

**“A LITTLE BABY IS ON THE WAY:”  
BOTHU/UBUNTU AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING IN GABORONE BABY  
SHOWERS**

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**Abstract:** *The expectation and arrival of a baby has always played a significant role in many societies across the globe. For simple reasons, babies are perceived as blessings from God. Hence, there is the need to shower the mother-to-be and her unborn baby with gifts and advice in preparation for welcoming, not only the bundle of joy, but also the new additional member into the family. The article is based on data that were collected from baby showers in greater Gaborone over a period of twelve months. The concept of Bothu/Ubuntu cuts across as one of the major initiatives that drive baby showers. The goal of this paper is to establish what baby showers entail, how these initiatives started and how they are conducted. But most importantly, the paper will argue that baby showers are a community building initiative in the urban space. The paper seeks to establish the extent to which baby showers are gendered, using analytical insights from the theory of the “good mother”.*

**Keywords:** (Baby) shower, Bothu/Ubuntu, Community building, gifts, mother (hood).

## **1. Introduction**

The article presents an analysis of data that were collected during baby shower celebrations over a period of one year in Gaborone, Botswana. The data came from 15 showers where 183 participated. The main aim of the paper is to argue that baby showers are a community building initiative in the urban space driven by the spirit of *Ubuntu/ Bothu*. In addition, the paper discusses the objectives and aims of baby showers, how they started and how they are conducted. By employing the theory of motherhood that is the ‘good mother’, the article will discuss the extent to which these baby showers are gendered and whether the

process is achieved by design or default. The western concepts of the motherhood theory will be adopted, contextualised and adapted to the practice of Gaborone baby showers.

## **2. Background**

The transitional stage from having no children to first time motherhood is a universal phenomenon that entails social and cultural changes. Botswana is no exception because motherhood is viewed as one of the most important stages in life. Therefore, welcoming and celebrating a new born baby is nothing new. Botswana used to have the traditional baby celebrations called *mantsho a ngwana*, which literally means “taking the baby out” of the house. The celebration coincided with the time when the baby turned three months. After *botsetsi* (“confinement”), the relatives will come together to “take the baby out” of the house and introduce it to the community. The activity was accompanied by feasting and gift giving. It was during these celebrations that the whole village was invited to the traditional shower. These preparations encompassed the principle of *Botho/Ubuntu*. According to Setiloane (1975:33), a Sotho-Tswana baby is born into a social group whose pattern of behaviour has been formed by history and is constantly being modified by the inter-relations of its individual members.

From Setiloane’s observation, the Sotho–Tswana group acknowledges each individual as unique when it comes to a particular social behaviour. However, the arrival of a new born is closely connected to the interpersonal relationships within a community. Hence, the new individual is perceived as a continuation of life. In most African societies conception is received with great joy, excitement and blessings by the family and the whole community (Magesa 1997). James Amanze (2002) notes that, in Africa, pregnancy is the first phase whereby a human being becomes a person. Consequently, when a woman becomes pregnant, there is a great deal of jubilation in the minds and hearts of those concerned as well as of the community at large (Amanze 2002:133). According to Amanze (2002), the safety and continuity of pregnancy is of paramount importance, hence the need for observation of specific taboos to ensure safety of both the expectant mother and the unborn baby. For instance, the expectant mother may use specific protective traditional herbs and prayers may be offered to *badimo* (“ancestors”) requesting their protection. Mbiti (1969:111) further observes that “in many African societies the pregnant woman must observe certain taboos and regulations partly because pregnancy in effect makes her ritually ‘impure’ and chiefly in order to protect her child”. Hence Mbiti argues that besides ensuring safety, certain taboos are for purity purposes.

## 2.1. Defining Botho/Ubuntu

*Botho/ Ubuntu* is a deeply African philosophy that calls on human beings to mirror their humanity in each other. It can be seen and felt in the spirit of willing participation, unquestioning cooperation, warmth, openness, and personal dignity demonstrated by the indigenous black population (See Mbiti 1969, Biko 1978). *Botho* can also be seen as the African understanding of being human and living in community. This can be summarised by a common African saying: “I am because we are and we are because I am”. According to Musa Dube et.al (2016:1) the saying with its recognition of the individual “‘I am’ emphasizes that one’s humanity is only realized in the context where ‘we are’, in a communal setting.” The second part of the saying focuses on the community, that is, “we are”. For Batswana, and most Bantu people, *Botho/ Ubuntu* is a concept of acceptable relational living, which is measured by one’s relationship to the family, community, the environment and the divine powers (ancestors and God) (Dube 2006:140, Dube 2008). In Sotho-Tswana languages this relational aspect is best captured by the adage “*motho ke motho ka batho*” or in Nguni languages “*umuntu ngu muntu nga bantu*.” The saying underlines the fact that a human being is only human through other human beings or that “a person is only human through living in the community” (Dube et al 2016:1). Dumi Mmualefe adds “without others one cannot be” (2004:7). Lastly, in *The Long term Vision 2016 for Botswana botho* has been defined “as a process of earning respect by first giving it and gain empowerment by empowering others”. (p.5) Although the above definitions of *botho* are relevant to showers in general, that is, Bridal, Laban and Naomi, *The Vision 2016* definition echoes the spirit of *botho* demonstrated during Gaborone baby showers. As a result, it will be adopted and applied to the general argument of the paper.

## 2.2 Baby Shower “Defined”

The term ‘baby shower’ is often assumed to mean that the expectant mother is “showered” with gifts. The custom can be defined in relation to the bridal shower, which may have derived its name from the old Victorian custom. It was customary to put presents inside a parasol which when opened would “shower” the bride-to-be with gifts (Montemurro 2006:3). The shower can be hosted by anyone: from relatives, parents of the mother-to-be, her in-laws, to her friends, office colleagues, and school friends. Baby showers can also be hosted by churches, but most people prefer a relaxed atmosphere where people close to the mother-to-be participate and have a great time. This becomes an opportunity to help the mother-to-be feel completely relaxed, greeted and surrounded with support, so that she does not feel anxious about the new chapter that is about to begin in her life (Robinson 2000:1).

Motherhood can be seen as a transitional stage and showers become testimony to that transition. Arnold Van Gennep discovered that all rituals share or follow three stages: that is, separation, transition and incorporation (Dundes 1999:101). Rites of passage are “ceremonies that mark important transitional periods in a person's life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, having children, and death. Rites of passage usually involve ritual activities and teachings designed to strip individuals of their original roles and prepare them for new roles.”(www.dictionary.com/browse/rite-of-passage). Rites of passage, therefore, are rituals and/ or ceremonies that accompany major personal transitions by individuals as they move from birth to death (Fischer and Gainer 1993:320). Van Gennep (1960) maintains that the mother-to-be is temporarily removed from the community. This is a form of separation. Although the mother-to-be was temporarily separated from the world of men, boys and girls during baby shower celebrations, once they are completed, she is reintegrated into the same community as a woman who is mature and responsible and ready to raise her child on her own.

As a result, baby showers somehow create the narrative that connects mother-to-be to her community, especially that of motherhood and womanhood. It is because of this self-exploration that the initiate (the mother-to-be) emerges with a stronger sense of personal responsibility in all the aspects of her life. This stretches all the way to the larger world of which she is a part. In this way, both the community and the initiate, i.e., mother-to-be benefit from this rite of passage. During this rite of passage there is a space provided for the community to transfer its essential values and deliberate on the roles deemed appropriate for the initiate's life stage. This will ultimately guarantee what could be termed as cultural continuity, where the interweaving of generations is realised (Van Gennep 1960).

### **2.3. “The Good Mother” As Theoretical Framework**

Despite decades of feminist critique of the dominant presentation of mother and motherhood, images of “the good mother” appear as prevalent as ever, especially in contemporary Gaborone baby showers. The critique of gender roles emblemized by Betty Friedan (2013) looks at the feminine mystique which articulated women's dissatisfaction with the conflicting roles of wife and mother. Feminists in the 1970's often represented this critique as anti-mother. According to *Encyclopaedia of Motherhood* (2012:748), media representations of motherhood in the 1980s and 1990s are as follows: the supermom: a working mother who preserves her energy at the end of a long day for her children and husband (this was rejected when the *Bill Cosby Show* (1984-92) was introduced and viewers started responding positively to portrayals of a mother who revealed the difficulty of child rearing, thus ironically rejecting

the unruffled image of supermom; the working class motherhood of *Roseanne* (1988-97) and the defiant single motherhood of *Murphy Brown* (1988-98).

During baby shower celebrations it became apparent that contemporary mothers are expected to behave according to the prevailing ideology of “intensive mothering.” It is as a result of the high expectations coming from the attendees of baby showers that the theory of a “good mother or intensive mothering” by Sharon Hays (1996) was adopted for this paper. The theory requires a mother to be a central care giver to the child, to follow the advice of experts, always put the child’s needs ahead of her own, and be fully absorbed emotionally with the child. In addition, the “good mother” discourse requires mothers to “act responsibly and present themselves in culturally recognizable and acceptable ways.” (Miller 2005:86) This became evident from the advice the participants shared with the mother-to-be. These included, among others, personal hygiene to the dos and don’ts of a mother in confinement, *botsetsi*. It is worth noting that the good mother “casts a long shadow over the women’s lives, motherhood and mothering continue to remain the subject close to social regulation”, as confirms Ruddick (2001:189). Even though Gaborone baby showers emphasise the “good mother,” it is worth noting that contemporary representations of a good mother are not uniform and stable. For instance, the “good mother” appears differently in various settings – she is nuanced in multiple forms. Therefore, to take the “good mother” literally means working on the ideological aspects of mother and motherhood and the notions of hegemonic motherhood.

It is in this regard that the “good mother” becomes more of a social construct that puts pressure on women to conform to particular standards and ideals, against which they are judged and judge themselves. However, as noted by Porter and Kelso (2006:xii) “representations of motherhood and the accompanying expectation of mother are in a constant flux as they adapt to the changing socio-cultural context”. As a result, these standards shape the identities of mother and of how a woman should feel. For instance, “a good mother is a happy mother and an unhappy mother is a failed mother. This myth attributes representation for the condition of mothering to individuals not the system”, conclude Porter and Kelso (2006: xii). Furthermore, she is expected to let everything go and protect her child. Sharon Hays (1996:150) adds: “a good mother would never simply put her child aside for her own convenience. And placing material wealth or power on a higher plane than the well-being of her children is strictly forbidden.” As a result, a good mother discourse positions women as intuitive nurturers naturally equipped and always readily available to care for their children, regardless of the circumstances (see Krane and Davies 2007).

The Gaborone baby shower regulates women “through good and bad mother discourses and has a number of functions because it ensures that a woman takes on the child rearing, it ties women’s identity to their roles as child raisers and nurturers of others” (Johnson and Swanson 2003:23). This is very narrow considering that a woman in the urban space can do far much better than nurturing and child raising. These are women who are not only single parents but are also in full time employment and yet they never leave their jobs to raise the baby. In other words, these women are in full control of their day-to-day lives because they continue working in full time job while mothering at the same time. At the end of the day, they control their family and family lives are not regulated, resulting in freedom when it comes to reproduction. Being a working mother in a fulltime job has become possible as a result of “group mothering”. This is where women from Gaborone showers have taken it upon themselves to take care and assist one another in raising and the mothering of children because, after all, “it takes a village to raise a girl” as the popular African proverb confirms. The only difference is that they are in the urban space not in the village setting. Finally, the women in the Gaborone shower do not have problems of setting norms which are currently promoted by media as “new monism”. These norms usually posit the increase in the standard of perfection, making it difficult for mothers to either achieve the prescribed ideal or carve out a space for individual identity. This can create anxiety, guilt and ambivalence for the motherhood experience. It must be emphasised that these norms are not posing any problems to Gaborone Baby shower mothers simply because it is through baby showers that they have learnt to cope in the midst of all the hardships of “intensive mothering” because they have a new support system in the urban space – that of friends, neighbours and acquaintances.

#### **2.4. Botho Project Objectives and Research Questions**

Before venturing into the methodology used in the study, our research objectives and questions will be presented. The title of the project was “*Botho/Ubuntu* and Community building in the Urban Space: An exploration of Naomi, Laban, Bridal and Baby Showers in Gaborone.” Although the study mapped out a number of objectives and research questions, this paper will only address Baby showers as driven by *botho* and community building in the urban space. The project’s objectives and research questions, as adopted from the original research proposal that was submitted when applying for the funding of the project have been introduced in order to assist and direct the reader to where this paper is coming from. The objectives of the *Botho/Ubuntu* Project were to:

- i. Explore the theological and spiritual base of *Botho/ Ubuntu* value/ ethic;

- ii. Examine how *Botho/ Ubuntu* ethic was understood and manifested in traditional Botswana Communities;
- iii. Analyse how *Botho/ Ubuntu* ethic is expressed in contemporary urban setting of Botswana;
- iv. Investigate how *Botho/ Ubuntu* activities in the urban space construct and deconstruct gender;
- v. Highlight how *Botho / Ubuntu* inform the building and maintenance of a justice-loving community.

Furthermore, the research questions of the study were:

- i. How is the *Botho/Ubuntu* ethic and spirituality founded and manifested in indigenous Botswana communities?
- ii. How does the *Botho/Ubuntu* ethic drive the Laban/ Naomi, Bridal and Baby Shower in the urban space?
- iii. What cultural traditions and roles are produced, reproduced or deconstructed in the urban space through the Laban/Naomi Bridal and Baby Showers?
- iv. How do these *Botho/ Ubuntu* driven showers forge African spirituality?
- v. How can *Botho/ Ubuntu* spirituality foster a justice-loving community that rally against the encroachment of poverty in urban spaces and empower women?

The paper will address some of these objectives, while it also attempts to answer some of the research questions.

## 2.5. Methodology

The study combined both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry. The study first carried out secondary desktop analysis and second, conducted fieldwork-based research. The last two objectives were constituted by the analysis of the findings. Quantitative data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire from individuals who were attending the different showers. The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to explore in-depth descriptions, explanations, and narrations of the experiences of the respondents as regards *Botho/Ubuntu* ethic and other behaviours at showers. The collaborative nature of variables necessitated a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry for interaction and was used to allow the strengths of one method to complement the other. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Botswana Internal Review Board. The UB IRB Informed consent to take part in the study was obtained from each participant. The researchers

read the consent form to the participants to inform them that their participation in the study was voluntary, therefore they could withdraw at any time during the research.

Gaborone was sampled as a site in which to carry out the study. The target population was people attending baby showers. All attendees were suitable for participation. Purposive sampling was used to identify prospective recipients of the different showers. The researchers attended the showers and recorded the events and the dealings that took place during the shower. The questionnaires were disseminated by the researchers during Baby showers. The researchers personally joined the showers to observe, conduct the interviews using voice recorders, and where permission was secured, video cameras, to capture data from the participants. Notes were also taken by the researchers during showers and interviews. Qualitative data were collected through participatory observations and in-depth interviews with key informants from each shower, such as organizers and the recipient of the shower.

The study used two instruments: the questionnaire and the in-depth interview guide, together with participatory observation, to collect quantitative and qualitative data respectively. The instruments were prepared beforehand and piloted before the study was carried out. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. The events were recorded by the researchers on video and audio support. The Shower Observation Instrument included a description of the location of the shower, the location, how the organizers received and greeted the guests; “off camera” dialogues before and after the shower; evidence of who was invited, activities, games, refreshments, and gifts form part of the baby shower activities.

A Shower Observation Checklist was designed consisting of 14 items to which the researcher indicated with a “Yes” or “No,” if they observed a particular behaviour during the shower. The items addressed 14 specific areas such as the behaviour of shower organizers, guests, church membership, kin/relation, ethnicity, the guest behaviours and the types of gifts that were brought to the shower. A Baby Shower Participants Questionnaire was developed to establish the respondent’s understanding of the baby shower: the purpose of the shower, whether it assists in community building, and whether shower furthers the cultural tradition of *Botho*, or it offers a new social gathering altogether. The survey instrument asked respondents to indicate their sex, marital status, educational status, their role in the shower, and their relationship to the shower recipient.

As soon as the questionnaires were scanned for any discrepancies, data were coded and entered into SPSS version 2. The exercise was conducted on each question. The data collected through the observations, voice recorder, were transcribed into text first. The transcribed data



and notes were then coded to make sense of them. Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and analyzed through Qualitative Content Analysis. Cross-reference was conducted in cases of overlaps. Lastly, the identification of themes was done. Respondents ranged in age from 20 to 50 years, which suggests a wide variability in the age of the sample. The Gender of Participants was as follows: Male (1.8%) and Female (98.2%) of which 70 percent of the respondents were single (69.6%), and 30.4% constituted married women. All respondents had some form of formal education, therefore they were literate: Junior Certificate (10.7%), Form 5 (14.3%), at Certificate and Diploma level (42.9%), Bachelors (25%), Masters (7.1%).

## 2.6. Emerging Themes

There are themes that emerged during interviews that indicate that *botho* drives baby showers in the Gaborone practice. These recurring themes can be summed up as: baby showers as a western concept, social networks, social support (material and emotional), empowerment, mutual trust, compassion and empathy. Although these themes are not exhaustive they keep on recurring throughout the analysis.

### 2.6.1. Westernisation Vs Baby Showers

The origins of baby showers were not clear according to the respondents. When they were asked where the showers originated, the following answers were given:

*"I have no idea."*

*"Clueless"*

*"I don't know ke di fitlhelwa di dirwa" .... I don't know I found them in practice"*

*"I am not sure how baby shower originates but I think it was an initiative to help women out"*

*"As a way to raise money to help the mother-to-be"*

*"I don't know but it is something that is not from our society. I think it's from the Bible."*

*"Baby showers I think are an extension of mantsho a ngwana (traditional showers)"*

*"ke belaela moletlo wa bana o tswa mo go wa mantsho a ngwana" transl. I suspect baby showers are a product of mantsho a ngwana (traditional showers)"*

*"It's an activity from the west not from Botswana"*

*"Mo seromamoweng (from radio) le television"*

*"They were imported from outside therefore not our tradition" (sic)*

The respondents pointed out five possibilities regarding the origins of Baby showers; firstly, the respondents said they did not know how the showers started, while the second group thought that it "was an initiative to raise money and a support structure for women to help the

mother-to-be.” The third group saw the origins of showers coming from the Bible, however there was no justification used to link baby showers to a relevant verse quoted from the Bible to support the claim. The fourth group saw the modern baby shower as “nothing new but a mere extension of traditional showers, *mantsho a ngwana*. This was a traditional way of welcoming the baby after birth. Although there may be similarities that can be drawn between the two, both Gaborone baby shower and traditional showers *mantsho a ngwana* are about the baby and gift-giving. However, there are a number of characteristics that set them apart. This will be discussed in detail later, when the two are compared. The fifth group of respondents, the majority of respondents, maintained that modern baby showers were the result of foreign influence. The media are thought to have played a great influence. Women heard about showers on some international radio stations or television and decided to introduce them to Botswana. *Ga se wa Batswana gotlhelele* translated “it has got nothing to do with Batswana in its entirety”, therefore *e adimilwe mo bathong ba basweu* meaning “it was borrowed from white people/ westerners.”

How justified are the respondents’ answers on the origins of baby shower in Gaborone? ‘Baby shower’ as a term is relatively new; however, the celebrations and rituals associated with pregnancy and child birth are both ancient and enduring, and were celebrated in the form of *mantsho a ngwana* (see Moloi 2006:1). In Botswana, baby showers are common in urban and semi-urban areas, with the invitees mostly being “unmarried working or educated female adults” (Moloi 2006:1). As Moloi (2006) argues, “the atmosphere during these rituals enables young women to learn from other women in a more relaxed manner. A baby shower ritual, despite being borrowed from the western cultures, is viewed by some young Batswana women as more or less like a modern initiation school for literate women” (Moloi 2006:41). Her argument is that it is during such an occasion that the mother-to-be receives counselling on pertinent issues related to childbirth and motherhood. Furthermore, the baby shower is a platform where the mother-to-be is not only showered with gifts but is showered with the necessary support, advice on what she ought to do and not do during and after her pregnancy, as well as good wishes.

Although Gaborone showers were seen as extensions of traditional showers (*mantsho a ngwana*), there are similarities and differences that can be drawn from these two practices. They are similar because women are still the chief organisers and at the centre for both the contemporary and traditional showers; one of the respondents said, *ke bone tshoso e rweleng* (translated “they are the brains behind the showers or the masterminds”). It is worth noting that gifts also play a very important role in contemporary showers. During both showers there is a

gathering, feasting and exchanges of gifts, counselling and advice giving. In both showers family members are participants. While in the traditional shower both men and women attend, cotemporary showers are mainly for women who are single. According to the data, 70 % of the women who attended were single, while only 30% were married. Furthermore, Gaborone showers are mostly organised by peers, friends, whereas in the traditional shower the family is involved extensively in the preparations.

Lastly, the baby shower is celebrated before the baby is born, while as for *mantsho a ngwana*, (“traditional showers”) the celebrations are done after the birth of the baby. Traditional showers did not have decorations like the modern showers where a marquee was pitched, and colour themes were chosen and used for decoration. Some of the places used as venues were an ordinary house or any space available outside the yard. For *mantsho a ngwana* (“traditional showers”), there were no decorations and music was not played during the celebrations. However, although men are not active participants in contemporary showers they are still involved in a way because they give support by “contributing money towards the shower”. There were restrictions in the past, especially about men not being allowed to be part of raising the baby especially during the confinement period (*botsetsi*); in baby contemporary showers some men, especially the father-to-be, have been encouraged to become more active in the raising of the baby by attending. However, most men still shy away from the idea.

### **2.6.2. Networking Connection and Socialisation Platforms**

Baby showers are seen as a platform where there is a chance of socialising, connecting with new people and building networks. Friends or relatives, co-workers, church mates and even total strangers build these networks. These platforms celebrate with the mother-to-be in welcoming the new baby. Through these showers new relations are forged which might either be short term or extend for a lifetime. As one of the respondents put it, the main purpose of baby showers is *go kopanya batho le go dira botsala*, which translates “to unite people with the expectation of making new friends”. Another one added to “liaise and meet well as make new friends to support each other especially women”. Since new friendships were forged, the respondents were happy to invite the mother and other attendees to their celebration in the near future. Moreover, long-time friendships are forged and these usually continue even after the baby is born; some respondents said they will “visit the family even after the baby has been born.” There is no doubt, connection and socialization become the pinnacle of baby showers in the urban space and it is through these liaisons that the mother-to-be becomes socialised into

a group of new acquaintances, other than her family, who are willing to share with her the joy of welcoming the new baby.

### 2.6.3. Support Structure

Baby showers are also seen as a support structure. The support can be either material or emotional. As one respondent puts it, *bomme ba a tshegetsana ka meletlo ya bana* (“Women support each other through baby showers.”) Bringing a baby into this world can be a mammoth task, and it is highly unlikely that an individual will cope on her own; therefore, it is important that other people support the mother-to-be *ka go fokotsa morwalo wa go reka dilwana tse dingwe ka o a boa a setse a rekile dingwenyana*, (translated “baby showers assist the mother-to-be by buying other baby accessories that she might have left out”). With the economic downturn Botswana is currently facing, baby showers could not have come at a more opportune time. The baby shower assists the expectant mother, as one respondent puts it, *gore a seka a ba balelwa thata mo pateng fa a santse a baakanyetsa kgorogo ya losea*, (translated “it relieves the mother from the financial burden associated with buying baby accessories”). Although it is not compulsory for presents to be brought to the showers, it is an expectation from all attendees of the shower. Baby showers are seen as platforms, where gift and gift giving becomes central to the celebration.

There is also the exchange of ideas where women give advice on how the mother-to-be should handle the baby. It should be noted that advice is not just for first time mothers, it is also shared with second time even third time mothers for the simple reason that a lot might have happened since they last had a baby. The advice ranges from personal hygiene of the mother and the baby’s diet to sexual matters. One participant advised the mother-to-be on what she terms a delivery bag checklist, as she said:

*Your bag should have cotton wool, surgical spirits, baby t-shirts, receiving blanket, sanitary pads (Dr Whites) toiletry for mom and baby and mummy clothes.*

The mother was cautioned about the type of medicine she should give her baby once it is born. She was encouraged to make sure that the baby receives all the vaccines as prescribed by the Doctor, and by all means to avoid over-the-counter medications. She was reminded to take her baby for routine check-ups every month because this was the only way for her to know if her baby was growing well. Most of all, cleanliness of the environment where the baby is housed as well as the mother’s personal hygiene were emphasised as paramount. Clean

environment keeps the baby safe from ailments, hence promoting their wellbeing. The mother-to-be was also advised not to neglect her partner once the baby has arrived. One participant said that, most of the time after delivery, new mothers neglect the baby's daddy and he becomes "the enemy in the home". The mother-to-be was encouraged to make love to her partner as soon as she feels ready, because the delay might drive the baby daddy to be unfaithful. In other words *ba tshwanetse go tiisa ngwana mokwatla*, (translated "they have to make the baby's back strong."). This is a popular belief in Botswana culture that at some point during confinement (*botsetsi*), a new mother is expected to make love to the father of her baby because it is deemed beneficial to the baby's overall health.

Pre-natal counselling is among the important activities during this ritual. The counselling session, according to Moloi (2006:58), is meant to educate the expectant mother on various issues relevant to "motherhood and womanhood in general". It is during this stage that attendees are expected to share their experiences with the expectant mother in order to enlighten her on what to expect during delivery and motherhood. She is further advised on taboos regarding pregnancy, confinement and parenthood, specifically mothering. It is worth noting that these spaces are very 'sacred' spaces because women are free to exchange advice and ideas without fear of intimidation or of being judged.

#### **2.6.4. Woman-Centred / Gendered**

Whether by design or by default, baby showers are indeed gendered and feminine. They become consumption avenues distinguished both by their 'feminine nature' and their seemingly active role as a modern-day rite of passage (Fischer and Gainer 1993). The women further reinforce the personal relationships which form and strengthen the bonds of the community in which they live. In a number of showers attendees were mainly women; for example, about 98% of attendees were women, while only 1.8% were men. When the respondents were asked who should attend baby showers and why, the following answers were recorded:

*"Everybody: women and those with or without children."*

*"Friends and family especially women to give her advice to share experience."*

*"Friends' family and colleague."*

*"People who are close to the mother-to-be and the father because their experiences could be interesting to hear."*

*"Women because it is about a mother who is expecting"*

*"Women in order to support, encourage, advise and give gifts to the mother to be."*

*“O tselelelwa ke bomme ba ba naleng maikarabelo e le go itumela le mme yoo itsholofetseng, re leboga modimo ka lesele le le tlang. (It is attended by responsible women to celebrate with the mother-to-be and thanking God for the baby who is on the way.”*

From the answers given by the respondents it is clear that baby showers are restricted to women. However, when further teased on who should attend baby showers, opinions were split. Some respondents felt that everybody should attend, that is, “men, women those with or without children”. However, some of the respondents felt that baby showers should be reserved for friends and family over the age of 18 because they will be comfortable with each other; therefore they will be open and sincere with their advice. 18 years was used as a yardstick because it was felt that some of the topics discussed during these showers were not suitable for anyone under the age of 18. However, the majority of the respondents strongly felt that the restriction was unreasonable because there are mothers who are under 18.

One respondent said:

*Currently baby showers are mostly restricted to women but I feel even men should attend as they have a role to play in upbringing and nursing. Women are regarded as the pinnacle of the infant’s upbringing; hence, restriction to the new baby... hence, the restriction.*

Emphasis seems to be not just on any other woman but *bomme ba bana leng maikarabelo* (translated as “women of integrity.”)

#### **2.6.5 Botho/Ubuntu Embedded in Gaborone Showers**

Although in the urban context, an individual becomes entrenched in the reality of (western) capitalism, Gaborone baby showers are still motivated by the concept of *botho* /*Ubuntu*, “humanity”. Baby showers are testimony to the fact that not all is lost during urbanisation. During these baby showers *botho* is expressed through *lorato*, *neelano le kutlwano* (translated “as love, giving and understanding”). In addition, there is *tirisano* “spirit of togetherness” where there is “respect and support”). Furthermore, as one respondent puts it, “it is about team work and if there is no *botho*, people won’t be able to work together.” All these are possible because people involved in the preparations are well mannered, tolerant and have mutual respect, which are the main ingredients of *botho*.

Baby showers in a way can help to diffuse what Sparks (1990:249) sees “as the individual ego and make an African less prone to acts that do not contribute to community

building.” This comes across in a number of ways; for example, as respect for the persons, the importance of community, personhood and morality. During baby showers the community becomes the context for the manifestation of *motho* (“human being”) and *setho* (“humanity”). As demonstrated by baby showers, the value and dignity of persons is best realised in relationship with the other. As Mbiti (1969:108-109) rightly points out, “one cannot be a human being alone, only in a community”. In the same way, the spirit encapsulated within baby showers shows how a Motswana individual is a communal being, inseparable from and incomplete without others coming together as women with a common goal: to celebrate a life that is about to be born.

Furthermore, in baby showers we come across personal growth of individuals, which happens within the community of the attendees. Only through cooperation, influence and contribution of the other can one understand and bring to fulfilment one’s personality. Through baby showers a mother-to-be discovers a sense of identity in reference to the community she interacts with, that of women who have been mothers themselves or aspiring mothers. Since *Botho/Ubuntu* is based on the collective, baby showers become a collective endeavour because they are driven by *Botho/Ubuntu*. Moreover, the dignity displayed during the baby showers makes a person divine, respected and valued; hence, a man or even a woman is valuable in himself and herself: “not just as his welfare, not his material well-being but just man himself and all his ramifications” (Biko 1978:46).

Within the context of *Botho/Ubuntu*, people are family; that is why women in the urban space come together in solidarity to support each other through baby showers even in the absence of immediate family. In that case, gift-giving during baby showers is seen as supporting those in need, by contributing to their welfare and society in the urban space. The expectation for participants is to bring *sengwenyana* (“something”), as one respondent puts it. Sherry (1983:159) observes: “The giving of gifts is a way of conferring material benefit on a recipient.” Sherry’s contention confirms the role of gifts during baby showers in promoting *botho* since “the act of giving takes precedence over the gift itself...” (Sherry 1983:159)

The central argument here is that, in the Botswana context, giving and sharing are some of the most important values in the spirit of *botho* and community building. Besides having a well-rounded character and being well-mannered, a person with *botho* should realise his/her full potential and be fully involved in the activities of his/her community. Baby showers prove to be just one of those activities in the urban space. Arguably, those who were involved in the baby shower activities exhibited the spirit of *botho* by supporting the expectant mother. There is a code of conduct expected from them, such as exercising *setho le tshisibalo* (“humility”),

they should be cooperative and show willingness to participate in all activities in the shower, *ba supe maitseo, maitshwaro le maikarabelo*, (“display good behaviour in a decent and dignified manner.”) Furthermore, maturity is taken for granted because it is assumed that the participants are mature women who should be exemplary to the mother-to-be, as well as aspiring mothers within the group of attendees.

### 2.6.6. Community Building and Reciprocity

During Gaborone baby showers there is no doubt that the spirit of community building and reciprocity prevails. By coming to the shower and participating in it, the attendee takes it for granted that the same favour will be returned whenever she has a shower or something similar. The fact that the attendees leave everything they do in order to attend the showers shows their selflessness and caring nature, as they sacrifice their time to celebrate with the mother-to-be. There is a lot of collective efficacy from hatching the plan by the organisers of the shower, to the actual day of the shower when it is carried out. As a result, baby showers become platforms where community building is realised in the urban space. This is put into perspective by the table below, where 64% of the respondents saw showers as community building in the urban space. See **Table I** below.

**Table I**  
**It Allows Community Building in the Urban Space**

	Percent
Strongly agree	7.1
Disagree	14.3
Agree	64.3
Strongly Agree	14.3
Total	100

While baby showers are rooted in both Setswana and Western culture, they somehow challenge some Setswana cultural values. For instance, women who are not mothers counsel mothers-to-be, which is contrary to Setswana culture. Furthermore, mothers-to-be disclose information regarding the expected delivery of the baby. This transparency is a taboo in Setswana culture because *ga go segelwe ngwana thari mpeng* meaning you cannot celebrate a baby before it is born. Data confirmed that norms of reciprocity were expected amongst the attendees. Respondents believed that if they have attended a baby shower for X, they would



expect X to attend their shower as well. Therefore, they made it clear that they would feel offended if they organized a baby shower for X, and then X would refuse to organize their baby shower. It is interesting to note that the attendees are expecting some form of reciprocity when it comes to organizing showers, which takes a lot of time, sacrifice, money and energy. The table below attests to the general feeling of the attendees regarding reciprocity.

**Table II**  
**‘I’ll feel offended if I organize shower for X and they refuse to organize mine’**

	Percent
Strongly agree	17.9
Disagree	28
Agree	32
Strongly Agree	21,4
Total	100

During baby showers it was expected that one cannot attend a shower empty-handed. This will also determine the presents you are given during your baby shower.

### **2.6.7. Women Empowerment**

With the economic downturn Botswana is currently facing, Gaborone baby showers empower women by rallying against the encroachment of poverty in urban space. Besides empowering women economically, baby showers create both an opportunity and an environment for young women to share knowledge and skills. In this way, expectant mothers become independent, unlike their traditional counterparts who depended on their male partners. While the presence of attendees confirms care, support and love, gifts are another important aspect of the baby shower celebration. The economic empowerment becomes pivotal in the baby shower because the majority of these women are single mothers who are trying to make ends meet in the urban space. Table III below gives an idea of the gifts given to the mother-to-be as an initiative to empower her materially, hence alleviating poverty.

**Table III**  
**Gifts Given to Empower Mother-To-Be (Materially)**

Baby Clothes	Baby Accessories	Vouchers and Cash
Booties, gowns , hats	Bed, Feeding bottles	Cash BWP100 – BWP5000

Blankets, fleece body suits	Pram/ push car, car seats	Vouchers BWP500-BWP2000
Baby bag	Baby lotions, cotton wool	
Socks, pull-on pants	Potty, detergents	
Jackets, sweaters	Cot, washing powder	
Vests	Chest of drawers, Diapers	

The table above demonstrates how women are empowered through gift-giving in Gaborone showers. The gifts range from baby accessories to money. These guarantee the mother's peace of mind because she has been empowered by being given the necessary resources to assist her in raising her baby. This further explains why 51.8% of the respondents agree that the main purpose of the shower is to give presents to the mother-to-be. See table below:

**Table IV**  
**Main Purpose is to Give Presents to the Mother-To-Be**

	Percent
Strongly agree	16.1
Disagree	21.4
Agree	51.8
Strongly Agree	10.7
Total	100

The gift-giving ritual indicates that part of the social function they serve is to create and reinforce personal relationships (see Cheal 1988, Fischer and Arnold 1990). It is worth noting that the need for external support and when one becomes a mother is not only moral, but financial. This is exemplified through the giving of the necessary equipment for raising the child. Therefore, financial and material empowerment becomes a welcome development in the celebration of her unborn baby. Since presents empower women materially, it does not come as a surprise that 35 % of the respondents disagreed when they were asked if it was okay to attend without presents. See **Table V** below:

**Table V**  
**It's Okay to Attend without Bringing Presents**

	Percent
Strongly agree	28.6
Disagree	35.7
Agree	32.1

Strongly Agree	3.6
Total	100

### 2.6.8. Emotional Empowerment

Women are also empowered emotionally through baby showers. It is in these showers that women create “sacred spaces” for women to express themselves in a justice-loving community. In this setting, women are given an opportunity to counsel the mother-to-be, regardless of whether they have children or not. In the village setting this would be done by aunts and grandmothers or blood relatives who have children. This adds a new dimension to urban showers, where we see freedom and equality as well as anti-oppression of women attendees. When the respondents were asked whether counselling should be done only by mothers, 62% of them disagreed. Refer to **Table VI** below:

**Table: VI**  
**Counselling Only Given by Mothers**

	Percent
Strongly agree	3.6
Agree	12.5
Disagree	62.5
Strongly Disagree	21.4
Total	100

It is worth noting that by letting everyone fully engage in counselling women in Gaborone showers create yet another new dimension, that of “group mothering.” A group of related or unrelated women take it upon themselves to come together and help the mother-to-be. Through their actions, the famous African adage “it takes a village to raise a child” is fully demonstrated. Despite being in the urban space, by coming together, these women are creating a similar set-up that takes place in the traditional setting, where blood relatives come together to raise the child.

The sharing of knowledge in the form of advice is very important in the tasks of mothering. It is more rewarding because the exchange of knowledge was shared by not only the mother-to-be but also by all other mothers in attendance as a way of tapping on other aspects of motherhood which are still guarded in secrecy. It is worth noting that baby showers are women’s “sacred spaces”, where mothers are empowered. It is a space within the urban space,

where expertise in motherhood is nurtured. However, nurturing alone forms a microscopic part of the mother/ mothering and should be expanded further. For instance, viewing mothers “as vessels and birth giving as a task provokes reflection on the reduction of any woman to her reproductive capabilities, seeing it as a form of bio power exercised in patriarchal societies to control a large portion of their members.” (Deszcz-Tryhubcazak and Marecki 2015:192).

### **3. Conclusion and Recommendations**

In this paper we have demonstrated that a new baby has always been celebrated in the Botswana context; however, baby showers have taken the celebration to another level. Despite baby showers being foreign to Botswana, Botswana women in Gaborone have adopted, contextualised and indigenised the showers. These showers have become very significant in the lives of women in Botswana because they empower them in a number of ways; for example, materially and emotionally. But most importantly, the paper has demonstrated that the Gaborone baby showers are driven by the spirit of *Botho/Ubuntu* which is embedded in Botswana culture. The women who are in the urban space become a support structure for another woman, regardless of class or whether they are related or not. It is through these baby showers that a justice-loving community is introduced where there is equality and anti-oppression. This is apparent in the way every woman attendee is given a platform to counsel the mother-to-be, whether they have children or not.

Despite the showers becoming urbanised, the spirit of *botho/Ubuntu* continues to be deeply rooted in the celebrations. The mother-to-be becomes a mother within a community of those who share her ideals and aspirations, but most importantly the net is cast wider to include even total strangers. This is highlighted and fully engaged to further intensify character building. It is through our lived experience that in an African setting no one can be an island and live in isolation. This is for the simple reason that “I am because you are” and it has taken the little baby to tap on the spirit of *Botho/ Ubuntu* even before they are born, thus celebrating their coming into the community. We would like to recommend that the net be cast wider and have similar studies (on baby showers) conducted in the rural areas and a full comparison be drawn between the two in the near future. In conclusion, due to the minimal even non-participation of men in these showers, the paper recommends that men should be fully engaged instead of being passive. Their participation is necessary because it represents a very significant part of the baby’s life and, whatever empowerment women are given, it will be beneficial to them as well.

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