A critical exploration of the personal experiences of the shifting womanhoods practices and values between the traditional and contemporary contexts of the Basotho cultural group

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Science at Rhodes University

Supervised by
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2024

Abstract

Womanhood rites of passage fulfill the purpose of integrating young girls into accepted womanhood roles, ideals, definitions, and expectations. Traditional Basotho womanhood rites of passage have become less popular in the modern context, with alternative womanhood practices and spaces populating the contemporary Basotho context. Through a qualitative methodology, this study explores three Basotho womanhood spaces insofar as they define and construct womanhood for the participants. Additionally, this thesis critically explores the personal experiences of the shifting womanhoods practices and values between the traditional and contemporary contexts of the Basotho women. It draws on the in-depth accounts of nine women of different ages and backgrounds and participating or having participated in one of three womanhood spaces: *Lebollo la basali, Pitiki ea bomme, and Makoti.* This study leans on African Feminist theory to engage these experiences and further relies on the qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews to collect data.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis has been made possible by many people and organizations in different capacities, both directly and indirectly. For their assistance and support, in no particular order, I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to:

- My participants, without whom this thesis would not have been possible. I am honoured to have been trusted with your experiences and insights. You have unknowingly aided in bringing me closer to my Mosotho cultural roots, and for that, I am eternally grateful.
- Dr. Thoko Sipungu, for your faith in me, your invaluable guidance and support of me, and your supervision throughout this academic journey. I came to you with, but a very fragmented vision and you helped me bring it to life. The wisdoms you imparted throughout this study are sincerely appreciated.
- The Rhodes University Sociology Department for resources and technical support during the process, a special mention to Sis Vuvu and Mama J.
- The National Research Foundation for full financial support.
- My friends and family, a special mention to my older brother, younger sister, and sister-in-law. Your unwavering support and constant check-ins did not go unnoticed. You were very understanding and accommodating of the times when I was not available for special moments and celebrations because of research pressures and schedule. Much love, forever and always.
- Ke lebohe Modimo le Badimo for the blessings of strength, wisdom, protection, and guidance throughout this journey.
- Myself, Babazile Jessica Lerato Zondi, for a job well done, the resilience I exhibited, and breaking generational cycles.
- Lastly, my late mother, Monts'eng Mojabeng Zondi, for seeing my potential, dreaming the wildest possible dreams for me, and keeping me in your prayers. I am undoubtedly who I am and where I am today because of you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

Gender in society is produced through constructions of masculinity and/or manhood and femininity and/or womanhood, which prescribes gender-differentiated roles and appropriate behaviour, rights, and responsibilities, respectively, for male and female persons. In this light, gender becomes a performance that is sustained by norms, values, and beliefs instilled by various institutions throughout the socialization process. Put differently, people are socialized into their gender roles. Central in the creation and performance of gender is the supremacy of the ideology of patriarchy. Throughout the world, gender ideologies are embedded in patriarchy, a system that guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. This is a study about the making, and the performance of womanhood in a patriarchal context.

There is a recognition that in traditional African societies, both manhood and womanhood were made through a series of rites and rituals of incorporation. Womanhood is a very important stage in a young female's life trajectory. Similar to the well-known initiation rituals for boys into manhood, many African communities have various culturally sacred rites of passage - that are less known about- that were (and are still) performed to mark the transition and properly integrate young females into their womanhood gender identity and roles. For example, the *Chinamwali* or *Chisungu* (terms used interchangeably) ritual of the Chikunda in Zambia (Talakinu, 2018; Phiri *et al*., 2020; Fumpa-Makano, 2019), the *Umemulo* ceremony of the Zulu ethnic group (Mntambo, 2020: 09), the *Intonjane* of the Xhosa cultural group (Padmanabhanunni *et al*., 2018; Matholeni, 2020) and *Lebollo* of the Basotho people (Du Plooy, 2006). While the modern day has witnessed a decline in the practice of some of these rituals due to the demands of work, and the material demands required to undergo the ritual, there has been an emergence of indigenous spaces where women congregate to impart the requisite knowledge. This study will grapple with these 'modern' indigenous spaces amongst Basotho women as 'quasi' rites of passage because of the central role they fulfill in the place of *Lebollo* due to the impossibility of being able to undergo the rite of passage. Therefore, in this study, these alternative, modern womanhood spaces are seen as facilitating the transition from either girl to woman, woman to mother, or woman to wife.

The identified gap in scholarship is the overwhelming focus on manhood rites of passage in African scholarship about gender. Gender scholarship in Southern Africa tends to focus on masculinities and initiation rites of men (Morrell, 1998; Mfecane, 2018; Ratele, 2014). When it does focus on women, it often approaches them as victims of violence perpetrated by violent masculinities. Very little scholarship exists about women's initiation rites in comparison to those about men's initiation rites. However, as previously mentioned, women's initiation rites exist in different ethnic groups across Africa. The Basotho cultural group is one example of African culture that previously performed culture-specific rites of passage that facilitated the transition of young girls into womanhood and taught them roles and values hegemonically associated with womanhood. To engage and expand the scholarship of African womanhood rites of passage, this study sets out to critically explore the personal experiences of Basotho women with the shifting womanhood practices and values of the traditional and contemporary contexts.

The word 'shifting' in the title of this study and in the main aim is devised as a double entendre. The researcher uses the word 'shift' to primarily acknowledge that there has been a marked migration from the traditional *Lebollo la basali* rite of passage to the emergent indigenous spaces such as *Pitiki* and *Makoti* spaces which set out to facilitate the transition. As it will become clear, this shift is necessitated by modern day demands of the working woman who cannot spare three to six months of *Lebollo la basali*. Secondly, the word 'shift' is employed to signify that the modern women who may have undergone *Lebollo* find themselves shifting between two value systems – the heteropatriarchal underpinnings in normative constructions of womanhood during these rites of passage and their lives after in the cosmopolitan world. The researcher wanted to find out, for instance, how women who attended *Lebollo* negotiate or shift between the notion that a man is a head of the household or a provider, as a teaching, versus the modern economic reality that requires both women and men to have a job. The researcher was interested to see which of these teachings the women keep and which they discard. Additionally, as mentioned, the researcher was interested to explore if the shift to modern indigenous womanhood spaces has transformed the character, in terms of teachings emphasized, about what it means to be a woman. What difference, if any, between the facilitation of womanhood between *Lebollo la basali*, *Pitiki*, and the recent *Makoti* spaces? These are the questions that underpinned this study.

Lastly, this study also shifted. The initial conceptualizations of this study sought focus only *Lebollo la basali*. The researcher, as explained in the preceding paragraph, sought to explore how traditionally initiated women moved or shifted between the traditional conceptions of Basotho womanhood and contemporary conceptions and demands of womanhood. However, due to strict cultural prescriptions to not share information about the *Lebollo* practice with women who are not initiated through the *Lebollo*, potential participants declined the invitation to participate in the study. The researcher only secured three participants. Upon realizing that three participant's narratives were too little, and that the data had not even saturated, the study then took a comparative shift. In this regard, Hayter (2003) notes that this is to be expected in qualitative studies. He argues that the "emergent nature of qualitative research necessitates that the research design unfolds, cascades, rolls and emerges as the study progresses" (Hayter, 2003: 121). This resulted in the amendment of the study to include women from the other two womanhood spaces and thus allowed for a comparative aspect.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter one introduces the study and provides the background in terms of the motivation for this study and the identified gap in literature. This chapter also briefly sets out the aim and details the changes that this study had undergone, from conception until here.

Chapter two provides a background of the thesis and literature on gender practice and how it is socially constructed and embedded in the culture of patriarchy. It further extends the gender discussion to the African context, highlighting the significance of rites of passage in the initiation and socialization of girls into womanhood. The chapter continues to engage with the African philosophy of personhood, demonstrating the purpose of these rites for African people.

Chapter three presents the theoretical framework of the study, which is African Feminist Theory. This theory recognizes the plurality of African women and considers this in addressing issues of women's oppression in Africa and reconciling the politics of distortions, marginal representation, and silencing of African women in Western feminism (Akin-Aina, 2011: 72).

Chapter four outlines the methodology and methods used in the undertaking of this study to explore the personal experiences of Basotho women of the shifting womanhoods. The chapter details the qualitative methods, sampling strategies, and data collection tools employed in the study. The chapter also shows the data analysis process, relying on the thematic approach. Finally, it discusses the ethical considerations and limitations of the research.

Chapter five focuses on the presentation of the findings and analysis of the findings. The findings are reported and analyzed according to themes derived from the subsidiary objects of the study. Lastly, the fifth chapter provides a summary of the thesis and final remarks on the findings and conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Chapter

Introduction

In the African context, initiation rites of passage serve as schools to educate and integrate boys and girls into the accepted gender norms and performance for manhood and womanhood, respectively. In line with the study's objectives, the literature review will give a broad context of the gender discourse, zoning in on the African context, and the popular initiation of gender configuration practices across different African communities. Furthermore, the chapter will venture into a discussion of the African personhood philosophy relating to rites of passage. The chapter continues to engage with the concept of liminality in rites of passages, highlighting its conceptual extension to describe a perpetual experience of limbo and application to understanding contemporary structures and relations. Finally, the chapter provides a brief contextualization of the three respective womanhood spaces this thesis is concerned with.

1. Conceptualising Gender

Gender is a set of widely held cultural beliefs about the essential nature and the relative status of men and women in society (Chatillon *et al*., 2018: 217). Chatillon *et al*. (2018: 217) expand on this definition of gender, explaining that it is culturally hegemonic ideas of masculinity and femininity, engrained in social institutions and relations, supporting gender-differentiated identities, behaviors, and divisions of labor. Similarly, Georgia Duerst-Lahti (2008: 160) defines gender as structured beliefs and views about how power should be distributed according to the social constructions of the female and male sexed bodies. While Castañeda & Pfeffer (2018: 119) refer to gender as social characteristics associated with manhood and womanhood, making a clear distinction from sex, the categorization of one as either male or female considering the appearance of one's genitalia- a biological characteristic. It is social beliefs on appropriate rights, roles, and responsibilities for individuals based on a binary perception of two biologically distinct and "opposite" sexes that arrange unambiguously two gender categories of manhood and womanhood/ masculinity and femininity (Chatillon *et al*., 2018: 217). Therefore, manhood and womanhood are

gender configuration practices that prescribe roles, behavior expectations, and social statuses for men and women, respectively, in society.

According to Lorber (2018: 347), gender is a pervasive aspect of society, so much so that people perform it in their daily activities without thinking about or questioning it. It is so intricately woven into the social fabric that it often takes a deliberate deviation from the normal expectations of how men and women are supposed to behave to pay attention to how it is reproduced (Lorber, 2018: 347). The practice of engendering an individual's body starts with sex assignment at birth, based on the appearance of their genitalia (Lorber, 2018: 347). The gender status of an individual is subsequently developed through naming, dressing, and marking the body in ways that display their sex category (Lorber, 2018: 347). Once the child's gender is apparent, society proceeds to socialize them according to their gender well into adulthood (Lorber, 2018: 347). Ideas about the two dominant genders are disseminated and reproduced through mass media and popular culture platforms, structural institutions and organizations, practices in families, schools, and the workplace, everyday interpersonal interactions, and effects on cognitions (Chatillon *et al*., 2018: 217). Deviation from or transgressions against hegemonic gender ideologies are punishable by social and legal sanctions (Chatillon *et al*., 2018: 217). Essentially, the lens that this study adopts is that about gender being socially constructed by various social institutions but also in the everyday actions of individuals in society. Everything and everyone is gendered which then makes even the resistance of gender binaries a performance in one form or the other.

1.1. Gender as a Social Construct

Although "doing gender" is second nature, so much "we assume it is bred in our genes" (Lorber, 2018: 347), it is not inherent in humans. Gender is socially constructed. Simone de Beauvoir's (cited in Leboeuf, 2016: 140) statement, constantly referred to in gender studies, that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" supports the contention that gender is not a biological product but a social construct. Contrary to deterministic narratives of gender that locate the existence of gender behaviors and expectations as being biologically tied to the human body (Castañeda & Pfeffer, 2018: 120), the social construction of gender approach locates the experience of gender as phenomenon created, maintained, and reproduced by society through symbols, activities, situations, and life lessons (Riseman, 2018: 23). Henderson (cited in Biever *et al*., 2007: 168)

explains that the meaning of gender is constructed by society, and individuals are socialized into that construction to produce and reproduce it through actions. Connell (1995: 262) elaborates that gender is a social script that people learn and enact. Feminist scholars argue gender is created through social and political processes that manifest as multiple performances and practices of manhood and womanhood, which are in turn embedded in society and enforced by social and political structures and institutions (Duerst-Lahti, 2008: 161).

In everyday interactions, people do not primarily rely on others' biological features to make gendered actions (Castañeda & Pfeffer, 2018: 121). Instead, they depend upon culturally specific social signs and signals like clothing, hairstyle, bodily compartment, and adornment to determine whether someone is a man or a woman (Riseman, 2018: 23). Kessler & Mckenna (cited in Castañeda & Pfeffer, 2018: 121) refer to this pattern of ascribing the appropriate gender using external cues as "cultural genitals". These gender markers and their meaning that underpin individual enactments of gendered behavior, do not haphazardly appear in a social vacuum. Rather, repeated and everyday socialization into norms act to reinforce gender normative behaviors and strongly discourage contrary gender normative displays (Chatillon *et al*., 2018: 219).

Furthermore, Castañeda & Pfeffer (2018: 123) employ sociologist Charles Horton Cooley's (1902) "looking-glass self" concept to theorize and support the notion of gender as a social construct. The concept asserts that people form their self-identity in response to others' actual and imagined perceptions of them, as if society existed as a mirror, reflecting one's social value and identity (Castañeda & Pfeffer, 2018: 123). Castañeda & Pfeffer (2018: 123) expand this social process onto gender, arguing gender identity formation is no different. They explain that gender is not an aspect possessed by an individual, but it is something that is internalized from repeated and everyday interactions. Therefore, West and Zimmer (cited in Riseman, 2018: 25) contend gender is not something we are or have but rather something we do, and we are held accountable and labeled as deviants by others if we do not do it properly. Moreover, by doing gender, people legitimate, reproduce, and perpetuate gender distinctions- taking part in the social project of constructing gender.

According to Castañeda & Pfeffer (2018: 123), people have no choice in doing gender because power relations in society, including the distribution of resources and allocation of power in the private, economic, and political domains, are heavily dependent on binary gender categorization of people into men and women. Therefore, social structures and institutions such as family, schools, churches, and the law are very important in normalizing gender and sexual identities (Lorber, 2018: 350). Gender policing, which refers to the societal punishment of people who deviate from or reject socially prescribed gender norms of behavior and appearance, takes place everywhere and on a daily, ensuring conformity to and reproduction of hegemonic gender-appropriate norms (Castañeda & Pfeffer, 2018: 124). Gender policing may take the form of informal sanctions such as disapproving looks, condemning comments, exclusion, and even physical violence (Castañeda & Pfeffer, 2018: 124). Gender policing may also be enforced in the form of formal punishment or threat of punishment by institutions and structures such as law enforcement and social policy (Lorber, 2018: 350). Consider, for example, Uganda's recently passed anti-gay Bill (2023) that prohibits and criminalizes identifying as LGBTQ+, compels citizens to turn in those who do, bans gay sexual activities and the promotion of homosexuality, and prescribes the death penalty for certain same-sex activities (Bhandari, 2023). This formal law acts to reproduce the hegemonic gender idea of compulsory heteronormativity- the "normal" sexual and romantic relation between men and women- and reinforces gender binary essentialism. If signed and implemented, the bill will target LGBTI people who deviate from commonly held gender beliefs that endorse compulsory heterosexuality and gender binary (Bhandari, 2023; Castañeda & Pfeffer, 2018: 124).

Further indicating the socially constructed nature of gender is the innumerable differences in gender constructs across cultures (Castañeda & Pfeffer, 2018: 121). Gender expectations and norms are created within contexts that vary across time, geographical space, religious affiliations, traditional beliefs, race and class makeup, and ethnicity (Chatillon *et al.*, 2018: 218). These context characteristics intersect and influence constructs of gender in various ways, resulting in diverse manifestations of gender constructs (Castañeda and Pfeffer, 2018: 125). Supporting this sentiment, Castañeda & Pfeffer (2018: 125) note that gender identity is always socio-culturally influenced, constructed, and located, often in ways that do not allow for simple understanding and classification. Gender is not a fixed construct, as it is intertwined with culture, everyday practice,

and experience, which are always changing. It is a state of flux (Castañeda & Pfeffer, 2018: 125). Constantly under negotiation and contestation, prone to change at any given moment (Lorber, 2018: 350).

The notion of gender as a social construct is particularly important to this study as womanhood is constantly being (re)constructed and (re)negotiated in cultures across the world. The Basotho culture, the focus of this study, is no exception. The focus of this study on Basotho womanhood(s) and how they are (re)produced and negotiated in three respective platforms within the Basotho community of Lesotho serves as evidence that gender is socially defined. This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature that explores what it means to be a woman within the Basotho cultural group. A lot of the research on gender and gendered rites of passage has largely focused on men and their rites of passage or spaces of gender conceptualization and performance. While there is a large body of scholarship on feminism broadly and African feminism in particular, the literature on womanhood rites of passage in Africa remains scant. This is, therefore, the gap in literature that this study seeks to make.

1.2. Gender Ideologies

The binary conceptualization of gender and structuring of power relations around two sexes is a constant throughout cultures, yet the ideological recommendations and expectations of the two genders differ greatly across cultures (Duerst-Lahti, 2008: 161). Traditional ideologies of gender practice are embedded in the currently accepted system of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 1995: 262). Patriarchy is a system of social organization and control that privileges men over women in the distribution of and access to rights, opportunities, and resources (Hussien, 2005: 60). Traditional gender ideologies locate the place of women in society as in the domestic sphere, being mothers and wives, ensuring the upkeep of their homes, and taking care of the children (Lorber, 2018: 347). At the same time, men belong in the public political and economic domains, working and bringing the bread home (Zuo & Tang, 2000: 30). Women's gendered identities call for them to embody feminine characteristics such as empathy, beauty, and selflessness (Riseman, 2018: 23). While men are expected to display strength, be assertive, and occupy leadership positions (Zuo & Tang, 2000: 30). These are manifestations of gender that are generally understood as masculine.

Women's bodily comportments are expected to display gentleness and graciousness, while men should exude confidence and authority (Riseman, 2018: 23). Most contexts have this understanding and expectations of women and men but still will differ based on variability in other identities that intersect in intricate ways and at different levels of society to produce culture-specific ideologies of gendered behavior and display.

While gender ideologies are universal, the particularities of their manifestations are culture-specific. African feminist scholars (Amadiume, 1987; Oyewumi, 2011) have argued that scholars should not universalize either gender ideologies or feminism. They argue that the occurrence and performance of gender and feminism in the African context differs from the Western gender order. Amadiume (1987) shows that the pre-colonial Igbo people in the Nnobi region in Nigeria had a flexible gender system that mediated the dual-sex organizational principle. She argued that that culture even had few linguistic distinctions between masculine and feminine gender that make it possible for men and women to play some social roles which, in other cultures, especially those of the Western world, carry rigid sex and gender association (Amadiume, 1987).

In line with the arguments that the construction and performance of gender in African societies varies from the Western gender order, the following sections highlight gender construction, particularly womanhood construction, in African societies.

1.3. African Gender Ideologies

Constructions of gender in most African contexts are primarily underpinned by the theme of patriarchy (Hussein, 2005: 59). Legends, proverbs, and myths are widely used to wield and reproduce gender relations and practices that encourage the oppression of women and superiority of men (Hussein, 2005: 59). Hussein's (2005) study of constructions of masculinity in African society through proverbs support that gender constructions are embedded in patriarchy (Hussein, 2005: 62). Men are encouraged to be autonomous beings, while a woman's identity and existence are attached to her husband or father (Hussein, 2005: 65). Nyame & Tomekyin's (2018) study of constructions of masculinity and femininity in the proverbs of the Nzema people in Ghana supports the representation of women as dependent on men. This is evident in proverbs like "it is the man who chews for the woman to eat", which means that women need men to acquire their material

needs, such as food (Nyame & Tomekyin, 2018: 230). Implying that women rely on men for material and financial support, thus legitimating the domination of men over women (Nyame & Tomekyin, 2018: 230-231).

The gender code of conduct and appearance for men and women in African societies mirrors the normative gender expectations. Women are considered as intellectually inferior, weak, and dependent. They are also symbols of warmth and all-nourishing goodness (Hussein, 2005: 60). On the other hand, African masculine concepts believe men to be more capable, both physically and mentally, assertive and powerful, making them more suitable for greater roles and responsibilities such as managing family estate, heading a household and ensuring financial security (Hussein, 2005: 60). Further, in these proverbs, women are regarded solely as objects to please and advance men's interests (Hussein, 2005: 66). For example, some proverbs express how some families enhanced their wealth and formed alliances by giving their female children away to other families in marriage or how women served as a commodity in warfare to make amends in Somalia (Hussein, 2005: 65). This construction of femininity in African proverbs emphasizes women's social, physical, and psychological inferiority (Nyame & Tomekyin, 2018: 231). Masculinity, by being the opposite of femininity in the practice of gender in these African contexts, is then associated with superiority, power, leadership, and wealth (Hussein, 2005: 67).

2. Womanhood rites of passage and rituals in Africa

Throughout the world, there are commonly held beliefs about the status of women, including expected values, characteristics, behavior, and ultimately their role in society that collectively define the gender practice of womanhood (Schaan *et al.*, 2016: 173). In the African context, womanhood practice is influenced by patriarchal ideologies, encouraging a submissive and subservient nature in women (Schaan *et al*., 2016: 173). Womanhood is considered a very important stage in a young female's life trajectory. Across many African communities, various culturally sacred rites of passage are performed to mark the transition and properly integrate young females into their womanhood gender identity and roles. Rites of passage are traditional ceremonies employed to mark an exit from one stage of life and entrance into another. Nhlekisana (2017: 31) explains that they accompany important changes in an individual's life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. In many African contexts, these rituals are performed for both young

boys and girls who are developmentally and socially ready to take on their adult roles (Sennott & Majola, 2017:783). The following discussion will identify and discuss the rites of passage in African societies whereby young girls are socialized into womanhood.

2.1. Womanhood in the *!Xoo*

Amongst the !*Xoo* of *Zutshwa* of southwestern Botswana, the attainment of puberty marks the transition for girls from childhood to womanhood (Nhlekisana, 2017: 34). When a girl gets her first period, she must run and hide in the bushes (Nhlekisana, 2017: 34). Later in the evening, elderly women in her family will realize that she has not come home, and go look for her in the bushes (Nhlekisana, 2017: 34). She is brought back home and isolated from the rest of society, in a hut for a period of one month. Nhlekisana (2017: 34) explains that this gives the girl time to get used to this change and learn how to manage menstruation in private. While in the hut, she is told not to look outside or make eye contact with people; rather, she should sit with her back turned against the wall (Nhlekisana, 2017: 34). The girl is taken care of by her mother or other elderly women in her family (Nhlekisana, 2017: 34). She does not do nor touch anything. They bring her food, bathe her and change the grass she sleeps on, which is kept in the house until the day she leaves the hut and then thrown far away where no one can see it (Nhlekisana, 2017: 35). This rite of passage by the !*Xoo* does not involve excision or circumcision (Nhlekisana, 2017: 35). This part of the ritual is important as the girl must be protected and guided while she is menstruating.

The next stage is regarded the being betwixt and in between social statuses (Nhlekisana, 2017: 35). At this point, she is neither a girl because she has started puberty nor a woman as she has not completed the initiation rite into womanhood. This stage is dedicated to educating and training the transitional girl (Nhlekisana, 2017: 35). She is advised on matters relating to womanhood, domestic and agricultural roles, reproduction, and behavior toward men (Nhlekisana, 2017: 36). She is also instructed on the moral and practical responsibilities of being a potential wife and mother (Nhlekisana, 2017: 36). The last stage is reintegration. After the month of seclusion, her caretaker sends word around the community that the girl will be coming out the following day, and people should join in for the celebration (Nhlekisana, 2017: 37). The girl comes out with a bunch of grass on her forehead, symbolic of the one she laid on during isolation, and her face

smeared with *letsoku* (reddish powder), to beautify her and make her more attractive (Nhlekisana, 2017: 37). The *letsoku* also signifies blood and fertility (Nhlekisana, 2017: 37). The girl is given necklaces and clothes made of animal skin as gifts by those who have come to see her reincorporation into society (Nhlekisana, 2017: 37). It is only at this point may be considered a woman and allowed to assume her roles and responsibilities as one, such as getting married and procreating.

2.2. Womanhood in the Chikunda

According to Talakinu (2018: 107), the Chikunda, a matrilineal ethnic group in Zambia found in the Luangwa district, perform an initiation ritual for girls interchangeably called *Chinamwali* or *Chisungu* (Talakinu, 2018: 107). Similar to the *!Xoo*, this is a rite of passage undertaken when a girl experiences her first menstrual period. The purpose of this ritual, through the symbolism of menstruation, is to initiate a young girl into womanhood (Talakinu, 2018: 108). *Chinamwali* is a secret and culturally sacred initiation school facilitating womanhood training at the onset of girls' first menstruation cycle (Phiri *et al*., 2020: 141). Selected elderly women of the community facilitate the teaching process, which takes 2-3 months, within confined spaces away from the rest of society (Fumpa-Makano, 2019: 26). During the isolation period, the girls are taught topics involving their "new" gender roles and identities of womanhood (Talakinu, 2018: 112). These include menstrual hygiene, respect for elders and men, the art of dancing in bed, and generally, how to be good homemakers, wives, and mothers (Fumpa-Makano, 2019: 27; Phiri *et al*., 2020: 141). The teachers often use song and dance to deliver the contents of their teachings (Phiri *et al*., 2020: 141).

Furthermore, the initiation school includes a component where the young girls' bodies are physically marked through the practice of labia minora elongation (Talakinu, 2018: 108). Talakinu (2018: 115) explains that the practice of labia elongation is argued as a sign of maturity from girlhood and gives sexual pleasure to men. Women who fulfill this part of the initiation are perceived as complete women. Those who do not are often ridiculed as "not a woman" or a "fool" and excluded from the Chikunda women's collective identity as women, which allows membership in the group of knowledgeable women in the community by completing the rite of passage (Talakinu, 2018: 112 & 116). Highlighting the patriarchal nature of womanhood ideologies in the

African context, Talakinu (2018: 116) elaborates that the body is a site of inscribing gender practices that privilege the sexual needs of men. He critically explains, "The practice of labia elongation also shows how women's bodies are seen as objects of men's desires and has an obvious impact on a woman's status, as they become dependent on their bodies for recognition and acceptance…." (Talakinu, 2018: 116).

2.3. Womanhood in the Zulu

The *Umemulo* ceremony is performed by the Zulu cultural group of South Africa to signal and symbolize the entry of young girls into womanhood (Mntambo, 2020: 09). Mntambo (2020: 13) explains that the ritual is done by young Zulu girls who have reached menarche- the first menstrual cycle. The rite of passage includes a seclusion process, whereby the ceremony recipient and her age mates are isolated (Mntambo, 2020: 09). During this seclusion practice, elder women in the community, who are custodians of the rite of passage, counsel the girls on how to be a Zulu woman and mother (Mntambo, 2020: 10). This process is called *ukuyalwa*, and the elder women emphasize *ukuhlonipha* (to be respectful) as an important feature in the construction and performance of Zulu womanhood (Mntambo, 2020: 10). *Ukuhlonipha* is defined as respect for elders, parents, and oneself by not having a child before marriage and through general dignified and obedient conduct. According to the Zulu culture, respect determines marriageability and access to certain spaces (Mntambo, 2020: 09- 10). *Umemulo* is the second and most important part of the rite. This is where the girl is tested if she has preserved her virginity by throwing the spear into the ground without it falling, wearing cow fat/stomach lining around her waist without tearing it, or jumping over a fire naked without burning (Mntambo, 2020: 11). If the girl passes the test, the ritual is concluded with a celebration ceremony whereby a cow is slaughtered, the community is invited, and the girl whose *Umemulo* it is comes out of isolation accompanied by her age mates in song and dance (Mntambo, 2020: 11). The *Umemulo* rite of passage is a gift given to a girl by her father for having preserved herself and, therefore, her father's kraal (Mntambo, 2020: 11).

2.4. Womanhood in the Xhosa culture

The Xhosa cultural group facilitates the transition from girlhood to womanhood through the practice of *Intonjane* (Padmanabhanunni *et al*., 2018: 705). Traditionally, the rite is initiated after a young Xhosa girl's first period, and the initiate is called *intonjane* (Padmanabhanunni *et al*., 2018: 705; Matholeni, 2020: 07). The ceremony also starts with a seclusion process at

Kwantonjane, a space built near the house and behind the kraal, for three to six weeks (Matholeni, 2020: 07-08). The initiate is kept behind a curtain inside *Kwantonjane* and is not allowed to be seen by anyone besides her guardian, who brings her food and takes care of her (Matholeni, 2020: 08 & 11). During the seclusion ceremony, the initiate removes all her clothes, wraps herself in a blanket, and is given a headscarf to cover her head and face (Matholeni, 2020: 10). The following part of the ritual is the slaughtering of the cow ceremony. The initiate is fed a certain part of the cow and receives counselling about the proper and important aspects of being a woman, marriage, and the rights and responsibilities of being a wife, mother, and woman in her community (Matholeni, 2020: 11). Furthermore, during the training, emphasis is placed on beauty, how to please a man, menstrual hygiene, and the woman's role in the household (Matholeni, 2020: 12). The young village women sing and dance outside the hut every night while the initiate remains inside *Kwantonjane* (Matholeni, 2020: 11). If the initiate goes out, she is accompanied by her guardian, both covered in a blanket, making it difficult to see who is who (Matholeni, 2020: 11). At the end of the seclusion practice, the initiate rejoins society as a woman and is welcomed back by her family and community members through the final stage of *umgidi*, a homecoming ceremony (Padmanabhanunni *et al*., 2018: 706). According to Matholeni (2020: 08), the *Intonjane* rite of passage is not just performed as an indicator of a young girl's sexual maturity and ability to conceive but is necessary. Mills (cited in Matholeni, 2020: 08) explains that some women may encounter fertility issues, sickly children, or face other misfortunes due to the failure to perform this ritual.

3. Womanhood in the Contemporary context

All over the world, the once dominant construction of womanhood as submissive and respectable is now changing. In the South African context, Gqola (2016: 120) notes that the implementation of post-apartheid gender-progressive legislation through a range of political and social activism saw women organize to demand gender equality in all issues and areas of society. In the contemporary South African context, women exercise more political presence and occupy more spaces in the public sector (Afisi, 2010: 236). As a result of the increased political, social, and economic empowerment of African women, Afisi (2010: 236) explains that women have gradually abandoned the traditional caregiving, homemaking, and nurturing roles of women in the African

household, which formed the basis of the traditional constructions of womanhood identity. This traditional construction of womanhood was intimately tied to the rites of passage for women. In the construction of contemporary womanhood, both continuities and discontinuities exist from traditional notions. Gqola (2016: 121) argues that the "new woman" seeks respectability through economic and symbolic means, through hard work and marriage rather than traditional notions of respectability attached to, essentially, how one appears or conducts themselves around men and elders, whether they have undergone womanhood rites of passage or if they have children. Therefore, the "new woman" shifts between these notions of womanhood, negotiating and fashioning their lived realities around them.

It is for this reason that this study traverses both traditional (*Lebollo la basali*) and more contemporary spaces of womanhood (*Pitiki* and *Makoti*). Firstly, this is because there is a recognition that the women in the contemporary era may be unable to attend the long period of *Lebollo la basali* and, therefore, decide to either join *Pitiki* or *Makoti* spaces to gain the necessary knowledge about motherhood or marriage. Secondly, there was a recognition that the contemporary woman may reject *Lebollo la basali* as archaic or patriarchal but still require some form of cultural support that correlates with who she is or can accommodate the demands of her working life. Lastly, there is often very little recognition that in African cultures, persons are made through rituals of incorporation. That is to, one is never a complete person until incorporated through ritualistic performance to being a full person. Mfecane (2019) writes about the rituals of incorporation in relation to masculinities in the African context. For example, he writes about *imbeleko* as a ritual of incorporation for children into the family and the ancestors. South African communities perform a similar rite of incorporation at the onset of a child's life called *imbeleko* (Ramphele & Richter, 2006: 78). It is undertaken by the paternal family of the child to formally welcome the child into their family and introduce him or her to the ancestors (Ramphele & Richter, 2006: 77-78). At the ceremony, a male elder calls upon the ancestors of the clan to bless, guide, and protect the child throughout its life (Mfecane, 2018: 297; Ramphele and Richter, 2006: 78). This ritual is often followed by rites that often mark a transition into adolescence, puberty, adulthood, parenthood, womanhood or manhood and ancestry. In some African communities, death does not mark the end of this pursuit of personhood. It is believed that the souls of the dead

continue to live on as ancestors, and rituals of incorporation are performed for those in the ancestral dimension.

A bulk of the literature often neglects to intertwine notions of what it means to be a person and how persons are made. In this study, the rites of passage into womanhood are also seen as processes through persons are made thus necessary to include a discussion on personhood. The point of departure for the researcher is that in most African cultures, a respectable personhood status is acquired through the successful completion of specific rites of passage. In the section that follows, I explore personhood as the practice and performance of rites of passage, such as female initiation practices in the African context, are closely linked to the project of making a morally virtuous person.

4. Womanhood and Personhood

Personhood scholars have distinguished personhood into two conceptions: Western and African. Western personhood is the idea of 'an autonomous person', whereby a person is a self-made, self-conscious, and right-bearing individual (De Craemer, 1983: 20). While the African notion speaks of a relational, communal, and inert identity attributed to other persons (Molefe, 2020). In this light, this thesis thus sees the rites of passage concerned and the womanhood spaces as ways through which not only women are made but also persons. The mere fact that one could not get married until they had undergone *Lebollo la basali* is evidence that a girl was not seen as a person until they had successfully completed the rite of passage. Thus, beyond womanhood, the study is also concerned with the African conception of personhood. However, African philosophers stress that this communitarian personhood does not imply the absence of individuality. While Western predominant notions of a person single out this or that feature of the lone individual and proceed to essentialize characteristics that entities aspiring to the status of man must have, like consciousness, memory, or rationality, the African view rejects this individualistic and oversimplified view that man can be defined by focusing of certain physical and psychological features of the individual (Molefe, 2018: 219).

According to African philosophy, personhood is not an inherently intrinsic moral virtue held from the conception of a person. Rather, human beings can achieve personhood through moral excellence, and human beings are born with capacities to make the pursuit of personhood possible. However, Molefe (2020: 198) notes, "…it is not every capacity associated with being human or their nature that is crucial for the possibility of morality qua moral virtue". For example, the fact that we are bipedal beings, we can sing and dance, though important human functions in other areas of our lives are not essential to the possibility of moral excellence (Molefe, 2020: 198). The normative conception of personhood assumes that the person has three distinct dimensions: mind, body, and soul (Ikuenobe, 2016: 145). Therefore, the moral and aesthetic judgment of a person as virtuous, and the subsequent social-communal recognition as such, assumes certain physical features and the metaphysical view of that person as not a "determined" object governed by physical laws over which the person has no control (Ikuenobe, 2016: 145).

It thus assumes that the person is a body that has a mind and is metaphysically free, fully capable of rational, voluntary and moral agency, and hence can be ascribed obligations and moral responsibility (Ikuenobe, 2016: 145). Therefore, one cannot be called a person by virtue of being biologically human but must strictly satisfy the communal moral expectations and aesthetic criteria. The African philosophy of personhood is predominant amongst most African cultures. It refers to an individual developing a morally virtuous character and leading a meaningful life (Molefe, 2020: 194). Scholars of the discourse of personhood in African philosophy usually identify two distinct concepts of personhood: the ontological and the normative (Ikuenobe, 2016: 144). The ontological perspective focuses on the fact of being human or the idea of human nature (Molefe, 2020: 196). This is a philosophical account concerned with what constitutes human nature, usually giving rise to debates about whether it is entirely physical or a combination of physical and meta-physical components (Molefe, 2020: 196; Ikuenobe, 2016: 144). The ontological description of personhood is beyond the scope of this dissertation. This dissertation is concerned with the normative conception of personhood. According to the normative description, personhood involves grading a human life in terms of meaningfulness or virtue relative to the quality of the moral agent's performance as part of a moral community as far as they possess the necessary spiritual capacities (Molefe, 2020: 196).

Nigerian philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti is credited as one of the first African philosophers on the moral/normative notion of personhood in African philosophy. Menkiti (cited in Molefe, 2019: 313) notes that to be a person amounts to equipping our human nature with moral dimensions. The achievement of the moral dimension cannot be fulfilled in a single event or condition; rather, it necessitates going through a lifelong process of social and ritual transformation (Molefe, 2019: 314; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001: 271). Menkiti elaborates that the internalization of moral norms of society will convert what was biologically conceived to have inbuilt excellencies (Molefe, 2019: 314). Thus, in African philosophy, the possession of personhood is synonymous with the development of virtuous moral character, wherein one's life is characterized as meaningful; and to be called a non-person is to be stripped of the status of moral achievement without denying one's humanity in the biological sense (Molefe, 2019: 314).

According to Ikuenobe (2016: 145), it is common in the African context to say that 'one is not a person' or that the individual is a 'thing' or an animal. This results from either not acquiring personhood or having stopped pursuing this virtuous identity. The person cannot satisfy the normative moral and aesthetic criteria of personhood because they do not have the necessary capacities to pursue the features of personhood (Ikuenobe, 2016: 145-6). Comaroff & Comaroff (2001: 272) explain that this only happens when one falls victim to witchcraft or is 'eaten' by someone more powerful. In the former instance, they are immobilized through illness or mysteriously rendered inert, negating their capacity for productive activity (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001: 272). On the latter, they are deprived of autonomy and control, reduced to dependency, a complete loss of self-determination, an empty shell of humanity who toil mindlessly at the behest of others (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001: 272).

Personhood, interpreted as a self-realization approach to ethics, requires individuals to pursue self-fulfillment through a set of collective social ideals and moral standards (Molefe, 2019: 314). Augustine Shutte (2001: 14) explains that one's greatest moral responsibility is to become more fully human by means of integrating more and more deeply into a community with others. The realization of a moral status befitting a true human being is characterized by certain relational virtues such as being generous, kind, caring, friendly, and compassionate (Molefe, 2019: 315). The relational facet of personhood constitutes the means an individual must employ to achieve

personhood (Molefe, 2019: 315). In South Africa, this feature of personhood is captured in the popular Ubuntu isiZulu proverb: "*umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*"- loosely translated, "a person is a person because of others"; in Cameroon Grasslands communities, the similar communitarian identity of a person is expressed in the saying: "A child is one person's only in the womb". The Akan of Ghana expresses this selfless communal personhood in the maxim: 'when a person descends from heaven, he descends into human society (Mfecane, 2018: 296). This relational facet further emphasizes key values such as group solidarity, conformity, respect, a humanistic orientation, and collective unity in pursuing moral perfection (Molefe, 2019: 315). Therefore, the achievement of personhood entails a dialogical morality insofar as it merges the individualistic and communitarian elements (Molefe, 2019: 316).

Rather, African philosophy advances a definition of man that takes into consideration the environing community (Molefe, 2018: 219). Personhood in African philosophy is a status obtained in progressively higher degrees throughout the course of one's life. It is a long process of social, cultural, and ritual transformation and integration (Ikuenobe, 2016: 151). Personhood status is acquired through participation in or performance of rituals of incorporation or rites of passage, and the community plays a significant role during this long process (Ikuenobe, 2016: 151; Mfecane, 2018: 296). For example, cultural practices such as *Lebollo la basali, Pitiki ea bomme, and Makoti* of the Basotho facilitate the incorporation of women into respectable womanhood personhood status. These rites of passage into womanhood are a community-centered process, with the elderly women in *Lebollo* and *Pitiki* and experts in *Makoti* being the custodians of the practices. Women who did not undergo *Lebollo* in the traditional context were not considered suitable candidates for marriage as they were not appropriate Mosotho women, reiterating the importance of fulfilling communal moral expectations to acquire personhood.

The argument that this thesis seeks to depart from regarding personhood is that these rites are not mere celebrations of various stages in an individual's life; they carry fundamental cultural meanings and expectations of the relations with family, the community, and the ancestors, and their recipients are meant to be transformed spiritually, behaviorally, and in terms of their personhood (Mfecane, 2018: 297).

5. Womanhood and Liminality

It would be remiss to conduct a study on initiation rituals and the accompanying construction of new identities and personhood without touching on liminality. It is important in explaining the seclusion period in rites of passage like *ulwaluko kwa-Xhosa* (Ntozini & Ngqangweni, 2016); Ndebele circumcision ritual (Bhuda & Koitsiwe, 2021); *Intonjane* in the Xhosa Culture (Sotewu, 2016); and in the process of becoming a *sangoma* (Rankou-Radebe, 2021). In the case of this study, liminality could also be employed to understanding the lived experience of Basotho women whose lives oscillate between two dominant value systems of womanhood: traditional and modern. Sociologist, Turner (cited in Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016: 49) describes liminality as an identity limbo in which people lack a concrete identity; they have shed their old identities and have not yet been assigned their new ones. They do not belong to or identify as either one thing or another. The concept "liminality", originally developed by anthropologists, has become widely used across disciplines, especially in contemporary social and human sciences, to describe and better understand transitionary experiences and transformative events. Liminality is the state of being caught between practices, cultures, belief systems, social roles, and/or identities (Donahue & Foster-Johnson, 2018: 361). You are no longer in the previous state and not yet in the next (Donahue & Foster-Johnson, 2018: 361). It is the state of being suspended between the insider and outsider positions (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016: 48). It describes the experience of living "in-between" cultures like immigrants, non-binary individuals, and Basotho women existing between differing constructions of womanhoods. Liminality is about the precarious and fluctuating experience of being one thing nor the other, or maybe being both, neither here nor there, or being nowhere in particular (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016: 48). Donahue & Foster-Johnson (2018: 361) posits it is a lens for conceptualizing the experience of movement from one normed state or community to another quite different one.

Liminality refers to an intermediate, transformative state during which an individual is 'betwixt and between' and moves from one sense of identity to another, i.e. girl to woman (Bamber *et al.*, 2017: 1518). The term is derived from Latin '*limen*' (threshold), meaning a situation facilitating a 'passing through' (Szakolozai, 2009: 142). Arnold van Gennep conceptualized the term through his study of societal "rites de passage", which are rituals of incorporation or collective cultural passages an individual has to go through during their life cycle with the intention to either mark,

guide or celebrate the individual (Szakolozai, 2009: 141). Van Gennep described these rites as sharing a three-stage sequential: separation, limen, and aggregation (Szakolozai, 2009: 141). The initial, pre-liminal stage involves separation rites to detach individuals from their previously occupied position in society (Somanadhan *et al.*, 2021: 615). The liminal is the actual passage through the boundary between the past and future phases, often requiring the completion of a practice or trial (Somanadhan *et al.*, 2021: 615). This stage is ritualistic, starting with a 'triggering event' and then conducted in sacred spaces for a specific duration (Beech, 2011: 287). During this stage, the person does not belong to either position but is a "laminar", i.e., suspended between not being a girl anymore and not being a woman yet (Somanadhan *et al.*, 2021: 616). The post-liminal stage follows and is marked by rituals of incorporation that celebrate and symbolize the individual's entrance into the new position and return to stability (Somanadhan *et al.*, 2021: 616).

While the concept initially found its applications in Anthropology, it quickly found its way in other social sciences. Sociologist, Turner expanded on the conceptualizations of liminality, seeing the liminar as an interstructural as they are in 'betwixt and between' both the positions they occupy at the points of separation and incorporations (Ybema *et al*., 2011: 22). According to Turner (cited in Beech, 2011: 287), the inter-structural position has several characteristics. First, the liminar is socially invisible (Beech, 2011: 287). Their ambiguous position places them outside of social definition because, for example, society's secular definitions do not extend to the existence of not-girl-not-woman, which is what a participant in a female initiation rite is, if they can even be identified as anything (Beech, 2011: 287). Second, the liminar is considered dead structurally. Since the transition calls for the liminar to evolve from an old to a new social position, this transition is metaphorically conveyed as death (and may in some cultures be ritually buried/lie motionless/stained black or covered in blood), and when he or she re-enters society, is accepted back as a newborn with a new status and responsibilities (Ybema *et al*., 2011: 22). Ybema *et al.* (2011: 22) explain that the transition is symbolically conveyed. Third, the liminar during liminality has no rights due to their classificatory ambiguity; the liminar's original definable identity is dissolved, and normal structures and modes of social are not applicable to the liminar (Ybema *et al*., 2011: 22). Fourth, liminality is the phase in which the liminar reflects about their society and their physical environment to reintegrate in a new identity with new responsibilities and competencies (Beech, 2011: 287). Liminality, therefore, is a reconstruction of identity in which

one's sense of self is significantly disrupted to give rise to a new, meaningful identity for the individual and the community.

As initially conceptualized, liminal experiences in traditional contexts were part of highly ritualized practices of transition and personhood from one sense of identity and social status to another. As such, the liminal stage was referred to as a temporary, obligatory, strictly scripted and expertly guided experience with a predetermined outcome of progression to the next social position (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016: 48). However, the concept of liminality has found application beyond ritualistic practices. The liminal experience in the contemporary context vastly differs from this classic anthropological conceptualization and is used to describe a growing number of people that inhibit 'in-between' states. The characteristics and assumptions have shifted to capture a full diversity of less ritualized and institutionalized contemporary liminal experiences. According to Ibarra & Obodaru (2016: 49) some of the features of contemporary liminal experiences include a greater variety of identity outcomes, other than the predetermined passage onto the next stage in the traditional progression of things.

Liminality may not result in the simultaneous objective and subjective state transition. In some instances, there is ambiguity about the next point in life. Contemporary liminal experiences may produce a multitude of outcomes, remain unresolved- in a perpetual state of being neither here nor there- or even regress change (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016: 49). Moreover, unlike the finite, bracketed traditional experience, the contemporary liminality can be open-ended, less finite or even permanent in nature (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016: 50). They unfold in a self-initiated and self-directed manner (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016: 50). Liminars in the modern day have more freedom and choice to craft their own course or even decide not to initiate progressive change. So, liminality in the modern day is variously used to classify of people in different occupations, hierarchy positions, events, and spaces that move in between and across boundaries, values systems, and social positions and to explore the experience the changeful nature of these subjects, the multiple meanings that can coexist and the consequences of extended liminality (Beech, 2011: 287).This contemporary adaptation of liminality captures and explains the full range of the participants for this study. *Pitiki* and *Makoti* rituals of incorporation into womanhood do not consist of a seclusion period. Furthermore, unlike the traditional experience of rites of passage, there is no definable

completion and reincorporation state to these rites of passage into womanhood due to their ongoing structure.

Scholars such as Nic Beech (2011), for example, have extended the notion of liminality to the identity discourse. Identity construction and experience is a mutually collaborative endeavor between individuals and the environing community. Therefore, the conceptualization of liminality in identity assumes the self is always located in a dialogue with the inner self and the external social identity. The extension of liminality to identity discourse captures the experience of all participants in the study. Multiple indigenous womanhood spaces and multiple womanhood identities exist in the external Basotho society, and the participants are in dialogue with these womanhood spaces to construct their individual womanhood identities.

Beech (2011) further proposes that three practices can be employed in the dialogical construction at the liminal phase of identity construction. The first is experimentation, whereby many versions of the self are tried and tested as a new or modified identity is pursued. This occurs in an internal-external dialogical orientation. Experimentation follows a dis-identification initial stage and happens during a paradoxical phase in the process where contradicting personal identities can co-exist. This practice is undertaken either to reject the imposition of an unwanted identity or to move towards a desired identity. The recognition practice facilitates an external-internal oriented dialogue. According to Beech (2011, 289), recognition is a gradual process of awareness, a realization that things are different. Commonly, it is prompted by a confounding event or a turning point, which leads to a greater sense of a new meaning. The practice of reflection places more emphasis on outside-in and internalized dialogue constructions. It involves self-questioning and change along with responding to external influences and perceptions. Self-questioning is mainly an internal process while self-change is an external endeavor of working through how one should present themselves to society. The identity of womanhood in the African communities is also a collaborative dialogue between the women and society constituted by these practices of experimentation, reflection and recognition.

The discourse on liminality has slightly stretched the conceptual boundaries of the original social anthropological use of the term to the possibility of liminality as a perpetual state. Initial

conceptualizations of the phenomenon argued that liminality is transitional betweenness and, inevitably followed by a final stage in rites or situations of change. However, the perpetual perspective of liminality proposes that some actors' sense or experience of being in between two states is an ongoing, never ending affair. Social actors in perpetual liminality exist at the threshold of existing structures, constantly crossing back and forth the boundaries of different groups and their values and beliefs, identifying with none in particular and/or all at the same time. For example, not being a 'traditional' woman or a 'modern' woman but both at the same time, continuously moving in-between, taking certain values from each to construct your identity but not fitting into any secular social definitions in society because society does not consider ambiguous categories such as a traditional-modern-woman. Ybema *et al*. (2011: 25) explain that a permanent liminar is like a quicksilver, always having to cast and recast themselves for different audiences at different times. This implies that perpetual liminars do not make use of temporal vocabulary to describe themselves, ascribing oldness and newness to their identities, but instead respond to contradicting principles and responsibilities switching from one socially acceptable identity to another, oscillating between 'in' and 'out', and 'us' and 'them'. This extended conceptualization of perpetual liminality, according to Ybema *et al.* (2011: 21), assists in the generation of a concrete understanding of how social actors navigate socially intricate, dynamic, and demanding situations.

The sections that follow review the existing literature about the womanhood initiation practices and spaces under investigation in this study.

6. Lebollo la basali

As previously mentioned, one of the aims of this study is to contribute to the knowledge gap regarding initiation rituals and rites of passage for women in Africa. It has already been mentioned that there is plenty of literature on initiation rites for men. This is the case with *Lebollo la basali*. There is very little literature about *Lebollo la basali* (initiation into womanhood), while there is a sufficient body of literature about *Lebollo la banna* (initiation into manhood). *Lebollo* in Lesotho refers to initiation schools (Matŝela, 1979; Du Plooy, 2006). As already evident, there is then a distinction between the initiation of boys into manhood and the initiation of girls into womanhood. Lekoekoe (2013) notes that "initiation (*Lebollo*) has from time immemorial played a significant

role for both men and women in the Sesotho cultural setting". *Lebollo la bale*, also known as *Lebollo la basali*, is an initiation ritual of the Basotho that facilitates the transition process of girls into womanhood.

Traditionally, Basotho girls between twelve and twenty years of age were sent for this initiation practice (Du Plooy, 2006: 72). According to the Basotho culture, girls of this age have reached puberty and sexual maturity and are physically strong enough to endure the living conditions and trials of *Lebollo* (Du Plooy, 2006: 72). Additionally, this is the age when girls were deemed eligible for marriage, and thus, *Lebollo* was intended to prepare them for it. It is for this reason that some scholars refer to *Lebollo* as a "marriage and initiation school" (Mohlabane, 2020: 34). Similar to most rites of passage in the African culture, *Lebollo* is intended to graduate young people into a moral state of adulthood and respectability. In this regard, Matŝela (1979) refers to *Lebollo* as "an entry point, a gate, so to speak, into adulthood (for which all youth yearned) and the privileges and responsibilities that it held for individuals".

Mohlabane (2020: 36) argues that *Lebollo* "instituted an independent, resilient, sexual type of femininity". Matŝela (1979) argues that *Lebollo la basali* was always kept extremely secretive from men and uninitiated women. It emerges from Matŝela's (1979: 208) writing that in the olden days, the initiation process and education inculcated skills such as craft skills and trained women for "womanhood, parenthood and citizenship". Additionally, "principles of authority and respect, love of work and dedication to family service, respect of their fathers, husbands-to-be and family elders" were emphasized (Matŝela, 1979: 209). While the type of femininity instituted was independent and resilient, as with Mohlabane's (2020) claim above, it also becomes clear that the teachings were also extremely patriarchal in that they placed reverence on the authority of the man, father, or husband. Additionally, Matŝela (1979) also adds that *Lebollo* prepared women to "look well after their husbands and care for their families." There was much emphasis on the domesticity of the women.

Matŝela (1979) notes that while the initiation ritual and process remained a secret, there was always a public ceremony starting the ritual and a public ceremony, a homecoming, to close the ceremony. The candidate initiates are accompanied to the village, where the initiation is to be held by initiated

female family members or a friend and handed over to the initiator (Du Plooy, 2006: 95). The girls' heads are immediately shaved, and the female traditional healer inoculates them (Du Plooy, 2006: 95). The initiates stay in an isolated initiation lodge in the village, and for routine activities, the initiates spend the day in the veld (Du Plooy, 2006: 98). But when they need privacy to perform certain sacred rituals, the initiates are taken to ditches where they will not be seen or heard by village inhabitants.

The candidate's family is responsible for providing food, her outfit, and other necessities during her stay at the initiation institution (Du Plooy, 2006: 68). During seclusion- until they are reintegrated into the community- the initiates are clothed in a cowhide or sheepskin skirt (Du Plooy, 2006: 87). They also wear a veil on the face and grass or rush/reed hoops around the waist (Du Plooy, 2006: 87). During seclusion, the initiates perform an array of domestic chores aimed at their education and initiation into womanhood. They wake up as early as four to fetch water and wood for the fire. Initiates take turns to prepare and cook food. They eat in the morning and evening, sharing communal dishes (Du Plooy, 2006: 99). After completing their morning domestic chores, they attend *koma* in the veld to sing secret songs and learn about initiation and totem laws (Du Plooy, 2006: 100). According to DuPlooys (2006: 06), *koma* is the highly guarded secret teaching of the initiation institution. It is considered the soul of initiation and is safeguarded to maintain the integrity of the institutions (Du Plooy, 2006: 100). *Koma* covers a wide range of themes, including sexual intercourse, the conduct of a married woman, and respect for older people (Du Plooy, 2006: 103-105).

The uninitiated status is ridiculed in the Basotho community. In the traditional context, the uninitiated adult status is undesirable, so much so that these persons are regarded as not having adult status (Du Plooy, 2006: 81). They are not consulted on important issues and may encounter challenges. For example, an uninitiated girl may be deemed unworthy of a bride price because of this status (Du Plooy, 2006: 82). The family she is marrying into might require her to undergo *Lebollo* before proceeding with marriage arrangements (Du Plooy, 2006: 82). The uninitiated adult woman is purposefully discriminated against, for example, excluded or disregarded in conversations of any import, such as marriage, motherhood, death, and cultural ceremonies (Du Plooy, 2006: 82). Not much notice is taken of her since she is not initiated. Her input in discussions

is unwelcome, weak, unworthy of attention, and unreliable because she does not truly exist; she is labeled a *lethisa* (an uninitiated girl) (Du Plooy, 2006: 82). The shame associated with being uninitiated propels females to attend and complete *Lebollo* to be a part of the initiated social group and share in the privileges associated with the status (Du Plooy, 2006: 81).

7. Pitiki

Pitiki is a sacred cultural setting whereby women are taught and empowered on how to be a *mosali oa Mosotho* (Mosotho woman) through erotic *litolobonya* dance, sexual conversations and demonstrations, reproductive health remedies and intergenerational and peer support and guidance. The emergence of *Pitiki* spaces was prompted by the decrease in womanhood initiation schools across various Basotho communities as a result of modern demands, innovation, and progressive beliefs in society. Although at its inception, *Pitiki* spaces admitted only married mothers, modern forms have become increasingly flexible in their membership criteria to include those that may not be mothers or married (Mohlabane & Tshoaedi, 2020: 49). The teachings imparted in *Pitiki* have also shifted from traditional hetero-patriarchal knowledge to mirror women's modern intersecting identities and lived realities.

The best way to explain *Pitiki* is consider thematic areas of focus that emerge in the scholarship that exists about the space. In the sections that follow, I focus on these thematic areas.

7.1 *Pitiki* on womanhood and motherhood

The cultural *Pitiki* space is a womanhood knowledge fountain purposed to empower Basotho women on their sexual and reproductive well-being as well as initiate them into their gendered identities and roles as women, mothers, and wives. According to Mohlabane (2022: 161), *Pitiki* is an indigenous knowledge hub celebrating life through a series of practices and teachings on womanhood. In earlier periods and far more traditional Basotho communities, access and attendance of *Pitiki* ceremonies were exclusively restricted to women who were married mothers, and the activities were performed in seclusion. Within *Pitiki*, the elderly women in the community are the custodians of the knowledge and rituals, responsible for imparting knowledge to the

incoming young women, particularly those who are new mothers (Mohlabane & Tshoaedi, 2020: 49).

Various processes and activities are performed at *Pitiki* gatherings that are aimed at empowering and educating women on Basotho womanhood. When a baby is a couple of months to a year old, the new mother will take part in *Pitiki*. At the first *Pitiki* ceremony, the new mother(s) attends with the baby (Mohlabane, 2022: 164). The women form a circle and the baby is placed at the middle, and they proceed to jump over the baby while singing and dancing, in short fiber skirts with tops on or completely naked (Mohlabane, 2022: 164). As part of this ritual, the women will also pass the baby amongst each other, still in song (Mohlabane, 2022: 164). Mohlabane (2022: 164) explains that this ceremony is an acknowledgement of the shared responsibility of motherhood. This sense of community, interdependence and solidarity demonstrated by the Basotho women in *Pitiki* reflects the salient African value of Ubuntu/personhood, emphasizing that it takes a village to raise a child. The *Pitiki* space fosters mutual support and peer learning systems about motherhood, post birth and child care, reproductive health and sexuality (Mohlabane, 2022: 164).

During the *Pitiki* ceremonies, new mothers are thoroughly educated and advised on Basotho cultural practices about postnatal healing and care. Gleaning their knowledge from what they term a "Basotho science", transmitted down intergenerationally through rituals and customs, the elderly women advise the participants to rest for up to six months after birth to help retain heat in the reproductive area (Mohlabane, 2022: 165). This is so that the pelvic bones that are separated at birth can heal (Mohlabane, 2022: 165). Women are further advised to tie the abdomen tightly to help the reconstruction process in the uterus (Mohlabane, 2022: 165). It is also explained to them that the vagina is no longer tightly closed like it was before birth and they are subsequently taught to use a folded, multi-layered cotton cloth sanitary towel (*litaepa*) to retain heat, aiding in the recovery of birth canal to prepare the vagina for sexual intercourse with their husbands, ensuring that not much of a difference is felt (Mohlabane, 2022: 165). Furthermore, vaginal steaming with the use of herbs is also prescribed in aiding the healing and tightening of the vagina (Mohlabane, 2022: 165). Although the *Pitiki* space advances the narrative of sexual pleasure as a male prerogative predominant in womanhood initiation practices and spaces, the teachings prioritize the reproductive wellbeing and healing of women as well as their sexual empowerment.

7.2 Pitiki on Sex

Within the *Pitiki*, Basotho women are "taught the tricks of the trade", in relation to being a woman who is a sexual being and sexually liberated as a wife inasmuch as she may be a mother (Mohlabane & Tshoaedi, 2020: 50). According to Mohlabane (2022: 166), the *Pitiki* space employs song and dance to reinforce insightful messages to ensure comprehensibility and cultural appropriateness. Women are taught the *litolobonya* dance to emulate an erotic sexual movement (Mohlabane, 2022: 166). These dances are performed either naked or wearing short, flared fiber skirts, involving a synchronized waving and swirling movement of the waist, buttocks and the hips- emulating the sexual act- to the rhythm of a song and drum (Mohlabane, 2022: 167). The purpose of *litolobonya* dance is to rehabituate the new mother of the erotic movements she is expected to perform when she resumes sexual activity with her husband after the labor and healing process. Women are advised to sleep separately from their partners for a while to prevent the contamination of the child's breast milk through engaging in sexual intercourse shortly after birth (Mohlabane, 2022: 166-67). Much attention is given to the new mothers during *litolobonya* dances to equip them with the necessary skills to ensure pleasurable intercourse following a long pregnancy and recovery processes (Mohlabane, 2022: 167). During *litolobonya*, self-made penises are used for demonstration purposes (Mohlabane, 2022: 167). The participants are completely naked because it is only women who are in the space. If a man, for any reason, dares to enter the *Pitiki* space, the women will strip him naked and throw their naked bodies on him in an attempt to embarrass him (Mohlabane, 2022: 167).

In keeping with the celebration of women's sexuality in the *Pitiki* space, women are taught to elongate their inner labia in preparation for their sexual roles in marriage (Mohlabane, 2022: 166). In the traditional context, this process took place prior to the onset of menarche and was followed by womanhood initiation rituals involving seclusion from six weeks to three months. This rite of passage marks the woman's entry into womanhood. The self-pulling and mutual pulling of the inner labia encouraged girls to discover sexual pleasure-inducing areas and ultimately become sexually empowered (Mohlabane & Tshoaedi, 2020: 48-9). The practice is performed either privately in the comfort of one's home, during bedtime or as part of young girls' game playing (Mohlabane & Tshoaedi, 2020: 48). Sometimes it takes place when girls are performing chores such as fetching wood in the veld, picking up wild herbs in the field or washing clothes by the

river banks (Mohlabane & Tshoaedi, 2020: 48). Conformity to the rite is established through peer support and often the older girls are responsible for teaching and initiating younger girls (Mohlabane & Tshoaedi, 2020: 48). The emphasis on women's sexual liberation in *Pitiki* is a resounding embodiment of Basotho women's bargaining power in their sexual relationships around sexual pleasure (Mohlabane, 2022: 167). The *Pitiki* space contrasts the definition of Mosotho women predominant in traditional exclusionary hetero-patriarchal womanhood spaces as sexually naive.

In recent years, *Pitiki* has migrated to social media, with groups on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. Within these platforms, the women discuss various topics and sometimes seek advice on personal issues on there. They also utilize these groups to share details of upcoming gatherings such as the date, location, and theme.

8. *Makoti*

The *Makoti* space is an extremely recent Basotho womanhood space. In the Basotho culture, a *Makoti* is a new-married woman. Because of the newness of these spaces, the researcher found no literature about the space. In comparison to *Lebollo la basali* and *Pitiki*, *Makoti* spaces are extremely commercialized and therefore are largely middle-class spaces. It is a space for married women to share their problems and offer counsel and advice to others. They meet six times a year but also organize virtual touch base meetings. At the face-to-face meetings, they hire a professional speaker to talk to specific challenges about marriage. As mentioned, there is unfortunately no literature on this practice or space.

9. Conclusion

This literature review chapter has provided a broad context of the gender discourse, focusing on the African context, and the gender configuration rites and practices across different African communities. Furthermore, the chapter discussed the influence of African personhood philosophy on these rites of passage. The chapter then engaged with Van Gennep's concept of liminality in rites of passages. Finally, the chapter introduces the *Lebollo, Pitiki* and *Makoti* spaces explored in this thesis, providing a brief background of each space.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework underpinning this study, African Feminist Theory. This theory aligns with the objective of this study, which is to go beyond homogenizing accounts of African women by considering the plurality of African women and that intersecting identities produce their womanhood position. The chapter provides a broad overview of the theory and its constitutive tenets and its relevance and application to this study.

1. Feminist discourse

Feminism, at its core, is a theoretical perspective advocating for men's and women's political, social, and economic equality. Freedman (2002: 22) explains that it "is a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth" and should be treated as so. However, feminism is also a group of socio-political movements and ideologies mobilized towards alleviating women's subjugated positions by challenging the patriarchal economic and political structures and gendered relations of modern societies (Malinowska, 2020: 01). It opposes a culture in which women as a group, simply by virtue of being female, are underprivileged and treated differently than men, and in this difference of treatment, women are oppressed (Bisong & Ekanem, 2014: 34). This movement therefore actively asserts that gender-based inequalities in society are not the natural order but stem from patriarchal social relations, structures, and systems (Bisong & Ekanem, 2014: 34). According to the African Feminist Forum (2006, 05), patriarchy is a system of male domination that legitimizes the oppression of women through political, social, economic, cultural, legal, religious, and military institutions. It legitimizes men's access to and control over resources and opportunities within the private and public avenues of society based on the patriarchal ideology, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 832).

The culture of patriarchy is different across time and space, meaning its manifestations in society are ever changing and vary according to class, race, gender, cultural and global-imperial relations and structures (African Feminist Forum, 2006: 05). Furthermore, patriarchy does not simply

change according to these factors, but interrelated within these factors and influences these relations (African Feminist Forum, 2006: 05). Thus, to effectively challenge this subordinate view and position of women, feminist theory urges a radical and intentional disruption of existing sexist and oppressive systems and structures and the cultivation of new/alternative relations in society that give legitimacy to equal position of men and women in society (African Feminist Forum, 2006: 05).

Throughout history, feminist agency and discourse have actively interrogated and challenged women's patriarchal oppression and subjugation in both public and private spaces. Feminism as a concrete political movement and theory emerged in the late 19th century and early parts of the 20th century (Rampton, 2015). Feminist theories and movements to liberate and empower women were most active in the United States and Western Europe during this period. Although the movement was not concurrently taking place across the global north, it unfolded in three respective waves, each prioritizing various issues of female oppression and marginalization, such as access to voting rights, employment and education opportunities, reproductive rights, and sexual liberation (Rampton, 2015). This branch of feminist organization is considered mainstream Western feminism. The theory of African feminism emerged out of a dissatisfaction with mainstream Western feminism (Mekgwe, 2008: 14). Western Feminism was associated with a radical approach to activism, and some proponents posit that the theory only represented white, western women and their interests (Freedman, 2002: 18). Knowles (2023:34) similarly notes that "African feminisms became known as a push back against white feminism that claimed to speak for all women but with no recognition of intersectional differences of race and class in this configuration".

Furthermore, the main point of contention regarding Western feminism, which called for the rise of Black Feminisms and African feminisms, has been about its failure to fully represent the lived experiences of black women, and African women outside the Global North (Akin-Aina, 2011: 71). Chandra Talpade Mohanty (cited in Akin-Aina, 2011: 71) points to distortions such as the universalization of Global South women in Western feminist discourse as victims of patriarchy, religion, development, globalization, culture, colonization, and neo-colonialism. Over and above being described as a homogenous group, women in the Global South are also portrayed as being

passive to or not retaliating against the multiple forms of oppressions and injustices she is subjected to according to (Akin-Aina, 2011: 71).

2. African Feminisms

Western feminist epistemology depicts African women as primarily concerned with "bread, butter, culture and power"; a politics of subsistence and survival within the oppressive conditions (Akin-Aina, 2011: 73). In perpetuating this narrative of feminist politics in Africa, Western feminism fails to adequately represent the multiplicity and importance of these concerns expressed, and the existential struggles and ideological battles wrapped in these issues (Akin-Aina, 2011: 73). In light of the persistent misrepresentations of black and Global South women, Akin-Aina (2011: 72) posit it is impossible to reach Western feminism's political goal of true global sisterhood since Western feminism neglects to acknowledge and recognize the unique struggles and context of third world women and replicates the systems of oppression through the marginalization of their experiences.

The limitations and shortcomings of Western feminism therefore necessitated the rise of different branches of feminisms throughout the world. While the objective remains the advocacy for men's and women's political, social, and economic equality, the emergent branches seek to fully capture and represent the lived experiences of the women in the context. African feminisms, therefore, due to the diversity in the African continent, remains "a boiling pot of diverse discourse and courses of action" (Ahikire, 2014: 8). It is for this reasons that the framework is pluralized as 'feminisms' because "there are many different forms of African feminist theory based on contextual, localized, responsive ideas of diverse African women" (Knowles, 2023: 34). It considers a myriad of diverse experiences, knowledge, and objectives in addressing issues of women's oppression in Africa (Akin-Aina, 2011: 72). Diversity notwithstanding, it is an inclusive theory, drawing from a wide range of African women - urban women, rural women, academics, activist, politicians, and community workers- while also addressing a multiplicity of areas of women's oppression such as issues of survival and culture, concerns over political representation, gender discrimination in land access and ownership, sexual identity and class (Akin-Aina, 2011: 73).

African feminisms attempt to reconcile the politics of distortions, marginal representation and silencing of African women in Western feminism. It provides a feminist theory and rhetoric which validates the experience and struggles of women of Africa and African origin against a mainstream feminist discourse (Goredema, 2010: 34). Njoki Wane (cited in Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016: 266) defines it as part and parcel of African women's lived experiences and about African indigenous ways of knowing, it has a decolonizing goal. The African Feminist Forum (2006: 07) describes African feminism as a theory for those who come from, live, and/or work in Africa. It is a theory that aims to create an identifiable difference between women who were colonized and those deemed part of the colonizers, and an epistemology that aims to raise the consciousness of African women to their gendered status in society (Goredema, 2010: 34; Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016: 266). Additionally, Ahikire (2014: 08) describes African feminism as all at once philosophical, experiential, and practical. The theoretical perspective informs the women's movement's political strategy and practice on the continent, and the practice and movement also inform the theory (Ahikire, 2014: 08-9).

According to Tamale (2006: 39), sometimes the wide gap between theory and praxis, unfortunately, results in a half-baked and truncated feminism, heavily characterized by obscurantism of knowledge, misdirection of the movement, and a hindrance to progress. The transformation of society into a more egalitarian environment can hardly be achieved under such conditions; hence theory and practice need to inform each other, as emphasized in African feminism. Nkealah (2016: 63) argues that the rejection of Western feminism has resulted in the emergence of African feminisms that not only seek to theorise from an African cultural and ideological perspective and geopolitical location but also resist the label ‘feminism’ in its Western definitions and theorise through own histories and cultures to empower women and enlighten men. This is a stark contrast to Western feminism which saw men as enemies and thus excluded them from feminist, strategies, organizing and spaces.

African feminisms, as a movement, considers the multiple roles and identities that make up women to defy simple, homogenizing descriptions of African women (Ahikire, 2014: 09). It is multi-faceted, multi-purpose and reflects the diverse nature of feminists organizing, practice and scholarship on the continent (Akin-Aina, 2011: 69). It understands that the African continent is

rich with traditional, cultural and ethnic social practices and seeks to interrogate, abolish and negotiate the elements of patriarchal oppression and subjugation of women embedded in these areas. However, it takes a respectful and preservative approach to avoid exporting Western culture and logic through the movement by undermining and destructing the African cultural fabric.

Obioma Nnaemeka (cited in Akin-Aina, 2011: 70) considers this a nego-feminism, a feminism of compromise. She explains that, first, nego-feminism is the feminism of negotiation (Akin-Aina, 2011: 70). Second, nego-feminism stands for "no ego" feminism (Akin-Aina, 2011: 70). African feminism as a movement with no ego hopes to detach personal gain and pride from the overarching goal of achieving full autonomy and liberation for women (Akin-Aina, 2011: 70). It understands and recognizes that in the context of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise and balance (Akin-Aina, 2011: 70). African feminism challenges the oppression of women through negotiations and compromise (Akin-Aina, 2011: 70). This is very much linked to the African Philosophy of Ubuntu. Unlike the Western paradigm, which is about individualism and individual rights, African feminisms considers the collective good, justifying its concern with negotiating women's cultural liberation without the individual ego needing to be satisfied. According to Nnaemeka (cited in Akin-Aina, 2011: 70), "it knows when, where and how to detonate patriarchal land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines." Supporting this notion of a feminism theory unique to the African context and experiences, Mekgwe (2008: 08) argues that African feminism ought to be conscious of the context within which the feminist stance is made. This means, while pointing out the flaws of the African culture, it should be careful not to seem to be aspiring to westernization at the cost of African custom (Mekgwe, 2008: 08). Therefore, African feminism rejects the individualistic, radical, and critical stance of mainstream Western feminist theory and movement in emancipating women from patriarchal power (Ahikire, 2014: 09).

African feminist thought is political. It argues that women's struggles with and concerns of oppression are political and should be addressed as such (Tamale, 2006: 40). It tasks itself with bringing sexuality, childbearing, child-rearing, and oppressive traditional practices such as child marriages, brutal abortions, and female initiation and circumcision rites into the preview of political systems, strictures, and institutions. All these practices are inextricably linked to the

political economy and constitute tools to control women and reinforce or reproduce the culture of patriarchy in society (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016: 268). African feminist theory, therefore, encourages all feminist organizations and movements in the continent to declare their political agenda very clearly and intentionally. Politics cannot be avoided in the engagement with very strong and powerful political patriarchs in the continent in the struggle for women's rights (Tamale, 2006: 40). Any effort to liberate women that shies away from making it clear that it is politically concerned will result in a reluctant, complacent, and ineffective action (Tamale, 2006: 39). In keeping with the theme of politicizing African feminism, the African Feminist Forum (cited in Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016: 265) further recommends that feminists publicly name and define themselves as such- feminists. It argues that by identifying themselves as feminists, feminist activists take a clear ideological stance (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016: 265). By naming themselves, they further the goals of politicizing the struggle for women's rights, challenging the legitimacy of structures that subjugate women, and developing tools for transformation analysis and action (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016: 265).

Moreover, African feminism employs an intersectional analytical approach to understanding and addressing African women's issues. Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality argues that individuals do not live single-issue lives, however, lived identities, structural systems, spaces of marginalization, forms of power, and modes of resistance crisscross in complex, shifting ways to produce multiple oppressions, domination, and discrimination (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016: 265). African feminism considers the multiple identities of African women that crisscross with patriarchal social institutions at various levels of their lives, thereby producing their subordinate status in society (Guy-Sheftall, 2003: 33). It is simultaneously concerned with women's multiple and intersecting jeopardies because the effect of one discrimination may manifest in various ways seeing as the matrix of social identities of women spans across all levels of social relations (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016: 265). Amplifying the argument of the simultaneity of oppression, Guy-Sheftall (2003: 31), further explains that African feminism's struggle against gender oppression has always been connected to struggles of liberation from other forms of oppression such as slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, poverty, disease, and illiteracy, which is not articulated in Western feminist theory. It also addresses issues specific to African communities, namely African traditions such as polygamy, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation. This highlights the

heterogeneity of African women's identities and the need for the gender struggles associated with these identities specific to some African women to be addressed in the fight for women's rights.

Lastly, the active involvement of men in liberating women from the oppressive and patriarchal structures of society is another noteworthy premise of African feminist theory. African feminism is a theory that recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of structural foreign domination and Western exploitation (Guy-Sheftall, 2003: 32). It is not hostile towards African men but challenges them to see their privilege in society and be conscious of women's subjugation, which differs from the general oppression of all African peoples (Guy-Sheftall, 2003: 32). African feminism encourages African men to realize that certain inequalities and limitations exist in traditional societies and that colonialism operated to reproduce them and other (Guy-Sheftall, 2003: 32). Ama Ata Aidoo (cited in Goredema, 2010: 34) implores all African men and women to be feminists, more so if they believe that Africans should take control of African land, African wealth, and African development because the issue of women's oppression is a development issue. Therefore, it is only possible to advocate for the independence and development of Africa by believing that African women must also share in access to human rights, opportunities for growth, and freedom in the public and private spheres (Goredema, 2010: 34).

For this study, with its aim to explore the Basotho womanhood and attendant rites of passage such as *Lebollo la basali* and (quasi) indigenous spaces such as *Pitiki* and *Makoti*, and therefore seeks to contribute to the scholarship that resists the erasure of African worlds, cultures (Mohlabane, 2020), and African rites and rituals that are central in both the creation of identities and making of persons, African feminisms presented itself as a perfect theory. As has been mentioned in the literature review section, most of the rites of passage and indigenous spaces rest on the assumption of personhood as relational and communal, and similarly, African feminisms reject the individualistic stance of mainstream Western feminist theory and movement in its quest to free women from patriarchal domination. The theory further argues for an intersectional approach, as other identity categories define women in Africa. These identities intersect in different ways and at various societal levels to produce their societal position and experience of womanhood, and this study sets out to employ an intersectional lens in engaging with these personal experiences of shifting womanhoods. Lastly, this study is about women in Africa and required an approach that

would be sensitive and non-pathologizing towards the practices and activities women have to undergo in the rituals or indigenous spaces and in this regard, Nkealah (2016) has noted the sensitivity of African feminisms to African women's diverse experiences of patriarchy in their everyday lives. As with all theories, African feminisms in this study is used as an anchor upon which this study rests.

3. Conclusion

This chapter has focused on African Feminist theory. African Feminism employs an intersectional analytical lens to understand and address African women's issues. It understands that the African continent is rich with traditional, cultural, and ethnic social practices and seeks to interrogate, abolish, and negotiate the elements of patriarchal oppression and subjugation of women embedded in these areas (Akin-Aina, 2011: 70).

Chapter 4: Research Design

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to collect data and how the data was analysed. A qualitative approach was used, and this approach allowed an in-depth engagement of Basotho women's personal experiences with the shifting womanhoods practices and ideas. First, the chapter discusses the research design, identifying the sampling and recruitment strategies. Secondly, it engages with the data collection tools, focusing on semi-structured interviews as the method of choice to obtain the detailed data for this thesis. Finally, this chapter discusses the analysis approach, ethical considerations, and limitations of the thesis.

1. Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research method is characterized by a class of empirical procedures and techniques of data collection and analyses designed to explore, describe, or understand social phenomena from the subjective experiences of research participants (Fossey *et al*., 2002: 717). The qualitative method of research emphasizes the importance of the subject's experiences, generating meaning and acquiring a depth of understanding (Fossey *et al*., 2002: 718). Therefore, the qualitative approach was appropriate for this study since it is concerned with exploring and understanding women's personal experiences of shifting between the traditional and contemporary notions and practices of womanhood.

Insofar as the research design that underpinned the study, a phenomenological design of inquiry was employed. The phenomenological approach was selected because the study explored the lived, personal, and subjective womanhood realities of women insofar as they are socialized into their womanhood identity in both traditional and contemporary rites of passage for womanhood in the Basotho culture. The phenomenology design is oriented toward lived experience (Creswell *et al*., 2007: 253). It is concerned with describing participants' specific statements and experiences of a phenomenon rather than abstracting from these experiences to construct a model from the researcher's interpretations (Creswell *et al.,* 2007: 252). The primary purpose of phenomenology

is to reduce people's experience with a phenomenon to a composite description of the essence of the experience – what they experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell *et al*., 2007: 252).

The main objective of this thesis is to explore the personal experiences of the shifting womanhoods practices and values between the traditional and contemporary contexts of the Basotho. The subsidiary objectives are to:

a. Compare traditional and contemporary definitions, practices, and values of womanhood of the Basotho cultural group;
b. Explore the role and relevance of womanhood rites of passage in the contemporary context; and
c. Investigate the personal experiences of Basotho women's movements between the traditional system and contemporary systems of African womanhood.

2. Sample

Sampling is the process of selecting a portion of the population for research purposes (Bryman, 2012: 715). Qualitative research is underpinned by non-probability sampling methods, allowing for participants to be recruited according to their relevance to the research topic and objectives instead of their representativeness (Neuman, 2014: 211). The sample for this study had to satisfy the following requirements: Basotho women who had (i) initiated into womanhood through *Lebollo la basali*, (ii) currently attend *Pitiki ea bomme*, or (iii) currently attend *Makoti* at the time of the study. The Basotho ethnic group are Southern Sotho language speakers predominantly living in the Free State province of South Africa and Lesotho. The participants must be over 20 years old and below 65 years old. Women within this age range are considered old enough to be married and can partake in the practices of womanhood spaces. Women within this age range experience both traditional and contemporary conceptualizations and practices of womanhood, and they shift between these two values systems of womanhood in their daily lives.

In total, 9 participants will be sampled; 3 participants representing each womanhood initiation platform. The aim is to have a small sample size, allowing in-depth conversations about each womanhood space and thus "thick-descriptions" for the analysis. The methods of sampling used

for this study were purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is whereby the participants are deliberately selected with the purpose of the study in mind (Neuman, 2014: 213). This method was suitable as I am Mosotho identifying female and frequently visit Lesotho. I exist in networks with Basotho women, from Lesotho, who have either undergone these rites of passage or known other women who fit the criteria necessary to fulfill the study's objectives. Thus, I could conveniently and purposefully sample them as participants.

The snowball sampling method was used to reach the minimum sample size. Snowball sampling is a method whereby one person is recruited, and they provide referrals of other participants who also meet the requirements and are relevant to the research topic (Neuman, 2014: 214). This sampling method is fitting because the participants sampled through the purposive method may know other women in unique positions to provide useful, in-depth information to understand the experience of womanhood better. Considering the age sampling frame, these sampling strategies may pose some challenges. As much as I am Mosotho identifying, I exist in networks of young people. Therefore, successfully reaching the specified age demographic may not be easy through these sampling methods.

3. Data Collection

To collect data, this study relied on face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher prepares questions or topics to be covered, referred to as an interview guide. However, the interviewer does not rigidly follow the schedule (Bryman, 2004: 314). Questions may be asked in an order different from the one outlined by the guide, and additional questions, not included in the guide, may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things that are said by the interviewee (Bryman, 2004: 314). The structure of the interview is flexible, and the dialogue takes a conversational nature which encourages the interviewee to share their experiences, opinions, and thoughts about the issues to the extent of their comfort (Bryman, 2004: 315). The emphasis in semi-structured interviews is on how the interviewee frames and understands the phenomenon under study (Bryman, 2004: 314). This data collection method was suitable for this study as it allowed for rich, in-depth data to be collected through the open-ended and discursive style of semi-structured interviews.

Before the interview, the participants were requested to sign an informed consent form in a language accessible to them, consenting to the interviews being recorded and their participation in the study (Appendix 1). The consent form also informed the participants that they could withdraw at any point and refuse to answer questions they deemed invasive. With the exception of two participants, the interviews were virtual. In these cases, the consent form was sent and explained via WhatsApp. The participant signed and returned it via WhatsApp. With the consent of the participants, the interviews were recorded to enable transcription. The interviews were conducted in Sesotho, the participants' language, and then translated into English.

Table.1. *Profile of Participants*

Womanhood Space	Participant Name *psydo-names	Age	Marital Status	Location	Child/ren
Lebollo la basali	Aus' Ithabeleng	40 years old	Separated	Mafeteng, Les	1
	Dinny Dee	39 years old	Single	Maseru, Les	0
	Aus' B	35 years old	Married	Mafeteng	3
Pitiki ea bomme	Mme Thewi	53 years old	Married	Maseru, Les	3
	Aus' Jemy	26 years old	Divorcee	Semonkong, Les	1
	Makarabo	27 years old	Married	Semonkong, Les	2

Makoti	Mme Sola	41 years old	Married	Maseru, Les	1
	Mareitumetse	32 years old	Married	Maseru, Les	2
	Aus' Retshili	32 years old	Separated	Mohale's Hoek	3

4. Data Analysis

The method of analysis for this study was thematic analysis. According to Clarke & Braun (2017: 297), thematic analysis is a method of analyzing and interpreting themes within qualitative data. It provides systematic procedures for generating codes and themes from qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017: 297). However, the aim of the thematic analysis approach is not simply to summarise content into themes but to identify and engage with key features of the data guided by the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2017: 297). The data will be classified and coded into common themes linked to the study's objectives (Creswell, 2009: 197). Finally, the data, categorized into themes, will be analyzed and discussed against the theoretical framework, literature review, and study aims.

5. Ethics

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was received from the Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee, and careful consideration went into observing research ethics. This included providing the participants with an information letter about the nature and purpose of the study and interview schedule, as well as requiring them to sign an informed consent letter before participation. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to protect the participants, and personal information revealing their identity to the public was not included- although some participants did not mind. Considering the sacred nature of cultural practices, participants were made aware of the option to decline to answer certain questions. However, the researcher was also considerate of the topic's sensitivity and was respectful in conducting interviews and of the

participants. Participants were made aware that they could receive communication of the research results upon request.

6. Limitations

In the undertaking of this study, multiple challenges were encountered. Due to the short time frame, the sample size is small, therefore hindering the generalizability of the study to a larger population. The initial proposed sample population was that of Basotho women who initiated through *Lebollo la basali* only. However, due to strict cultural prescriptions to not share information about the *Lebollo* practice with women who are not initiated through the *Lebollo*, potential participants declined the invitation to participate in the study, resulting in the amendment of the study to include women of the other two womanhood spaces. Regardless of the confidentiality measures in place to protect the identity and privacy of participants, potential participants declined the invitation simply out of fear and concern for their privacy, making the recruitment process long. There were some connectivity issues encountered during WhatsApp online interviews in remote parts of Lesotho or on days with bad weather, causing some interviews to be rescheduled or postponed to another time.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the research methodology followed in the undertaking of this thesis. This thesis employed a qualitative approach to research, and this approach was suitable for the engagement of this thesis with the subjective experiences of the participants with the shifting womanhoods. The chapter focused on the research design, outlining the sampling and recruitment methods employed. Then, it discussed the semi-structured interview choice of data collection method to collect rich data. Finally, the chapter detailed the analysis method, ethical considerations and limitations encountered in the undertaking of this thesis.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

The following section of this chapter will discuss the objectives of this research in relation to the accounts of the participants and the respective findings in line with each of the objectives. This chapter is divided into three sections, each addressing a subsidiary objective of the thesis. In line with thematic analysis, the voices of the participants are clustered under a relevant theme. The first section distinguishes and discusses the three respective womanhood spaces, engaging with their processes, practices, and teachings. The second section of this chapter outlines the roles and relevance of womanhood rites of passage and spaces, highlighting their significance for cultural education and preservation, entrainment, cultivating personal relationships, and identity construction. The final section engages with the personal challenges of arranging one's life around two dominant value systems.

5.1 Definitions, practices, and values of womanhood

In discussing the objectives in relation to the data, the researcher has, in line with the method of analysis, identified the following themes from the interviews regarding the contemporary and traditional definitions, practices, and values of womanhood of the Basotho: *Lebollo la basali*, *Pitiki ea bomme* and *Makoti*.

5.1.1 Lebollo la basali

As previously argued, womanhood in the Basotho community is constructed through various spaces. However, the only traditional initiation practice for girls into womanhood remains *Lebollo la basali*. *Lebollo la basali*, also known as female initiation, is one of the oldest womanhood platforms among the Basotho. The *Lebollo la basali* rite of passage ritual was popular in the ancient *Basotho* societies when traditional initiation processes were the way of life. Its practice in the contemporary context has declined significantly, continuing moderately in rural parts of the country. *Lebollo la basali* is a culturally sacred rite of passage facilitating transition into womanhood for young girls. For the three participants who had been to *Lebollo la basali*, it was more of a womanhood 'school' where they were taught what it means to be Basotho women, and how to be Basotho women.

Women go there because of culture…to become women. They teach you how to be a woman, how to behave as a woman. Aus' B

Women are prepared for marriage to be better wives to their husbands. There is a teacher to guide the initiation. She has been married and has many years of experience. Ithabeleng

It is to teach young girls about Basotho culture and how to manage a household when they reach the stage of being women. Dinny Dee

All the participants' accounts about *Lebollo la basali* and its place in the cultural landscape were about its role in teaching Basotho culture. There are teachings about womanhood and wifehood within the Basotho culture.

(i) Becoming a woman

Typically, *Lebollo la basali* is attended by young girls who have reached menarche to initiate them into the following stage of their lives: womanhood. Traditionally, the young girls would leave their homes for six weeks to six months for the ritual, depending on various circumstances. During the period of initiation, they live in seclusion in mountainous or distant open veld areas, where they are socialized into their womanhood identity by elderly women in the community who have been married. This is the separation phase of the initiation practice. During this seclusion period, the elderly women are their caregivers and teachers. They engage in various activities which are aimed at equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills for their womanhood roles and responsibilities. Although the participants could not disclose sacred details about the ritual, they described similar details about the practice for *Lebollo la basali*.

I left in June and came out in September. There were a lot of us from different rural regions of Lesotho. There were just about thirty of us from my village. We live in the mountains. There is a house (Mophato) that we built for living there, and when we are done, the hut is burnt down. We make our own dresses with our own hands…they show you that as a woman, you can do things with your own hands…as a Motaung, I wore a dress made out

> *of cow skin and applied a clay mask (letsoku). We cook for ourselves, your family has to bring food supplies such as large bags of maize meal, mabele, corn, potatoes and vegetables on a monthly basis…we bathe at the river. Showing you how a woman is supposed to bathe…and there is a time where we celebrate, making a huge fire…people come watch, even those that are not initiated, to see the celebrations towards the end of the initiation.* Aus' B

Unlike most girls who go to *Lebollo la basali* when they start their first period and are still virgins, Aus B went when she was twenty-five years old as a prerequisite for her to begin her initiation to becoming a traditional healer. She explains that as a traditional healer, it was important for her to attend because there are initiated women and womanhood challenges, she could not consult on unless she too is initiated. This is a testament to the sacred and exclusive nature of *Lebollo,* where only women who have been initiated have been privy to the knowledge and activities and may not share it with anyone who has not also been initiated through *Lebollo*. She explains that she was propelled to attend *Lebollo la basali* by her ancestors, through her dreams. She persistently had a dream showing parts of the *Lebollo* ritual and herself in the regalia, but she was not clear on what it meant, causing her to approach her *gobela* (traditional healer) to help her understand the meaning. The ancestral prompt for Aus' B to attend *Lebollo* supports the argument about personhood in the African context being the visible and the meta-physical components- i.e., dreams (Molefe, 2020; Mfecane, 2018). Further, it reiterates the extent of the collaboration necessary in the making of a morally virtuous person, not only limited to living beings but includes ancestors as well. Additionally, Aus' B's account also serves as evidence that the ritualised pracice is also necessary in the makings of personhood. The mere fact that she could not undergo traditional until she had completed *Lebollo* means that the incorporation through *Lebollo* is necessary before one can assume a spiritual identity. Another participant who attended *Lebollo* at an advanced age was Dinny Dee.

> *We stayed at the initiator's house. She lived…very close to the mountains. We stayed for six months with her. She and other elderly women who know about Lebollo facilitated the initiation and taught us the expectations. We wake up in the morning and fetch wood to boil water. We bathed. We then cook and clean our space. We then gather to be taught about the values and roles of a woman through different topics and scenarios. In the*

> *evening, we make a fire, break into song, and dance. The songs were sometimes about the lessons we had already been given to reinforce them. But it was also a form of entertainment for us while we were there.* Dinny Dee

Similarly, Dinny Dee attended *Lebollo* when she was twenty-five years old. This was due to the fact that her family did not take part in this Basotho cultural practice. She independently decided to attend *Lebollo* because of peer pressure from many young women who had already undergone the ritual. Part of the reason behind her decision was also that she thought she was old enough to receive this knowledge.

The *Lebollo la basali* practice similarly follows Van Gennep's three-stage sequence of rites of passage: separation, limen, and aggregation (Szakolozai, 2009: 141). Somanadhan *et al.* (2021: 615) explain that during the separation stage, the initiates are isolated from the rest of society and proceed to the liminal ritualistic stage, which is highlighted in the accounts of the participants leaving their families and homes for periods ranging between 6 weeks to 6 months. During the limen stage, women are produced through cultural practices and teachings aimed at facilitating the initiation and transformation into the next stage of their womanhood and personhood (Somanadhan *et al.*, 2021: 615). As in Nhlekisana's (2017: 34) account of the womanhood initiation of the *!Xoo* of southwestern Botswana, it is elderly women in the community that provide care and facilitate the practices and the teachings. Therefore, supporting Molefe's (2020: 198) arguments that personhood is not an intrinsic moral virtue possessed from birth but rather acquired from the successful satisfaction of collective moral expectations such as womanhood initiation. Furthermore, the acquisition of personhood is a collaborative endeavor, seeing as *Lebollo la basali* is a socially guided practice involving and supported by family, the community, elderly women in the community, and fellow initiates (Molefe: 2019:315).

In Both Aus B and Dinny Dee's accounts, there is a sense of community during the initiation in the descriptions of activities performed with fellow initiates. This serves as a support for the notion that personhood is relational rather than an individualized process, as proposed by the Western individualistic narrative of personhood (Molefe, 2018: 219).

(ii) Becoming a wife

Although her account of the rite is parallel to the other two *Lebollo* participants, Ithabeleng was initiated at seventeen years old while in high school. Ithabeleng was raised by her grandmother in the rural community of *Tsakholo, Ha Khothu*. Then abduction marriages (*chobeliso*) were popular in Lesotho. Aus' Ithabeleng explains that young girls were abducted on their way to school or while fetching water at the spring by boys whom the potential suitor or his family sent. She elaborated that in some instances, you may know the boy abducting you for marriage, and in some, you do not because he is from a neighboring village. As a result, young girls were getting married at the ripe age of fifteen/sixteen years, so she had to go to *Lebollo* because she was at the age where she could get married and her grandmother wanted to ensure that she would be able to assume the role of a woman and a wife should a potential family identify her as a potential wife to their son and proceed to abduct her.

> *Because I was still a high school student…I stayed for six weeks. We lived on a mountain far away from my community. It was camping conditions because the intention behind you being able to endure such hard conditions is that you are a very strong woman and will be able to support your husband. You can make do with what is available to you. Your family has to make your clothes out of cow skin. Those are the clothes you have on you the entire time. Your family brings you two blankets, one to lay on the ground and the other to cover yourself. But it depends on the family you are from and whether they can afford to bring you blankets. If they cannot afford it, you only receive one to cover yourself. The cow skin clothes are also very expensive, but it is mandatory that you have them. When you are about to be complete, your family is expected to bring you new clothes. You have to pay a contribution amount to enroll, which is supposed to cover food and utilities…we go around picking different types of morogo from the fields. If you are not able to wake up early, there is discipline for you. You would be punished to get water for the day for everyone. You clean your sleeping space. You go freshen up at a nearby river. Then, the lessons and conversations with the elderly women who are the caregivers. We dance and sing as a form of entertainment.* Ithabeleng

The expectation of foraging for and preparing one's own food as part of the teachings and initiation of *Lebollo la basali* strikingly contrasts that of male initiates being prepared and brought food every day during initiation from boyhood to manhood. This aspect of the practice reinforces dominant patriarchal gender ideologies, which, according to Lorber (2018: 347), locate the position of women in society as in the domestic space, being mothers and wives, while men are placed in the public domain, being breadwinners. Gender constructions in African cultures mirror normative gender expectations, which Connell (1995: 10) argues endorses the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. This gender code is sustained and reproduced in African cultures in such cultural spaces where women continue to be framed as weak, dependent, and altogether inferior through activities that enhance their homemaking capabilities. Thus, in this comparative regard and in Ithabeleng's account above, through *Lebollo la basali*, women are prepared for domesticated wifehood because the processes for the making of men willfully disregard or omit teaching men how to be domesticated.

The three *Lebollo* participants underwent the rite of passage in different districts of Lesotho and at varying ages, but they recollected similar dominant values of womanhood in their teachings. Recurring themes in the teachings were respect, resilience, submission, and being a responsible *Mosotho* wife. The value of respect is the cornerstone of Basotho culture, and it comes as no surprise that it is foregrounded in the traditional teachings and training of how to be a Mosotho woman in *Lebollo la basali*.

> *They teach you respect and respectable conduct. How I teach my children about respect and how to care for them. How to also respect everyone in my family and community. How to care for my husband. To love my husband and obey him.* Dinny Dee

> *You do not argue with your man; he has to have the last word.* Aus' Ithabeleng

> *The teach you how to behave as a woman. Discipline…They encourage you to get married. How to behave in marriage…how to respond to your husband. The kind of advice you get as a newly wedded woman.* Aus' B

The value of resilience was greatly emphasized by the participants in their descriptions of the teachings on what it means and looks like to be a wife as prescribed by *Lebollo la basali*. It is

taboo in many African cultures for a woman to return home from marriage for whatever reason. Women are encouraged to 'wait out the storms' of marriage and motherhood as a form of resilient character. This is expressed in the following Sesotho idiom: *mosali o tsoara thipa ka bohaleng*. Women who leave their marital homes and husbands are described as not resilient and shamed for this.

> *They teach how to fix things… There are difficult things that you are going to encounter in life, so how do you fix them…how to stay in the marriage and endure the hardships of marriage as a woman. A woman is able to handle problems.* Aus B

While responding to the question on who is responsible for the education, Aus Ithabeleng clearly highlights the humiliation associated with women who divorce or leave their marriages.

> *Strictly married for a long time or widowed women. The belief is that if you have divorced, you have failed, so how can you advise on something you have not succeeded in?*

Furthermore, as part of the teachings, the participants were socialized into their responsibilities and roles as wives and homemakers during their isolation period in the mountains. The participants observed that the living conditions and activities in seclusion resembled the normal daily life of a wife and mother in their home.

> *You wake up extremely early in the morning like a typical Mosotho wife would and prepare everything for your husband to go to work. You act as if it is a normal family setting.* Aus' Ithabeleng

> *It resembles daily life in a house, just in a wild environment. It teaches you many things…I did not know how to cook outside or even going to get wood, tie a lot of sticks or wood together. These lessons are supposed to help you better handle problems.* Aus' B

Some of the duties and responsibilities of a typical traditional (rural) Mosotho wife, which are taught at *Lebollo la basali*, include how to gather firewood in large quantities, make a fire and cook on the fire, and raise children. They stress that an ideal Mosotho woman does not visit other people's homes for days on end and refrains from immoral conduct such as engaging in local gossip, lies, and talking about things that have nothing to do with them. They stay at home and

take care of their family and home. The teachings further extend to the sexual and reproductive areas of the women's lives.

> *She is active sexually. Do not just lie there like a chicken, you need to lift up your body so that you are accessible to your man. How to cater to your man…different ways of mixing and using traditional herbs to enhance your sexual life, to keep him from going to other girls, to make him give you money, and to make you a baby.* Aus Ithabeleng

Lebollo la basali perpetuates the construction of traditional rural wifehood through teachings and values of womanhood that encourage submission, endurance in marriage, and the focus on male pleasure in sexual education. As can be seen in Ithabeleng's account, the man is at the center of the sexual pleasure. It is about how to keep him from going to other women. Secondly, it is interesting that this participant also brings in the use of sex to get money – in a non-transactional manner – because this assumes that the woman does not have to work and must be dependent on the man. Lastly, a dutiful wife and woman must produce babies, and therefore, the sex is also primarily about production.

These teachings neglect the multiplicity of women's lived struggles and the intersectional nature of their other identities in its oversimplified construction of womanhood as wifehood. According to Akin-Aina (2011:72), this misrepresentation and marginalization of African women's contexts and unique experiences perpetuates the systems oppressing African women. Ahikire (2014: 09) explains that African feminism recognizes the multiple roles and identities that make up women and understands that they intersect in various ways, and at different levels of society to produce their position. Therefore, it is misguided to think of and construct womanhood in terms of traditional rural wifehood because women are defined by other identity categories of race, class, religion, and ethnicity which intersect in different ways to produce their personhood.

5.1.2 Pitiki ea bomme'

Pitiki is another indigenous space within the Basotho group where womanhood is constructed and negotiated. *Pitiki*, like *Lebollo*, is purposed with socializing new mothers and newly wedded women into womanhood. According to the participants, *Pitiki* is a gathering of women to celebrate and entertain themselves. They entertain themselves through song and the Basotho traditional

dance of *Litolobonya*. This is a common form of dance in Lesotho, mimicking sensual sexual movements, and is performed by Basotho women at various events. *Litolobonya* is often accompanied by music or songs that contain sexual innuendos. During the gatherings, the women in *Pitiki* perform the dance naked in a private setting because young girls and men are not supposed to witness this segment of the practice.

Previously, membership in this space was strictly restricted to married women who have recently become mothers. This is because the engagements and education in this womanhood space are centered around womanhood issues experienced by women postpartum. However, in recent times, the space has evolved to welcome new mothers who are unmarried into the space. Mme Thwei explains the logic behind this change as follows:

> *…but even as a single mother…now you know a man. There's no difference between you and a married woman in knowing a man. You…both have kids, went through the labor process.*

Makarabo further posits an explanation behind the exclusive criteria of 'mothers only' of *Pitiki*.

> *Some of the things we talk about will shock you if you do not have a child. Someone might even talk about them outside. But when you have a child, you understand them and can receive the teachings.*

Pitiki ea bomme' presents as a support group geared towards motherhood education, a notable shift from the wifehood focus of *Lebollo la basali* in its construction of womanhood. This concurs with Riseman's (2018: 23) contentions that gender is lodged in the process of social construction, defined and reproduced by society through social interaction. Earlier rural Basotho communities constructed womanhood as wifehood and social institutions like *Lebollo la basali* acted to maintain this as the normative gender script through activities that equipped initiates for wifehood. In contrast, following generations have constructed womanhood to be synonymous with motherhood and have subsequently created womanhood spaces such as *Pitiki ea bomme'* that perpetuate this version of the gender narrative. Castañeda and Pfeffer (2018: 121 &125) explain that these innumerable differences and shifts in gender constructs are because gender is in a state of flux, constantly being socio-culturally contested and negotiated, prone to change at any given moment.

As a womanhood practice, *Pitiki* has shifted from the traditional structure of participation. The practice takes the form of frequent day-long sessions, ranging from weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly, depending on the specific *Pitiki* group. The participants describe the gatherings as follows:

> *...when it is time to begin, there's always a pastor. Either male or female because at that time we have not undressed. They open the proceedings with prayer. Then a short sermon or words of encouragement to the women. Share a comforting scripture because like I explained we gather together because we go through many challenges as women. If it is a male, they will then depart. Then, there is Sesotho music playing and we dance. We drink alcohol. We bring our own food but sometimes, the food is sold there as part of women having business and empowering each other through support.* Mme Thewi

> *Before the proceedings begin, we pray. After prayer, we are served hot mabele porridge. Right after that we break into song and dance. The respective Pitiki groups take turns in playing. After lunch, we continue with the dance. We conclude with a prayer. Each division has a uniform of a particular colored Seshweshwe. Black shoes. There is a time for teachings and conversations between singing and dance. We address the intention behind the gathering of the women here. We are here for peace and many other challenges that bring us here, and women's wellness.* Makarabo

The ongoing nature of the gathering allows for relationships amongst the women to be formed, unlike the once-off structure of *Lebollo la basali*. Women are able to make long-lasting connections and support each other through the experience of womanhood. This is another significant shift in womanhood practices. Furthermore, the teachings and practices become embedded more in scripture and prayer rather than Basotho cultural expectation alone as seen in *Lebollo.* Making this another dimension of change in womanhood practices and constructions. The incorporation of Christianity in *Pitiki* suggests that the environing context within which *Lebollo* is taking place is one of colonialism and capitalism. The colonized and capitalist Basotho context can further be extended to explain the change in the structure of womanhood practices. Colonization saw the introduction of formal education and law. Unlike in traditional communities where education was only a virtue of a boy child, in a colonized society, it is the legal right of every child to receive a formal education. Therefore, absence from school for prolonged periods

of up to 6 months to fulfill this rite of passage is not feasible, and, therefore, cultural practices of initiation have evolved and transformed to facilitate the necessary womanhood initiation and socialization without interfering with one's education.

Pitiki, although more entertaining in practice in comparison to *Lebollo la basali*, is also a space where women and incoming mothers are educated about challenges and expectations of marriage, motherhood, and womanhood. The topics in the teachings range from postpartum healing and sexual education to resilience and respect. Sexual education is delivered through the very sensual *litolobonya* dance, where women are taught how to move their bodies during sexual intercourse to make the activity more pleasurable and entertaining for their partners, preventing them from cheating.

> *You should not deny your husband sex. This is probably the most important responsibility of a woman they speak of. For example, after having my first born, I did not like sex at all. So I was boring and distant. To the extent that when I was having sex with him, my mind was not in the act. I was just doing it so that he could finish and get off me. So, it went on to the point that he also picked up on it and went to report me to my family…It helps in such issues where you are told and taught to satisfy your man. If you do not satisfy him, he will go to other women where they will do things that you fail to do and that will be the end of your marriage*. Mme' Thewi

> *that exercise for women that ensures we know how we sleep with men…As a woman, do not sleep dressed in many layers of clothes.* Makarabo

Despite the shift in practice and the differences between *Pitiki* and *Lebollo*, the focus on the satisfaction of men during sexual intercourse instead of mutual pleasure still appears in the teachings within the *Pitiki* space. This serves as a testament that although some aspects of womanhood construction have changed over the years, others have persisted. Supporting Hussein's (2005: 65) observation that normative gender constructions are embedded in patriarchy. Furthermore, these sexual teachings that prioritize men's needs over women's deviate from African feminism's agenda to liberate women from the oppressive and patriarchal structures of society intersecting in complex, shifting ways to produce multiple oppressions, domination, and discrimination (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016: 265).

Secondly, it is interesting to note that sex, which is always considered very private, is no longer private between man and wife. This is reflected in men, now reporting sexual challenges encountered in marriage to the family to deliberate over, as well as *litolobonya* dances that are aimed at improving women's sexual performance in the bedroom in *Pitiki.*

According to the participants, *Litolobonya* is a necessary activity because it helps new mothers to exercise and reconnect with their sexual selves, which some women struggle to do postpartum.

> *It is an exercise that helps mothers after having a child for the muscles or the womb to return to its initial position prior to the pregnancy and labor process. Through those dance exercises, going up and down…that helps the womb to return where it was and for her to heal faster. Mme'* Thewi

Mme Thewi's explanation of the purpose of *Litolobonya* within *Pitiki* echoes Mohlabane's (2022: 166) contention that women are taught the tricks of the bedroom through the *litolobonya* dance, which emulates the sensual sexual movement of the waist, hips and the buttocks during the act. According to Mohlabane (2022: 167), more attention is given to new mothers during this activity. This is because, following the labor process, new mothers are expected to abstain from sex and sleep separately from their partners. It is believed that premature sexual intercourse shortly after birth will contaminate the child's breast milk (Mohlabane, 2022: 169). Therefore, *litolobonya* dances are performed to rehabilitate the new mother of the waving and swirling movements she is expected to perform during sex after healing and a long time of not engaging in the act (Mohlabane, 2022: 166-67). Mohlabane explains that so much emphasis is placed on women's sexual liberation and performance in *Pitiki* to establish women's bargaining power in their sexual relationships around sexual pleasure (Mohlabane, 2022: 167). Therefore, even though male pleasure is still embedded in the womanhood teachings of *Pitiki*, the platforms also reject the narrative of Mosotho women predominant in traditional exclusionary hetero-patriarchal *Lebollo* as sexually naïve.

Pitiki mirrors *Lebollo* in its preservation and emphasis on the value of respect in its teachings of the ideal Mosotho woman. The teachings stress respect in marriage, of oneself, through dignified conduct and appearance, and of others in the community.

They are very different women. Even though they drink alcohol, they drink responsibly. They know they must go home after drinking. There are others who behave poorly when drunk. They have a respectable image. They dress very beautifully…when they go to Pitiki. Dressed in liShweshwe and blankets, representing the way a Mosotho woman should look. Jemy

We discuss how to be humble and respectful when talking to your husband. When your husband has wronged you, do not walk away from your marriage or try to hurt him in the same way. We are taught that men, most of the time, have their own weaknesses, and as a woman, you have to be patient and not raise your voice at him. They are people who do not like aggressive conduct. Makarabo

Respect remains a primary value taught in womanhood rites of passage across most African communities. Mntambo (2020: 10) argues that respectable conduct towards oneself and others, according to the Zulu culture, is a very important feature in the construction and performance of Zulu womanhood. The participants' narrations of what respect looks like support Schaan *et al*. (2016: 173) idea that womanhood in the African context is constructed around patriarchal ideologies that exalt a submissive and subservient nature in women. Hussein (2005: 60) further highlights the subservient expectations of womanhood embedded in these respect teachings, explaining that women in Africa are considered symbols of warmth and all-nurturing goodness while men's rites of passage prepare them for to be more capable, both physically and mentally, assertive and powerful, making them more suitable for greater roles and responsibilities such as managing family estate, heading a household and ensuring financial security.

The nature of education in some of the *Pitiki* groups has shifted to not only rely on elderly women for knowledge and advice but rather to involve professionals in the program of the sessions to speak on pertinent contemporary issues faced by women in these communities, such as health practitioners to talk about the upsurge in HIV/Aids infections in women and how to protect themselves or gender experts on the issue of gender-based violence, encouraging them to report incidents of abuse and not just remain quiet. *Pitiki,* in this regard, seems contemporary and responsive to current issues faced by women.

5.1.3 Makoti

The *Makoti* womanhood space has recently emerged in the urban Maseru district of Lesotho and similarly facilitates the transition of newly wedded women into their wifehood identity and roles. However, it is a commercialized platform, and its practices are far more progressive and engage with modern-day demands on women and womanhood issues in marriage. At its conception, attendance was limited to engaged and newly wedded women; however, the space has amended its restrictions to include widowed and divorced women as they still have experience in marriage. The participants of this space describe it as follows:

> *It is a platform for women, for married women, although we have allowed unmarried women, the initial plan was for married women. The vision is to get them empowered so they may build peaceful homes, raise well children…a well-structured family.* Mme' Sola

> *It is a very safe place for women. For young people, I advise they come into the Makoti space as soon as they are engaged to be married because…In Makoti, you get to understand things that you did not know about in marriage and womanhood, things that if you did not know about could eventually cause troubles in your marriage. But if you go in there already equipped with this information obtained from Makoti, because I also went before my actual marriage, you get a deeper understanding about marriage.* Aus' Retshili

The ongoing structure of *Makoti* sessions and the inclusion of women of all ages in the space serve as a testament that the making of womanhood and wifehood is never complete but rather a lifelong learning endeavor. Reiterating contentions of Molefe (2019: 314) and Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 271), that the achievement of personhood is not fulfilled through a single event but is a lifelong trajectory of social and ritual transformation. Additionally, the ongoing nature of both *Pitiki* and Makoti goes against the sentiment in some literature that it is easier to make women out of girls than make men out of boys (Ougzane & Morrell, 2005). Making a man out of a boy is described as a longer and more difficult process than achieving womanhood (Ougzane & Morrell, 2005: 175). The argument is that it is easier to make women out of girls because womanhood is closely linked to biological functions such first menstruation.

Similar to *Pitiki*, the rites of passage into womanhood values and roles are facilitated through gatherings held every two months. The women pay a general admission fee to attend the *Makoti* sessions where the education and conversations occur. The money generated for admission fees is directed at securing a venue and paying qualified speakers to teach women on various issues. According to the participants, the sessions often take on a structure of group counseling, whereby the various women share their opinions, challenges, and questions regarding the specific topic of the event, and they collectively engage with these issues with the direction and advice of the expert. It is a very open and safe space. At some point during the event, women break away into smaller groups for more intimate engagement and conversation of the issues, where some even share deeper and personal stories in the hopes of finding support and resolution from fellow women. Due to the less frequent gatherings, this space has created social media platforms on Facebook and WhatsApp for women to continue the conversation and support each other in between the physical *Makoti* gatherings. The women use these social media groups to share testimonials and hold weekly conversations on other pertinent issues both in their personal and external lives. The education in *Makoti* is grounded more in Christianity, with teachings gleaned from the bible, rather than the Basotho cultural norms of womanhood passed from generation to generation.

> *the difference is in the word of God being the basis of marriage*. Aus' Retshili
>
> *Ensuring that God is in everything you do*. Reitumetse
>
> *Be a woman who depends and trusts in God because in all things, when you trust in God…it is always emphasized that the foundation of marriage is the owner of marriage, which is God… Makoti is also based on Christianity.* Mme' Sola

The incorporation of Christianity in *Makoti* is also noteworthy, demonstrating a change in the influence of the teachings of what is deemed Basotho cultural values to Christian values in so far as meanings and beings of womanhood are concerned. *Makoti* relies on technology and social media platforms to communicate session information and facilitate discussion on pertinent womanhood issues, signaling the adaptation and evolution of womanhood spaces to reflect the modern, technology-driven contemporary context. This is contrary to the traditional context where word-of-mouth communicated details of womanhood rites of passage. The use of social media platforms in the life-long pursuit of personhood instead of long-period isolation practices is a

response to modern-day social and economic demands on women as full-time mothers, working women, or students. These contemporary social and economic responsibilities do not allow for them to be isolated in a hut for a month or attend the culturally sacred Chinamwali womanhood initiation school for up to three months as practices in other African communities (Nhlekisana, 2017: 34; Phiri *et al*., 2020: 141)

According to the *Makoti* participants, the space is holistic in its approach to educating and initiating women into their wifehood identity. From the accounts of the participants, it emerged that the teachings engaged within *Makoti* are versatile, aimed at producing holistic women in society who are exceptional and capable individuals in their homes as wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law, as well as in the public spaces they encounter in their daily lived realities as community members, employees, employers and/or students. The focus on womanhood training in this space has shifted from merely initiating one to be a 'good' Mosotho wife and mother to considering other dimensions of their contemporary womanhood reality. The predominant and recurring topics in the teachings of being a woman include effective childcare, mental wellness, sexual and reproductive health, feminine hygiene, self-love, independence and resilience, balance, financial literacy, and respect.

According to the *Makoti* participants, self-love is a reoccurring theme in the gatherings because women, more often than not, dedicate a lot of energy and love to their homes, children, and their husbands and neglect to direct these efforts to themselves. The self-love teachings of *Makoti* recommend that women love themselves first and seek an individual identity that will bring them meaning and independence.

> *We are taught about self-love, that you cannot pour from an empty cup…a woman knowing her worth and finding her shine. Women often complain because men still make time to see their friends, whereas the moment a woman is married, you no longer make time for your friends, hobbies, or anything outside her marriage. We are stuck. We are encouraged to find moments to take care of ourselves in between taking care of the family. Ensuring that you are happier so that you can give this same happiness to my children and husband.* Mareitumetse

> *Loving yourself first because you cannot pour out any love to your children if you do not love yourself. You will depend on being loved by someone else. Your peace as a woman should start with you*. Aus' Retshili

The importance of independence and self-development is also emphasized in *Makoti*. Women are encouraged to seek out financial independence rather than relying solely on their husbands for financial support. Financial experts are invited to the gatherings to advise and teach women about financial independence. Furthermore, women are also advised to open small businesses, recommended to complete short online courses and start reading to empower themselves.

> *Even if you feel like you cannot return to school, at least do short-term free courses. Gain experience or knowledge in things that you do not know about.* Mareitumetse

> *Be a woman who can stand on their own if anything were to happen. Try in whatever way that you can. Go learn. It is even amazing that we live in the era of the internet…research anything you are interested in, such as being a secretary, even if all you have is a form 5 qualification, go online, and learn about being a secretary.* Aus' Retshili

The participants highlight a significant change in the nature of the teachings of Makoti in comparison to those of *Lebollo*. They are geared towards independence rather than the normative heteropatriarchal expectations of subservient womanhood. *Makoti*, in encouraging women to pursue education and employment opportunities, is rejecting the traditional gender ideas that confine the woman in the domestic sphere, strictly making home and taking care of the children and their husbands (Lorber, 2018: 347). Similarly, by depicting women as intellectually capable and economically involved beings, *Makoti* rejects the distortion predominant in Western feminism as passive victims of patriarchy, religion, culture, colonization, and neo-colonialism. Akin-Aina explains (2011: 73) that Western feminist discourse often depicts African women as primarily concerned with "bread, butter, culture and power"- a politics of subsistence and survival within oppressive conditions. Therefore, through the theme of independence, *Makoti* contrasts this and represents the multiplicity of the roles women occupy and the existential struggles of the contemporary Mosotho woman. Additionally, these findings support Afisi's (2010: 236) position that women have gradually evolved from traditional caregiving, homemaking, and nurturing gender expectations in the African household. They now exercise more political presence and

occupy more space in the public sector (Afisi, 2010: 236). Similarly, on independent and contemporary women, Gqola (2016: 121) notes that the "new woman" seeks respectability through economic independence and hard work rather than traditional notions of respectability of how one responds to their husband or physically appears and conducts themselves.

Mme Sola, although she is 41 years of age and has been married for over 11 years, emphasizes the value of independence and empowerment in the following account:

> *This is why we encourage women to make their own money because when you have your own money, no one will control what you do. Even those who could not go to school for whatever reason, we encourage them to take themselves to school; for example, I was only graduating the previous Saturday, getting my Diploma. It does not end there; I plan on pursuing my degree next year. I will not stop living my life because I am married and someone's mother...I still have my dreams of being a professor in this life.*

On the value of resilience, *Makoti* takes a different approach to the much more traditional (and patriarchal) womanhood spaces, which stress endurance as resilience, often expressed in Sesotho idiom, "*mosali o tsoara thipa ka bohaleng*". Women in *Makoti* are advised to stand their ground, leave unpleasant and unhealthy marriages, and express their feelings as a form of resilience.

> *Resilience is not being a doormat. It is being strong enough to say this is not good for me when it is not good for you. You say 'no' whether society sees it differently, you should be strong enough to stand your ground.* Mme 'Sola

> *our society is used to saying that when you are married, you are married. It does not matter the circumstances… but I have separated because of emotional abuse. If I was not educated from Makoti, I think I would have still stayed because society teaches us to stay because a woman holds the knife on the sharp side (mosali o tsoara thipa ka bohaleng). You should stay no matter what and you will change your husband. For example, I remember my mom, when I went to get psychological therapy, and I got back, explaining things to her, she said 'but that is your husband, there is nothing you can do'. I said, 'no, there is something I can do. If this is toxic, I cannot stay'.* Aus' Retshili

The notion of resilience advanced in *Makoti* goes against traditional teachings of what it looks like to be a resilient Mosotho woman. This demonstrates the shift in ideas about womanhood held in this day and age.

5.2 Role and relevance of womanhood rites of passage

In discussing the objectives in relation to the data, the researcher has, in line with the method of analysis, extrapolated the following predominant themes that emerged from the interviews on the role and relevance of womanhood rites of passage in the contemporary context, (i)the preservation of Basotho culture, (ii)community and sisterhood and (iii) entertainment and identity construction platforms.

5.2.1 Basotho culture preservation

Womanhood spaces within the Basotho fulfil various purposes. According to the *Lebollo la basali* participants, the space serves as a preservation hub of the Basotho culture. Practice of culture is very important within the Basotho community, and this is evident in the continued presence of traditional cultural spaces such as *Lebollo la basali* that educate and socialize women into the Basotho cultural norms and values of womanhood and of the Basotho people. The participants explain the cultural significance of *Lebollo* as follows:

> *It helped me a lot because I learned a lot of things that I previously did not know about my culture. We still need those practices. Because young girls of today are very different from those of the past. They no longer follow their cultural prescriptions, such as being respectful and knowing your responsibilities as a woman*. Dinny Dee

Others go when they are at a much older age because they encounter problems in their lives that culture posits are rooted in the fact that they missed this necessary rite in their lives that they had to do culturally.

For example, one of the women I had undergone Lebollo at the age of sixty-four years. She explained that she did not like this practice and defied her elders when she was told to go at a much younger age. Aus' B

I think Lebollo la basali is a way of life/living. To tame women according to the Sotho culture…You can see that women who are initiated are appreciated more in the Basotho communities… Marietumetse

Participants of *Pitiki* and *Makoti,* although having been initiated into womanhood in recently emerging spaces, similarly express the continued importance of cultural values of womanhood predominant in *Lebollo la basali*, such as respect and being a submissive woman.

The likes of respecting your husband. In the era in which we live, women seldomly respect men. Mareitumetse

They are still relevant like for example…in Makoti we were told that when you are loud and aggressive your husband will beat you up but if you approach him in a calm and respectful manner, he will also do the same. Aus Retshili

We still teach traditional beliefs such as being submissive as a woman, but we emphasize that submission is not stupidity or total surrender. You are still an individual with dreams and aspirations. Mme Sola

I still strongly believe in being submissive. I believe in the middle of a heated argument, not with just a husband, someone has to step back. Ithabeleng

Mme Thewi recalls an encounter with a younger female colleague where she had to teach her to be respectful towards male collogues at work. She cites this incident to elaborate on the significance of womanhood spaces in instilling and preserving core Basotho cultural values such as respect in society.

…I remember there is this young lady, when at work, she calls men in a disrespectful manner. On first name basis, not as 'Mr' so and so. I said 'no, no, here at work we have to be formal. It does not matter if the person is your junior or senior both in age or professional position, you have to address them appropriately as 'ntate so and so'.

Although the participants are from three different womanhood spaces, they mention the value of cultural preservation attached to womanhood rites of passage in different contexts and conditions. This demonstrates that regardless of the changes in times, external conditions, and how womanhood and wifehood are constructed, even in modernity and emergent womanhood spaces, there is a recognition of cultural prescriptions of womanhood. They are adopted and assimilated into their practices and teachings. As can be seen in Mme Thewi's account, in some instances, the applicability of traditional cultural values is extended to contemporary external situations.

5.2.2 Community and Sisterhood

Participants of *Pitiki* and *Makoti* raved about the spaces being a platform where they were able to form safe bonds and supportive relationships with other women. A sense of community and sisterhood is established within the frequent gatherings where women share common challenges of womanhood.

> *It started off as a group of married women who were having hardships in their marriages. We wanted something that we could hold on to. They did not want to divorce, but it was just too much for them to handle on their own. They needed some guidance. Some support.* Marietumetse

> *It is an environment where we build sisterhood. Women are already stigmatized for a lot of things by greater society, so we are trying to build sisterhood…even if the marriage does not succeed, you can be free to talk and be supported…you have sisters who can say this is how I dealt with my situation without being judged*. Mme 'Sola

> *Pitiki women have unity. They understand each other*. Jemy

> *It is a very safe place for women. For young people, I advise they come into the Makoti space as soon as they are engaged to be married because, first, it is more like…Nigeria has Kitchen parties where they tell young women about getting married.* Aus Retshili

> *I could not share my problems with others, but now I can talk to others and have learned that when you have stress about something, do not isolate yourself. When you are married early, you sometimes wonder if you can endure and become strong in marriage as time*

goes on. When challenges happen, you lose hope. But when I joined Pitiki, it gave me reassurance that marriage has always been like this; even our mothers went through the same, and they are still alive and have raised us… I am happier and less stressed because I have a platform to share my stress and let go instead of bottling things up to the extent it affects my well-being. MaKarabo

In contrast to *Lebollo*, which is a once-off gathering, the frequency with which *Pitiki* and *Makoti* are held necessitates conditions that create community and sisterhood – a place of sharing counsel about everyday problems. However, it is not only a platform for sharing problems – but also a space where women build each other up to deal with life's daily needs.

Moreover, the use of social media technology for communication purposes in *Pitiki* and *Makoti* that enables the women to form closer, personal relationships of sisterhood is the use of convenient communication platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook, allowing them to connect outside of the spaces and the gatherings held privately. *Lebollo* does not make for an environment of building sisterhood and finding community because, often, the initiates do not come from the same village districts that would allow for them to maintain a relationship upon completion. Whereas, as a result of social media platforms, women in different places can maintain relationships and continue to support each other.

5.2.3 Entertainment and Identity Construction

Participants also identify entertainment as another role of womanhood spaces. In the following accounts, the women detail some activities performed during their education and initiation into womanhood within these spaces, which were entertaining and enjoyable for them:

there is a time when we celebrate, making a huge fire…there is someone standing in front of you, and you place your hands on their shoulders…then we sing and dance. But your hands have to remain straight throughout…it is some game…you cannot at any point bend or relax them. If you fail, you start all over again. Aus B

Pitiki is where women gather, celebrate and entertain themselves in the form of traditional Basotho dance- Litolobonya…They dance in a nude form. Mme Thewi

> *Amongst the activities they do, they exercise through dancing Litolobonya*. Jemy

> *…we break into song and dance…each respective Pitiki division partakes in this form of play*. Makarabo

It is noteworthy that although the spaces are different, the aspect of entertainment has carried through across all three. Entertainment in the form of song and dance is common within these spaces. *Lebollo la basali* employs these activities to reiterate lessons provided during the teachings with the elderly women. Similarly, *Pitiki* makes use of *litolobonya* dance and modern popular songs embedded with sexual puns and innuendos to remind recovering new mothers how to move during sexual intercourse. Contrastingly, the participants of *Makoti* noted the singing of gospel songs as the entertaining aspect of the space, clearly highlighting the alignment of *Makoti* and its practices with Christian belief. The song and dance entertainment element of womanhood rites of passage is popular across many African communities. Nhlekisana (2017: 37) notes that the return and reintegration of a female initiate in the *!Xoo* of Botswana is celebrated through food, song and dance with family and the community. Similar to *Lebollo,* according to Phiri *et al*. (2020: 141), the teachers at the culturally sacred Chinamwali womanhood initiation school of the Chikunda tribe in Zambia deliver the contents of their teachings through song and dance. Furthermore, Mntambo (2020: 11) explains that when the girl passes her virginity test during the *Umemulo* rite, she is celebrated and accompanied out of isolation through song and dance.

In addition to entertainment, there is also the aspect of identity construction.

> *I think I lost myself when I got married. I lost my identity. I was not even aware, but I was living a life of a shepherd. I was looking after my children, marriage, in-laws, family, and husband. Everyone else but me. It came to a point where it got so overwhelming that I felt like I was giving too much to people who did not reciprocate… One of the teachings that helped me is about self-love and self-care. Because now, I can draw a line between having a good time and overburdening myself…it helped me become happier than I thought I was.* Marietumetse

It taught me who I am and how to forgive and forget things that have happened. It taught me to avoid gossip and lies and to refrain from talking about things that you have nothing to do with you. I am a woman of morals because of Lebollo. Aus B

I love Makoti so much because they want a woman to know themselves as a person. Have values. They teach us things that we might not have been taught growing up in life myself; I was not taught about values and principles...It has the element of uplifting and has a lot of positive vibes. I remember we had been given a challenge of positive affirmations, affirming whatever you want in a positive manner. When you start doing these things in your own space, you can see the usefulness of the teachings. Even when I have a bad day, I do my affirmations, and I become uplifted. Aus Retshili

Identity construction as one of the benefits of womanhood rites of passage further reiterates the notion of communitarian personhood (Molefe, 2019: 316). These accounts demonstrate the identity struggle encountered without or before partaking in their respective womanhood spaces. According to Molefe (2019: 315), this relation facet of identity construction evident in womanhood rites of passage emphasizes key values such as group solidarity, conformity, a humanistic orientation, and collective unity in the pursuit of a virtuous identity. Menkiti (cited in Ikuenobe, 2016: 151) explains that one's personal identity cannot be made sense of outside the context of these communal ethics.

The participants' accounts detailing their identity-discovering journey through these spaces and their rites of passage imply experiences of being liminar before undergoing or attending these womanhood rituals and spaces. They allude to being lost or in a state of limbo before engaging with these womanhood spaces and practices and only acquiring a better understanding of their womanhood identities through these spaces.

5.3 Basotho women's experiences of shifting between the traditional, and contemporary ideals of womanhood

In discussing the objectives in relation to the data, the researcher has, in line with the method of analysis, identified the following themes that emerged from the interviews on the Basotho women's personal experiences of shifting between the traditional ideal and definitions of Basotho

womanhood and contemporary systems of Basotho womanhood: (i) a state of in-betweenness and (ii) shaming.

5.3.1 A state of in-betweenness

Both the traditional and modern ideals, definitions, and practices of womanhood are at play in contemporary Basotho communities. There are continuities and discontinuities of both ideals and definitions of womanhood contigent on context and time. They intersect and manifest at different levels of their lived realities, influencing how they construct and ngeotiate their womanhood identities. While most of the participants work and live in the city, they often migrate back to the rural areas where they have to assume traditional gender expectations of them, such as being a domesticated mother, submissive wife, and/or a respectful daughter-in-law. Contrastingly, their lives in urban cities may not require them to construct and express their womanhoods in these traditional prescriptions. Some of the participants are pursuing higher education, hold positions of power in their workplace, and even business owners, subsequently necessitating them to express their womanhood in ways that deviate from traditional expectations in Basotho women such as being more assertive, out-spoken and even dress in ways they would not in their marital homes or when visiting the rural areas. Therefore, the participants find themselves having to negotiate their womanhood around the traditional and modern ideals of what it means and how to be a woman, being in-between both systems of ideals and construction of womanhood, adopting from each what resonates with them to create their womanhood identity. This is the "shifting" that the researcher sought to explore in this study.

> *I think for a person to be able to fit in both urban and traditional environments, you have to shift between two roles. You pick up and let go of certain things depending on the environment, just for peace's sake. Or even just to feel like part of…not be identified as rebellious. Normally when I go home, my family holds this narrative that I am a superwoman who has to cook for everyone, wash dishes, and clean the house. When I rebel, my mom frowns upon my behavior. I will be doing everything but my brother will not be sent to do anything. My mom will respond by saying, he cannot cook because he is a man. It does get to me a lot.* Ithabeleng

Although she was born and raised in the rural village of Tsakholo, Ithabeleng now lives alone in an urban city in South Africa, completing a postgraduate qualification. She frequently visits her mother and father who live with her teenage son in Lesotho. She explains that she and her mother often disagree about the life path Ithabeleng has taken seeing as she is forty years of age and a separated single mother. Ithabeleng's parents are very traditional, and she still hope she will one day live up to the traditional expectations of a Mosotho woman.

> *I was the breadwinner in my home…but I never said because I am the one bringing money in this house, I will take control. No. I always ensured that he has a pocket money as much as he did not have a job, I always involved him in the financial plans…not excluding him because I make the money. It was not mine alone but ours. Within my independent identity, I was still able to be submissive in finances.* Aus Retshili

Contrary to scholarship about masculinities which often suggests that men are the breadwinners, Aus Retshili here shows us that times have changed. The changes in time notwithstanding, she still carries lessons about being submissive. Therefore, while her being independent undoes patriarchal ideas about the role of the woman in the house, she still subscribes to some such as submission. This is evidence of a liminal experience of womanhood, as she is living at the boundaries of two womanhoods, not a completely a traditional woman or a modern woman. According to Beech (2011: 287), this ambiguous position places her outside of social definition because, for example, society's secular definitions do not extend to the existence of modern-traditional-woman, which is what this participant is, if she can even be identified as anything. Furthermore, Aus Retshili serves as an example of a permanent liminar. Ybema *et al*. (2011: 25) explains that a permanent liminar is like quicksilver, always having to cast and recast themselves in different roles at different times. For a permanent liminar, the state of being in between and betwixt positions does not have a definable, temporary period (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016: 51). She is perpetually in a state of being a provider and submissive in her home.

> *Some young people… in fact generally, women in Lesotho, we believe that when you come from work, you ought to wash the dishes and the children's uniform, you cook, clean, and help the children with their homework while the husband is resting and having some time to himself…We are the modern generation. There is a difference between a traditional*

woman and a modern woman. A traditional woman knew her place was to look after children, cook, and care for her husband. Now, women are bringing in income; they are providing for families. Some even more than men. So, how do we bring up the balance? Because I cannot submit the same way a traditional woman would because now, I have my money… I attend workshops… stay in hotels for weeks on end, and so does my husband. Where do we bring up the balance? Yes, we should submit, but draw a line between submission and being a doormat… I can always order if I am tired and feel like I cannot cook today. It is not a big deal. Marietumetse

Marietumetse recalls a conversation with her husband about bringing balance into their home and negotiating their roles as woman and man.

I remember one time, I was having a heated conversation with my husband. He was not understanding that there are things I wish to do but just cannot because I am not 100% at home and, therefore he could not expect a warm meal from me when he gets home from work like a wife that has been home all day. I have also just arrived from work and am tired, just like you, so you cannot expect that from me. I was trying to reason with him that if you want a stay-at-home wife, I could always stop working and looked after our home. But let's go back to the drawing board; how did we get to the point where I had to get a job? Because there was not enough income for our household. We were struggling to reach our goals and plans for our family. How do you plan on us reaching our goals with just one salary if I stay at home? There was an issue that the things that I am supposed to do, I am no longer doing, and I also pointed out that we are the same because I am also helping you to provide as a man, so why are you not helping me as well where I fall behind as a woman. Marietumetse

In the traditional values system of womanhood, sexual pleasure is framed as the male prerogative. Regardless of being initiated through the traditional *Lebollo la basali*, Aus B rejects this narrative and contends that she has not practiced this in her marriage as a Mosotho woman. She also now rejects other traditional teachings like the resilient Mosotho woman who endures all in marriage.

Because I am no longer an initiate and I am a lot older, I tell them that it is not a must that you live with an abusive man just because mosali o tsoara thipa ka bohaleng (a woman

> *handles the knife on the sharp end). You also have to be happy. For example, I disagree with the teaching that sex is about male pleasure. I tell them that we both have to enjoy it. And you do not have to have sex because a man wants to have sex. You should also want to. I often get judgmental stares from older women in the community when I say these things, and they sometimes reprimand me for saying them. I retaliate and explain that we are young and things have changed; it is not like the traditional times. Some do understand. And some of them find it hard to adapt to because all they know and are exposed to is the traditional ideas.* Aus B

The stares from the elderly woman back in the rural areas can be interpreted as a form of negative sanctions for Aus B's different idea on sexual intercourse. For them, sexual intercourse serves two purposes only: male pleasure and procreation. Aus B's explanation of how she handles the challenges of being back in the rural areas since she now lives and works full-time in Gauteng, is evidence of an awareness that she exists in between two identity positions and is constantly negotiating and navigating her womanhood around these two womanhoods.

Dinny Dee similarly lives her life at the boundaries of the two systems of womanhood. She values her culture and continues to uphold the core womanhood values that were instilled in her during the *Lebollo* initiation but acknowledges that times have changed, and the way women do things has changed, too, compared to how she was taught during her initiation into womanhood.

> *I think the difference is in the context, but an ideal woman remains the same…back then, we had to gather wood before we cooked. Now, there are improvements. We cook on electric stoves. So, women remain submissive, cater to their husbands, and take care of their homes in a different setting. I will not forget the lessons I have been taught; they still apply to the woman I am today.* Dinny Dee

Mme Thwei explains that the *Pitiki* teachings on womanhood are the same education girls get at their homes, and she will always take the opportunity to educate younger women when they stray from these teachings. She asserts that even though she lives in a modern context, she remains a traditional woman.

> *Even in adulthood, these teachings remain. For example, even as an adult, you remember how to sit like a girl from when you were taught much younger. My mother taught me to place my dress in between my legs when I was sitting with my legs open. So, we all have an understanding of how to behave as a woman regardless of attending Pitiki or not. So when I see my female colleagues or younger women, I do not mind the fact that they may tell me off if I correct their behavior as a woman. I tell people that as much as we are civilised, I am still traditional in some aspects.* Mme Thwei

Mme Thewi's account further supports the liminal experience faced by the participants in womanhood. She is suspended between the insider position of being older woman raised in a traditional context and outsider identity around her younger female colleagues at work who construct their womanhood completely differently to how she does. Therefore, because of her urban work life role, she precariously fluctuates in the experience of being one thing nor the other, or maybe being both, neither here nor there, or being nowhere in particular (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016: 48). Furthermore, this account constitutes as evidence that teachings about womanhood are everywhere. It is no longer the responsibility of just the elderly women at the initiation school or family, but one can receive advise on how to be a woman from colleagues, friends, and qualified experts. Supporting the communitarian making of persons position of the personhood discourse.

5.3.2 Shame/Guilt

The Basotho of Lesotho remains very traditional and conservative as a community, and participants explained that there is a lot of criticism in the Basotho community around women who do not live up to traditional expectations of womanhood. Some of the participants express feelings of shame and/or guilt for constructing their identity outside the traditional bounds of what it means to be a Mosotho woman. Having to either explain and reason with or educate the older generation of women who disapprove of the ways in which they define and embody their womanhood.

I am aware that in LGBT studies, shame and guilt are a big part of the identity construction process. A lot of the participants in these studies express shame for being different in the construction of a LGBT identity (Flower & Buston, 2000). Additionally, Halperin & Traub (2009: 6) argued that "shame provided the conceptual link necessary to understanding the relation between queer identity and queer performativity". Similarly, in masculinity studies shame and guilt also enters

the conversation regarding identity construction – i.e. no one wants to be failed man because of the shame that will follow. Scholars such as Mfecane (2018) and Ratele (2014) have written about the shame and guilt men often feel for failure to acquire hegemonic ideals about manhood. It was interesting to me to see shame and guilt also emergeing as a theme in relation to the construction of a womanhood identity. Marietumetse describes a conversation she had with her mother-in-law after several times of being criticized, condemned and compared to herself (the mother-in-law) on her motherhood, wifehood and womanhood approaches.

> *It has always been an issue. She never understood because she was a hardcore believer in traditional womanhood values. I tried an activity with her. I made it about soup, how to prepare soup. I asked her how she cooks soup. She told me she added potatoes, tomatoes, and onion, and the spices she adds. I then asked her to estimate the portion of the veggies in the soup and name the veggies according to the values that are most important in her marriage. She said a man having money, providing the children's fees paid, having a car, etc, were important in that order. A lot of the values she listed were materialistic. I then told her the soup of my marriage. The most important one is commitment. That would be the potato. Followed by communication, he must communicate wherever he is or that he will be unable to make it at home on time for whatever reason. If he does not communicate, he is doing wrong by me in my marriage soup the same way your husband would be failing you if he does not take the kids to school…Trust, I have to be able to trust him. After this conversation, she never bothered me about my marriage because she understood that her soup differed from mine because we were different cooks (women)…My mother, on the other hand, understands that we are different, and I always share the teachings of Makoti with her so that I can get her perspective. She embraces the work that Makoti is doing for our younger married generation of women.* Marietumetse

Women of the older generation often shame and judge younger, modern women for the different and far less traditional ways in which they express their womanhood and wifehood. Because they deviate from the traditional expectations of being a woman, modern women are considered 'not women enough'. This is like the ridiculing of women who do not fulfill the labia elongation practice in *chinamwali* are subjected to by other women in the community (Talakinu, 2018: 112).

They are labeled ‘not a woman’ or a ‘fool’ and excluded from Chikunda women’s collective identity (Talakinu, 2018: 112).

> *I feel judged that I have taken longer than expected to start a family. Some of my married friends have isolated themselves from me. But I often tell them that it is not yet my time. My time could still be coming to have a family of my own. But people will always talk.* Dinny Dee

> *On the matter of my separation, I feel like people always want to understand and expect me to explain what went wrong. They tell me that even if your husband fathers a child outside your marriage, a woman has to stay firm in her marriage. I am made to feel like I have failed as a woman from separating so much so that I end up believing and thinking it too, especially according to the values of traditional womanhood. When I go back home and see some of my married female friends, they complain about their husbands but are still with their husbands, saying all men do this and that, you do not leave because he stepped out of your marriage. I feel like I have failed. I feel lost like this place is not where I belong. My mother often asks if there is any man in the picture or tries to set me up with men she goes to church with. I am made to feel like I have failed as a mother too because I have left my son behind in pursuit of a career.* Ithabeleng

Both Dinny Dee and Ithabeleng, according to their *Lebollo* teachings, ought to have been married women with children. However, they live independent, career-driven lives in Urban South Africa where Ithabeleng is completing a Masters qualification and Dinny Dee is a self-employed beautician. Traditional Basotho community classifies women of their age, who are unmarried as ‘mafitoa’.

> *If your mother-in-law wants to get too involved in your marriage, we teach them how to address this without causing too much disagreement but still establishing boundaries. There is a lot of backlash about being the ideal woman according to Makoti and its ideas because our family members are still traditional and refuse to progress. Besides being traditional, they are also ignorant. Being a woman is not being a slave that is being taken decisions for by the husband and mother-in-law, while you have no say about your life and*

your children's lives. This is why we encourage women to make their own money because when you have your own money, no one with control what you do. Mme Sola

There is a lot of shame in coming back from a failed marriage and it is difficult. You start thinking that maybe you are the one who is troublesome or stubborn. Sometimes I judge myself against public opinion and do what society recommends even if it is not something I want to do. It is very difficult. But there is a time when, in self-reflection, you can see that you have beliefs and values from Makoti and society, and you have your situation, then you have to make a decision based on the two. This reminds me of a topic we once did in Maloti called Batho ba tlo reng syndrome (what will people say). You assess that Makoti has taught you about this syndrome, and if you have it, you will never succeed in life, and you will never escape your stressful situation because you are concerned about what people will say. You weigh your options. There are moments when I will be in between, confused about what to do and feeling disingenuous about my true feelings. For example, in my situation, my partner told me that his ideal marriage since he was young was to live with his mother and wife at his home. So, I told my sister about it, and she said if the way to his heart is through his mother, then you should consider it. I felt like I would be groveling and changing myself to become what they wanted. How am I going to live with myself? It had me confused and in pain because I did not understand how I was going to live if I kept on doing things that were not in alignment with who I was. I did it. I tried to grovel. But it was difficult, and I had to stop it. So, there are times when you give in to society's traditional expectations of a woman in marriage, but I could not and had to heal from that. Aus Retshili

Contrarily, Makarabo expresses the shame associated with being a young woman and partaking in womanhood spaces considered 'old and traditional', such as *Pitiki*, from her peers.

I am very young, and some of my agemates in the community do not understand Pitiki and why I have joined. As a result, I am often judged about it. Those that do not understand it say the likes of me love older women's things. They will criticize you, saying you like acting old by joining things that are not meant for you…Pitiki has given me self-confidence, so I know myself, what I want, and why I am in it; that is why I do not let negative opinions and

> *attitudes affect me. I like it and no one will make me stop going there because I see the value it is adding to my life. I still do things that my agemates are doing.* Makarabo

As a result of the shaming experience, some women expressed developing avoidant behavior. In her relationship with her mother-in-law, who ascribes to traditional values of womanhood, Maritumetese explains that she sometimes agrees with her to avoid disagreements.

> *It will always bring up a quarrel between us…like other women with different beliefs about such issues. My mother-in-law, for example, always said, 'It is not a big deal when a man cheats or does not sleep at home' and that women should always cook for their men…Sometimes, I agree with her verbally on things because she does resist my values, but I do not do it in action or beliefs because I would not be true to myself.* Maritumetse

When speaking on visiting home in Lesotho, and seeing her family that still ascribes to traditional expectations of a woman and criticizes the various ways in which she has deviated from these expectations, Ithabeleng said the following:

> *Most of the time, I become avoidant of these spaces that bring up these challenges.* Ithabeleng

As part of avoidant behaviors, Mme Thewi narrates that she ignores traditional teachings, which she disapproves of, that are sometimes shared within *Pitiki.*

> *There are some people who teach that being a mistress is not wrong, but the fault is when you disrespect the wife. I do not approve of this. I keep the disapproval to myself…*Mme Thewi

More research is needed to explore the emergence of shame and guilt in relation to the construction of womanhood identities through ritualised initiation practices and contemporary indigenous spaces of womanhood.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has reported and provided a critical discussion of the data in relation to the outlined objectives of this thesis. It engaged with the different ways in which womanhood is defined and

performed within each space and how the spaces are organized. Then it discussed the many purposes of the womanhood spaces as identified by the participants. Lastly, the chapter discusses the women's personal experiences of shifting between womanhoods, focusing on two themes: in-betweenness and shame.

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter presents the summary and conclusion of the study. The aim of this study was to critically explore Basotho women's personal experiences of the shifting womanhoods practices and values between the traditional and contemporary context of Lesotho. The key findings are presented in the order of the research objectives.

i. Compare traditional and contemporary definitions, practices, and values of womanhood of the Basotho cultural group;

Key findings under this objective are as follows:

Three respective womanhood spaces were identified and interrogated in this study, namely, *Lebollo la basali, Pitiki ea bomme, and Makoti*. This study set out to understand the definitions, practices, and values of womanhood within each space. It found that *Lebollo la basali* is the oldest and most traditional institution for training young girls for womanhood in the Basotho community. The practices and philosophy of this space were informed by the Basotho cultural beliefs, which are patriarchal at the core. In *Lebollo*, womanhood is closely associated with values like respect, submission, and resilience. Women are further encouraged to aspire to and prepared for wifehood and motherhood through the domestic activities performed during the seclusion stage of the rite.

Pitiki ea bomme has been around for some time and is also embedded in the Basotho cultural constructions of an authentic Mosotho woman. Previously, admission was strictly exclusive to married mothers; however, the criteria has since been amended to include women who are not married or mothers. The space facilitates the transition into womanhood, educating women on issues and expectations of wifehood, motherhood, and womanhood. Great emphasis is placed on sexual education, using the sensual litolobonya dance to teach women the trick of the bedroom to make sexual intercourse more enjoyable for their partners.

While *Makoti* is the most recent space, far more progressive and responsive to the demands of the contemporary context in its education on how to be a woman. The teachings deviate from the traditional cultural prescriptions of Basotho womanhood. Contrastingly, the space relies on the Christian Bible and expert knowledge to produce independent, intelligent, and mentally well-willed women.

ii. Explore the role and relevance of womanhood rites of passage in the contemporary context

Key findings under this objective were as follows:

Various benefits of these spaces where identified by the participants. On *Lebollo,* all participants- including those of *Pitiki* and *Makoti*- expressed its significance in the preservation and dissemination of Basotho culture, particularly the beliefs on the authentic Mosotho woman and values. The participants addressed the general decline of the culture of respect in the younger generation. Further, they attributed this to a lack of education on respect facilitated by institutions like *Lebollo.* The entertainment aspect was identified across the three spaces. The participants explained that these spaces were a platform to enjoy themselves through the dance and song component and socialize with their peers. Moreover, they find community within these spaces and can cultivate long-lasting personal bonds of sisterhood. Lastly, these womanhood spaces serve as a platform for women to construct their identities, allowing them to get better acquainted with who they are and what they stand for through the education of what a woman is and what values a woman has.

iii. Investigate the personal experiences of Basotho women's movements between the traditional system and contemporary systems of African womanhood

Key findings under this objective are as follows:

Two themes came out of these objects: a state of in-betweenness and shame. With traditional and modern systems of womanhood in Lesotho, the women must navigate their lives between them. Most have careers in urban parts of the country and South Africa, where modern notions are rampant, and frequent remote rural areas like their birth homes where traditional values are at the core. They must negotiate their womanhood identity by moving between the two value systems. This has resulted in feelings of being betwixt, constantly moving between and never either simply a traditional woman or a modern woman. Furthermore, there is much shaming experienced with being a woman who does things differently from the traditional expectations of what a woman is supposed to do. For example, women are criticized for hiring help in their homes, traveling often because of work, and serving takeaways. For some, this leads to the development of avoidant behaviors, whereby they go to their in-laws or rural homes less than usual or refrain from confiding in elderly women about their womanhood issues out of fear of being criticized or shamed.

This study set out to critically explore Basotho women's personal experiences of the shifting womanhoods practices and values between the traditional and contemporary context of Lesotho. It relied on the qualitative methodology and strategies, employing semi-structured interviews to

collect data. The study is grounded in the African Feminist theory, which rejects the homogenization of African women's identities and experiences, advancing an intersectional and inclusive analytical approach to understanding and addressing African women's oppression and subjugation issues. The study found that the Basotho women recognize the significance of both traditional and modern womanhood spaces and rites of passage. However, they encounter shaming and experience a liminal existence while moving and navigating their lives between the two.

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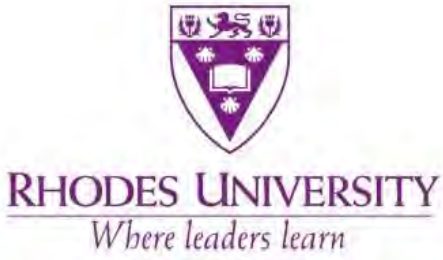
Appendices

Ethics Approval Letter



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https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/

14 August 2023

Babazile ZONDI

Email: g19z0533@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2023-7393-7882 Dear Ms ZONDI

Title: A critical exploration of the personal experiences of the shifting womanhood practices and values between the traditional and contemporary contexts of the Basotho South African cultural group.

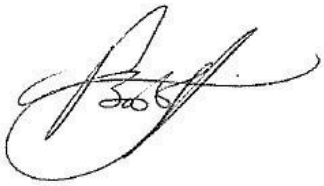
Researcher: Babazile ZONDI

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee (HF-REC). Your Approval number is: 2023-7393-7882

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying you when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the Humanities Faculty REC is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the Humanities Faculty REC should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely,



Dr Priscilla Boshoff

Chair: Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee

Informed Consent Form

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

(To be signed by research participant/s)

Project Title: A critical exploration of the personal experiences of the shifting womanhood practices and values between the traditional and contemporary contexts of the Basotho cultural group.

Babazile Zondi from the Department of Sociology, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to explore the personal experiences of the shifting womanhood practices and values between the traditional and contemporary contexts of the Basotho South African cultural group.

2. Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project 7393 and I have seen/may request to see the clearance certificate by contacting the Ethics Coordinator (ethics-committee@ru.ac.za)

3. By participating in this research project I will be contributing towards a scholarship on womanhood values and initiation practices of the Basotho culture group of South Africa

4. I will participate in the project by partaking in a once-off interview.

5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.

6. I have the right to decline to answer any questions should I not want to, at any point during the interview.

7. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.

8. The following risks are associated with my participation: Research may trigger sensitive and personal experiences about womanhood and identity.

9. The Researcher intends to publish the research results in the form of an academic research thesis. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained, and my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conducting of the research.

10. In terms of the Protection of Personal Information Act (No. 4 of 2013) it remains my right to request the Researcher to provide me with a detailed explanation of exactly how confidentiality and anonymity of the data I provide will be achieved. I may also request to know exactly how my personal information will be stored securely, for how long it will be stored.

11. If any data collected from me for this research project is to be used by the Researcher for any further study, I am to be informed in writing and my written consent requested again. I need not give consent for the new research if it is incompatible with the initial purpose of the present study (POPIA, s15(3)). Equally, I can simply reject the request. In such cases, a formal request needs to be made to me by the researcher via the Ethics Coordinator (ethics-committee@ru.ac.za).

12. In terms of the POPI Act, I possess the right to receive feedback about this research. This will take the form of the final thesis being emailed to the participant unless ***I elect not to receive this feedback.***

13. Any further questions that I might have regarding the nature of the research and/or my participation in it will be answered by Babazile Zondi (zondi.jessica@gmail.com)

14. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record by the Researcher.

15. I ***agree/disagree*** (delete inapplicable) to the Researcher's use of voice recording of my comments and opinions during interviews, the purpose of which is to ensure the accurate recording of my views/responses. Furthermore, I have the right to request a copy of the interview transcriptions to confirm that my opinions are accurately recorded

I, ……., have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask, and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

…… …… …….

Participants signature **Witness** **Date**