laban and Naomi may be understood. As noted by Denbow and Thebe (2006: 181) Botswana mark important stages in life with ceremonies and rituals. These stages include the naming of a newborn baby, puberty, marriage and death. During such significant stages in the life of an individual, the community comes together to recognize and provide support to families and individuals as they assume new roles and responsibilities (Denbow & Thebe 2006: 181).

Birth and naming rites

Denbow and Thebe (2006) further explains that, according to Setswana culture, after a woman has given birth to a newborn baby, she undergoes a period of confinement (*botsetsi*) which ranges from three to six months (cf. Amanze 1998: 19). After the seclusion period a ceremony to reconnect her and the baby with the rest of the family and society, takes place. During such a ceremony known as *mantsho* which literally means ‘the taking out of the house’ certain rituals are performed to welcome and usher the mother and the new baby into the outside world (following months of confinement to the birth hut). During this time the baby is also named, and the names traditionally make reference to and connect the child to some event(s) surrounding the baby's birth. For instance, a child born during a rainy period could be named *Mmapula* (mother of rain), *Rapula* (father of rain), *Motlalepula* (the one who came with the rain), *Pule* (rain), *Mpule* (*the rain one*) etcetera (Denbow & Thebe 2006: 181-2).

Puberty rites

Traditionally, puberty was also marked by ritual activities, a practice that is no longer as widespread in contemporary Botswana as it used to be in the past (Denbow & Thebe 2006). Appropriate rituals were performed during the first menstrual period. For example, traditionally girls were confined for some time when they had their first menstruation, and during that period, older women would teach them about the stage of womanhood they were now entering into. They would be taught how to practice good hygiene every time they had their periods, how to become good wives and the dangers of engaging in (pre-marital) sexual activities (Denbow & Thebe 2006: 182).

Another important ritual performed at puberty was the initiation ceremony which marked an important transition from childhood to adulthood (Amanze 1998: 20). Among those Tswana cultures where these ceremonies were part of the culture, there were separate ceremonies for boys and girls, and these were *bogwera* and *bojale* respectively (Schapera. It is not clear what was taught to the initiates during the ceremonies as they were very secretive (Amanze 1998: 21). However, it is thought that the initiates underwent rigorous and intense training which was considered important and necessary for their new responsibilities as adult men and women. For instance, it is believed that boys were taught their responsibilities as heads of families and how to effectively perform the duties entrusted upon them by the society (*morafe*). They also learnt important skills such as hunting, dancing, carpentry, and making shields (Amanze, 1998: 22). Girls were taught cooking, mothering and nurturing skills and housekeeping skills in general. They were also taught the values of respect, especially towards their husbands, but also to the rest of the community. At the end of their initiation schools, the now trained men and women were welcomed into the society as full citizens with certain rights, duties and responsibilities (Amanze 1998: 22). It was at the stage of puberty, especially during the ceremonies, that gender roles were instilled into individuals so that there were clear demarcations between masculine and feminine roles. Men were taught to be tough, to provide and to protect their families, of which they were heads. Women were taught to keep their lowly ranks as domestic workers, child bearers and servants of their master husbands.

Marriage rites

Amanze maintains that marriage is regarded as a very important rite of passage in traditional Setswana culture, because it not only forms the basic unit of society, the family, but it also ensures the continuity of the group, lineage and tribe (Amanze 1998:22). Ellece (2011: 43) has noted that a ritual called *go laya* (ritual advice), is perhaps the most important of marriage ceremonies in traditional as well as contemporary Botswana. What happens is that before a bride is presented to her in-laws, her married female relatives gather together and take turns to advise her on how to be a good wife. Ellece further maintains that recently even the groom is subjected to the *go laya* ritual further pointing out that there are differences in the content that each is given (2011: 43). During this ritual gender roles are accentuated. Further still, Ellece (2011) argues that while the ritual is intended to foster a harmonious relationship between married partners, it is often self-defeating because of its patriarchal nature, in that females are taught the values of long suffering and tolerance (towards their husbands' indiscretions) which perpetuates inequality in marriages in Botswana.

Amanze points to another important ritual that accompanies marriage ceremonies in the country. According to Amanze payment of *bogadi* "bride price/dowry" is a ritual that transfers the labour of a woman and her childbearing properties to her husband and his family (1998: 22). The same point has been reiterated by scholars including Masenya (1997),

Chirawu (2006) and Ellece (2012). The *bogadi* (*lobola*) is a practice in which the man who wants to marry pays cattle to the family of intended wife, The ritual has often been used as the scapegoat for the oppression and abuse of women, although it is often justified and sugar coated as ‘a token of appreciation’ (Ellece and Rapoo 2013) and proffered as an important aspect of Setswana culture. It has, however, often given men the excuse to behave as owners of their wives since *bogadi* is like a form of purchase (Masenya 1997; Dube 2003 and Gichaara 2008). The effects of bride price (*bogadi*) on gender relations within marriage are not our focus in this article; we focus on how Naomi and Laban showers are emergent rites of passage in Botswana. In what follows we briefly outline the objectives and research questions that informed our research before expounding on the methodology that was used.

Objectives and research questions

Our study titled “*Botho/Ubuntu* and Community Building in the Urban Space: An exploration of Naomi, Laban, Bridal and Baby Showers in Gaborone” had several objectives and research questions. We will start by mapping the project’s objectives and research questions as adapted from the research proposal that was submitted to the John Templeton Foundation through the Nagel Institute when we were applying for funding. They are listed below in order to indicate where we are coming from in terms of the focus of this paper. The objectives of the *Botho/Ubuntu* and Community Building Project were to:

1. Explore the theological and spiritual basis of *botho/ubuntu* values/ethics
2. Examine how *botho/ubuntu* ethos was understood and manifested in traditional Botswana communities
3. Analyse how *botho/ubuntu* ethos is expressed in contemporary urban settings of Botswana
4. Investigate how *botho/ubuntu* activities in the urban space construct and reconstruct gender
5. Highlight how *botho/ubuntu* spirituality can inform the building and maintenance of justice-loving communities.

The research questions were as follows:

1. How is the *botho/ubuntu* ethos and spirituality founded and manifested in the indigenous Botswana communities?
2. How does the *botho/ubuntu* ethos drive the Naomi, Laban, Bridal and Baby shower events in the urban space?
3. What cultural traditions and roles are produced, reproduced or deconstructed in the urban space through the Naomi, Laban, bridal and baby showers.
4. How do these *botho/ubuntu* driven showers forge an African-founded spirituality?
5. How can *botho/ubuntu* spirituality foster justice-loving communities that rally against the encroachment of poverty in urban spaces and empower women?

The idea of Naomi and Laban showers as emergent rites of passage is derived from research question number three of the *Botho/Ubuntu* and Community Building Project as outlined above. The question here referred to is “What cultural traditions and roles are produced, reproduced or challenged in the urban space through the Naomi, Laban, bridal and baby showers?” In this paper we, focus on the Naomi and Laban showers only. We have already shown that Setswana culture had, and still has, rituals and ceremonies that mark important transitions in an individual’s life. Naomi and Laban showers are similar to some of these traditional rites of passage, especially the marriage ones. This shall be demonstrated later in

this paper. But before that, we discuss the method(s) used in the data collection stage of the study. Our aim was to find out how the Naomi and Laban showers support our claim that they are emergent rites of passage in Botswana.

Methods

In order to achieve the above objectives, and to find answers to our research questions, the Botho/*Ubuntu* Project adopted a mixed method design. The significance of the mixed design was to use multiple data collection techniques as they play a supportive role to each other (Mertens 2014; Creswell 2009). A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, as used in the project has advantages of convergence, through the illustration of points, which brings flexibility, and helps to verify results. It also ascertains that facts are observed within the context and perspective of the respondent. The qualitative methods enrich the variables under study by linking them to specific incidents and observations. The research design is therefore both descriptive and exploratory in nature. The interactive character of the showers necessitated such a combination of methods. As noted by Jick (1979: 608), the importance of such integration is supported by many scholars (cf. Reiss 1968; Diesing 1971). In sum, combining different methodologies in the study of one phenomenon, or triangulation, according to Jick (1979:604) and others (cf. Denzin 1978), is important in that the weaknesses inherent in the use of a single method is compensated for by the counterbalancing strengths of the other. The study therefore integrated fieldwork and survey methods. We collected quantitative data from the attendees through self-administered questionnaires. Qualitative data were collected through participatory observation (cf. Bryman 2001) coupled with extensive interviews of the organizers and beneficiaries. These methods are discussed at length in the main the research project. We used social media and other personal networks to get our informants who in turn invited us to their showers. We took turns to attend the showers and our focus was on showers in Gaborone and peri-urban areas of Mogoditshane, Tlokweng, Kanye, Molepolole, Ramotswa and Mmopane. In total fifteen Naomi and Laban showers were attended by the research team. The showers were almost always held concurrently. This was probably due to the nature of the showers; the Naomi shower is for the prospective mother-in-law and the Laban is for the prospective father-in-law, which means that the two parents may be a married couple, hence the showers being held at the same time.

Naomi and Laban showers: What are they and where do they come from?

According to our research findings, the Naomi and Laban showers are organized specifically for women and men who are about to become mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law respectively. However, it was observed that during these showers, the bride and the groom to be were also invited and expected to attend. Both showers can be traced to the biblical characters of Naomi in the Book of Ruth and Laban in the book of Genesis. This section begins with a brief history of each of the showers which is followed by a narrative description of the showers in order to give the reader a clear picture of what happens at the Naomi and/Laban showers. After the narrative description we will move onto a discussion of the data on the two.

The research showed that the two showers discussed here started in Botswana, founded by a group of women from Pentecostal Christian backgrounds. The women, who now act as leaders, teachers, facilitators and organizers of the Naomi and/Laban showers, further revealed that they saw the need to teach other women about the important stage of being an in-law. The women asserted that one of their friends was preparing to receive a

daughter-in-law, but she worried about how she was going to accept the new member of the family. Thus, her friends organized a counseling session for her. The idea behind this initiative was to foster a harmonious relationship between the mother-in-law to be and her prospective daughter-in-law. The ritual was intended to provide a friendly social platform to share ideas and experiences on the issue. They named the ceremony the Naomi shower. As time went, the founders realized that there was need to further their services to include men who are about to become fathers-in-law as well as to bring in the prospective bride and groom into the showers as beneficiaries of the counseling services. The question now is why Naomi and/Laban? What do the showers have to do with the biblical characters branded after them? To help the reader to understand the concept of Naomi/Laban showers we provide condensed summaries of the stories of Naomi and Laban from the Bible.

The story of Naomi: Ruth 1-4

Naomi is a female character in the biblical book of Ruth which can be summarized as the story of women who struggle to survive in a man's world (Masenya 2004: 46). The story begins with a tragedy in which a migrant family of four, namely, Naomi and her husband Elimelech and their two sons Mahlon and Kidron, who were originally from Bethlehem in Judah went to Moab. There they were visited by a misfortune; Elimelech and his two sons died and left behind three childless widows; Naomi and her widowed daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah. Overcome by grief, Naomi decided to go back home to Bethlehem. She asked Orpah and Ruth, who were from Moab, to also return to their families. While Orpah heeded Naomi and left, Ruth made a vow to Naomi thus:

Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow after you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you sojourn I will sojourn; your people shall be my people and your God my God (Ruth 1:16).

The pledge has been described by Athalya Brenner (1993) as a memorable and poignant statement of loyalty. Another scholar, Patricia Tull (2003) describes the commitment as "fierce fidelity" (p.56). Sharing similar sentiments, Carolyn Pressler (2002) asserts that Ruth's loyalty to Naomi "crosses ethnic and religious boundaries and flies in the face of social conventions" (p. 265). It is an example of what true loyalty means (cf. Fewell and Gunn 2009; Meyers 1993). By so pledging, Ruth was not only selfless and loyal, but also trustworthy. Importantly, she and Naomi went back together to Bethlehem where they lived in a loyal loving partnership as mother and daughter-in-law. Thus, the Naomi shower envisages that mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law should learn from the example of Naomi and Ruth and follow their example.

However, we cannot ignore the fact that Naomi and Ruth were not angels. The biblical narrative does not airbrush their imperfections. Naomi instructed Ruth to seduce Boaz (Ruth 3:3-4) and Ruth did as directed. For that Naomi has been described as a crafty old woman (Campbell 1974). Ruth herself can also be faulted for agreeing to seduce Boaz and acting like a harlot (cf. Ruth 3:7). It is such details and more that make the Naomi shower a deconstructive strategy to the biblical text itself. It is deconstructive in the sense that the founders are only interested in the aspect of the narrative that portrays the two female characters as exemplars of a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship, and not as co-conspirators in subversive behaviour.

The relationship between mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law can be some of the most difficult familial relationships (Jackson and Berg-Cross 1988). Lucy Fischer (1983) contends that mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law have a potentially competitive relationship when compared to fathers-in-law against sons-in-law. Without going into depth on

the issue regarding mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law rivalries, it is on the understanding that such relationships are challenging that the Naomi shower was conceived.

The story of Laban: Genesis 29-31

The story of Laban and Jacob is recorded in Genesis 29-31. It is stated that Jacob wanted to marry Laban's youngest daughter Rachel but was tricked by the girls' father into marrying Leah instead. Leah, according to the story, was Rachel's eldest sister. As the story goes, it is the girls (Rachel and Leah) had no say in the entire plan involving their getting married to one man, and that their husband had to work hard for their father. Laban further sought to dispossess Jacob of his hard-earned possessions (Genesis 31:7-12). Ultimately the inevitable break up between the two men occurred as Laban and Jacob made a legal contract to go their separate ways.

Petersen (2005) suggests that the Jacob and Laban story exemplifies a relationship challenge. Their relationship was characterized by deceit and theft. The only option was for the two to separate, and to do this Laban swore by the god of Nahor while Jacob swore by the fear of the god of his father Isaac. According to Petersen (2005), Laban's household was no longer viewed as part of the immediate family of Jacob. All that was left for Jacob was to hope for pardon and remission of legal consequences. In the context on Botswana, the Laban shower seeks to prevent possible tragedies between fathers-in-law and sons-in-law and it serves as a deconstruction of the biblical Laban narrative.

The Naomi and/ Laban showers

Naomi and/Laban showers are held in a home setting. The home where the shower is held is prepared so that tables and chairs and a tent for shade are set up. The atmosphere is similar to a wedding ceremony in Botswana. See figure 1 below.



Figure 1: The setting typical of the Naomi and /Laban shower

What we observed is that the showers are organized by close friends and relatives, and usually hosted by a friend to the one who is being showered. The attire resembles that of a traditional wedding ritual of *go batla* and *go laya* (the pre-marital counselling). Women are dressed in blue German prints known as *leteisi* and shawls and head scarves as shown in the figure below.



Figure 2: Seating arrangement and dress code at a Naomi shower

The showers begin with a prayer and one or two Christian songs, typical of a Christian gathering. One such song goes like: *Modimo o refile sebakanyana se*, which means “God has given us this little opportunity.” All the guests are greeted and welcomed by the leader of the ceremony. The mother-in-law and father-in-law to be, and their prospective daughter and/son-in-laws are introduced. The organisers of the showers take turns to teach at the showers. The Bible, especially the stories of Naomi and Laban, form the basis for the teaching. However, any scripture deemed relevant can be used. For instance, at one shower the teaching began with the reading of Titus 2:2-5 which states:

Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. (NIV)

While the focus is on the prospective parents-in-law, all the attendees are reminded that they too should receive the teaching so that they can use it to better and foster their own relationships with their in-laws. The beneficiaries of the showers are advised to get ready to receive a new child who is about to be born into their family as either a daughter/son-in-law. They are also cautioned to let go of their child who is to be given away in marriage to another family where she or he will be adopted through marriage. Prospective parents-in-law are further cautioned that once married, their children are no longer under their custody as they have become one with their marriage partners (Genesis 1:24). That is, parents are taught to let go completely so that they do not try to ‘remote control’ their married children. The metaphor of pregnancy is used to show how the mother in law should prepare for her daughter-in-law just as she would prepare for her unborn child. In other words, the prospective mother-in-law (Naomi) who is about to receive a daughter-in-law is pregnant and on the wedding day she will give birth to a child (daughter-in-law). She is counseled to love, care for and nurture this new child. The same teaching is given to the man (Laban). He is expected to love, teach and impart his culture to the young man who is coming into his family. He is urged to treat him like his own son.

A special ritual is usually performed in the Naomi and Laban showers. is one in It involves the two families who are about to become in-laws being asked to join hands and unite as demonstrated in figure 3 below:



Figure 3: A uniting ritual in a Naomi /Laban shower

Ideally there should be six people in the ritual, comprising of three couples, namely, the parents of the prospective bride, the parents of the groom as well as the prospective bride and groom. In the above picture, the women in the middle are the bride’s mother on the left and In the extreme left is the bride followed by her father, then her mother who is facing the groom’s mother. To the extreme right is the groom. The groom’s father is not in the picture above because the groom’s mother is a single parent. What happens here is that the two families face each other. The prospective in-laws hold hands and unite as one in an embrace. The lesson of this ritual is that, not only are the two families becoming united through their children’s marriage, but also that as the bride faces her mother-in-law, she is now her parent and the groom also faces his prospective wife’s parents who from the wedding day will be his parents too. So, while a daughter is born into her husband’s family as a daughter-in-law, the groom is born into his wife’s family as a son-in-law. This is consistent with the Setswana culture where, during the premarital counselling (*patlo*) ceremony, the bride is often told, “these are the parents we give to you. You are no longer the child of this household. You are their child...” (Ellece 2007: 234).

Naomi and /Laban shower interview data

As indicated in the methodology section of this paper, data were collected using various tools, the interview data is chosen here as a sample to highlight what transpired at the showers. The data were chosen in an ad-hoc fashion for the limited purpose of this discussion which is to show how the Naomi and/Laban showers are a reconstruction of the traditional *go laya* and *patlo* rituals and in turn have become emergent rites of passage. The data cannot be exhaustively analyzed given the substantial amount that was collected during the research project. The questions are only a part of t the interview guide that was used.

1. Question: Please explain in detail the purpose of the Naomi-Laban showers in the urban space.

Answers:

- a. *Ke go aga motho ka bo ene* (it is to build an individual self)

- b. *Go nale thuto ee tseneletseng. Go na le kgakololo mo batsading* (there is intense teaching. There is advice to the parents).
 - c. To build a relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.
 - d. It is educational and very important in teaching *botho*.
 - e. Offers counselling to the new in-laws.
 - f. To shower the mother with gifts and advice from the word of God and from Setswana culture.
 - g. It is to share and give advice to the new in-laws.
 - h. To educate, community building and assisting each other.
 - i. To develop healthy relationships between bride/groom and their in-laws.
 - j. To assist the mother-in-law of the groom to know how to handle the groom as a new child in her family. It also assists her financially through contributions.
2. How did Naomi-Laban shower (s) originate?

Answers:

- a. *E tsamaelana le go laya ngwetsi* (it is related to the *go laya* (to advise) rite of passage. *Ngwetsi le matsalaagwe ga ba tshela sentle*. (there is, usually, tension and conflict between mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law).
 - b. *Baebele. Ga go fose kgolagano ya rona ya Setswana gope, ke gore gone go nale kgakololo ee tseneletseng e eseng sephiri* (Bible: it is similar to the Setswana tradition of *go laya* except that it is done intensely and openly; not in secret).
 - c. *Ke bona e simolotswe ke bomme, gape e tswaa mo baebeleng. Ke selo se se siameng thata* (I realize it was founded by women and it is based on the bible. It is something very good).
 - d. Having observed conflicts between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, it was designed to build relationships.
 - e. Before I did not know where it came from but after attending, I realized it is biblical.
 - f. No idea except I read it in the bible.
 - g. A friend's daughter was getting married and friends organized a session for her (the friend) to encourage her and contribute towards wedding expenses.
 - h. I do not know.
 - i. Some Christian women gathered together and saw the need to teach each other.
 - j. There was this lady who was preparing for her daughter's marriage ceremony and kept asking herself how she was going to accept the new member of her family and her friends organized a counselling session for her.
 - k. No answer
3. How do you compare and contrast Naomi-Laban shower (s) with traditional cultural activities of welcoming a bride?

Similarities:

- a. *Go tshwana ka go laya* (the counselling is similar).
- b. *Go nkgopotsa ngwana a batlwa* (It reminds me of the traditional *patlo*)
- c. They are not different at all. However note: I feel incompetent to answer this question since I am single and Ngwaketsi culture excludes unmarried women from attending *patlo*.
- d. *Go tshwana le go laya ngwetsi le go laya mogwe* (it is similar to *go laya* the bride and the groom).
- e. *Go laya le go rutubatsa*. (To counsel and to calm).
- f. Counselling.
- g. *Go laya* (to give advice). Dimpho (gifts). Unity and oneness.
- h. Dress code. Respect. Different counsellors are invited.
- i. They all aim at character building.
- j. Advice. Encouragement. Financial support. Gifts. Attendance by friends, colleagues, relatives, church mates etc.
- k. Done by women only as organizers.

Differences:

- a. *Go laya ga batsadi eseng banyalani fela* (to give advice to the parents and not just the bride and the groom)
- b. *Naomi e bua puo phaa...patlo ya Setswana e sephiri* (Naomi shower speaks openly while the Setswana *patlo* ceremony is secretive).
- c. It exposes what culture keeps secret. *Naomi e ya aga* (Naomi shower builds) and does not tolerate oppression and unhappiness.
- d. Naomi demonstrates that it can build families and the nation.
- e. No answer
- f. *Matsale le batsadi botlhe baa laiwa* (the mother-in-law and all the parents are given advice/counselling).
- g. It involves both parents.
- h. Naomi-Laban gives spiritual support to the parents-in-law.
- i. Traditionally only married people attend.
- j. Women and men are mixed while traditionally they do it separately.
- k. Some cultural teachings can be biased on cultural beliefs. Naomi-Laban showers are based on biblical principles. Cultural activities can be gender biased.
- l. There is a gate pass to attend and money contributions are made immediately. There are some selected organizers. Naomi showers allow unmarried women and youth to attend. Naomi showers are more transparent. They encourage relationship building and openness. Men are allowed to attend.

4. What changes do Naomi-Laban shower(s) bring in the urban space when compared to the traditional activities in villages?

Answers:

- a. No answer
 - b. *E ka tokafatsa botsalano fa gare ga ngwetsi le matasale* (it can improve or foster a better relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law)
 - c. *Go tshwaraganya* (uniting). *Go bua boammaaruri* (to tell the truth). *Go bua puo-phaa* (to say it openly) and explaining the Bible.
 - d. I am not sure. It is the first time I attended.
 - e. No answer
 - f. Present giving
 - g. In urban areas people are not related and friends come together to give support.
 - h. Cannot think of any.
 - i. Christian women gather from different denominations and share the activity.
 - j. The showers gather us and bring us together in the urban space where we would otherwise have remained separated.
 - k. The showers include both men and women and can bring mutual understanding between the two.
 - l. They are not restricted to traditional values handed down from generation to generation.
 - m. They include teachings from the Bible.
 - n. Provide both spiritual and financial support.
5. Give examples of what might be identified as character-building in the Naomi-Laban showers.

Answers:

- a. No answer
- b. *Matsale o rutwa go amogela ngwetsi le ngwetsi e rutwa go amogrla matsale* (mother-in-law is taught how to receive a daughter-in-law and vice versa). *Ha ba tshwaragannwa go supa bokopano* (during the uniting ritual, unity is demonstrated)
- c. By telling people what really happens, Naomi-Laban tells it as it is; what may happen and what may cause it; they are better than pastors. They assist people to build their characters.
- d. Teaches all parties to be tolerant of and accepting each other in their differences.
- e. Provide social support.
- f. The advices given during the showers help build characters, not only of the recipients but all those attending.
- g. Biblical characters and discussed

- h. Even the dress code shows respect and *botho* is all about respect. In Setswana culture we show respect through dress code and the same is done in the showers.
- i. Accepting an in-law is an individual's responsibility and it contributes to community building. The mother-in-law is to serve as a steward to the couple and to mentor them throughout.

Naomi and Laban showers: Emergent rites of passage in Botswana

It is apparent that the Naomi and /Laban showers are emergent rites of passage in Botswana. This is because these showers re-produce and or re-contextualise some Setswana traditional rites of passage, especially those of *patlo* and *go laya* rituals. However, they also differ from *patlo* and *go laya*. For instance, in the traditional *patlo* ceremony in Botswana women and men participate in separate counseling (advice) ceremonies. The women counsel the bride inside the house while the men counsel the groom in the kgotla (a traditional male space in the front yard). As observed by Ellece (2011:44), the advice given to brides and grooms is based on a network of traditional discourses which perpetuate unequal power relations between spouses. The separate sitting arrangements during the ceremony clearly points to a segregation of gender in the traditional Setswana culture. Gender roles are assigned and dichotomized even by the choice of where the ceremonies take place. As a result explained by Ellece (2011:44) the advice given to the bride and groom reproduce gender stereotypes. In contrast, the Naomi/Laban showers provide a joint counseling and teaching session with all the the guest present regardless of marital status or gender. Thus, the showers allow for integration of men and women and their joint counseling. Additionally, the content of the counseling sessions is accessible to all, and is thus transparent compared to the Setswana ceremonies which are exclusive and secretive. The counselling ceremonies also subvert the traditional ceremonies of *patlo* and *go laya* which exclude unmarried women and men (Ellece 2011:45) by granting unmarried men, women and the youth to access to a traditionally inaccessible ritual. For instance, when asked to compare the Naomi and /Laban showers with traditional *patlo*, one of the participants said:

“I feel incompetent to answer the question because I am single, and the Setswana culture excludes unmarried people from attending the ritual. Naomi and /Laban showers are more relaxed and open. They involve both parents. Men and women are mixed while culturally they are separated. The showers allow unmarried women and the youth to attend. They are more transparent; the advice and teaching are not done in secret. They encourage relationship building that is based on openness. Parents are given counseling and not just the bride and the groom as in traditional rituals. The basis of the teaching is biblical although some cultural aspects are also apparent.”

The Naomi and Laban showers appropriate the *patlo* and *go laya* rituals and re-contextualize them so that the focus is not only on the bride and groom, but also on the mother- and father-in-law who are about receive a daughter- or son-in-law. Thus, the Naomi and Laban showers acknowledge the importance of parents-in-law in the success of their children's marriage. Character building is intended for both parents and their children who are entering into marriage.

The Setswana culture is further appropriated, subverted and adapted for biblical teachings. For instance, where the Setswana proverb says, “*monna selepe wa fapaanelwa* (“a man is an axe, he is passed around)” (Dube 2003), the Naomi /Laban teaches that *wa rona ga se selepe*; that is, “ours is not an axe.” The message here is that while the Setswana culture tolerates male sexual indiscretions such as infidelity, the aomil/Laban counseling explicitly

proscribes sexual immorality and infidelity. The bride is told to be faithful to her husband and vice versa. The metaphor of the well (*sediba*) is used to construct the woman's body as a "sacred well" meant for the exclusive use of her husband. Likewise, they teach the husband to drink exclusively from the same one well to reciprocate his wife's fidelity.

Consequently, the showers are characteristic of rites of passage in that they are meant for a mother and father who are about to make a transition to being mother- and father-in-law. The counselling also includes the bride and the groom who are transiting into the statuses of wife and husband as well as daughter- and son-in-law respectively. The new roles and statuses of the beneficiaries of the Naomi/Laban showers are celebrated by the community of close family and friends who give moral, financial and material support. Importantly, the community, just as in the traditional rites of passage, offers guidance to the bride and groom on the new responsibilities they are about to take on. The teachings aim at building character in all the participants of the showers. This is in line with the spirit of *botho/ubuntu*, whose core principle is that a person is a person because of other people, and that the wellbeing of the individual is dependent on the wellbeing of the community and vice versa. The Naomi/Laban showers are an expression of this ethos in that they provides for the smooth transition of people into different phases of their lives so that they can fit into their communities and become one with it.

Conclusion

The data explored throughout the paper indicate that the Naomi and/Laban showers have appropriated the traditional rituals surrounding marriage, and added new meanings and significance that is in line with urban citizens. The showers bring together all important parties in a marriage, that is, parents from both sides and the bride and groom to the table, so that they are supported and ushered into their new phases of life of being in-laws. The showers re-contextualise traditional Setswana rituals and meanings, giving them new contemporary inflections. For instance, the Naomi/Laban showers are open to both men and women, married and unmarried, and the teaching and advice are done in an open and inclusive space. The spirit of *botho/ubuntu* is the driving force behind the initiative as it encourages community spirit where individuals show love, care and support for their fellow human being. We have demonstrated that individuals who are to become parents-in-law are assisted by the community to transition into their new positions and responsibilities. Finally, Naomi and /Laban showers are evolving as 'emergent rites of passage' in Botswana, and they cater for the urban or peri-urban citizen who, while they value the traditional way of doing things, also recognize that some aspects of traditional wedding ceremonies do not satisfactorily cater for the needs of contemporary urbanized Christians. The paper does not constitute an exhaustive study of the Naomi and /Laban showers; there is more that the overarching research has shown, but is not covered in this article. The *Botho/Ubuntu* research has yielded quite a substantial amount of data from which a lot can be learnt and which form part of the content of other articles emanating from the research.

ⁱ www.dictionary.com/browse/rites-of-passage

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